

The Australian general practice network  
A stronger network, a stronger voice

Delivering local health solutions through general practice



## Acknowledgements

The Australian General Practice Network gratefully acknowledges the valuable contribution of the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing in developing this strategy.



**Australian Government**

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# Foreword

Attitudes to health care are changing in Australia. Governments have realised that for our health system to be sustainable it must have a greater focus on primary health care including prevention, early intervention and chronic disease management rather than acute, hospital-based care.

Now is the time for us to be the change leaders. But for us to lead this process, we must be ready to take the next step and become a stronger network with a stronger voice. We need to capitalise on our strategic advantage – that is our capacity as a network to deliver national primary health care solutions at a local level across the length and breadth of the country.

We need to raise our profile to make sure that politicians at all levels of government, the media, consumers and other key stakeholders know who we are and what we do. When they are considering local health solutions – they are immediately thinking the Australian general practice network.

Our communication and advocacy program, a primary focus of AGPN for the next 12 months, sets out the framework for taking the Network forward. This document introduces the program to you, our members, so that you can understand it, support it and fully participate in implementing the program in your community.

As a strong, cohesive Network we can influence health policy direction and have a positive future.

Dr Tony Hobbs  
Chairperson, ADGP

Ms Kate Carnell AO  
CEO, ADGP

AGPN is the largest voice for general practice in Australia. It is the peak national body of the divisions of general practice, comprising 119 divisions across Australia, as well as eight state-based organisations. Approximately 95 percent of GPs are members of local divisions of general practice.

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# Making an impact

The divisions network has a bright future if it can operate effectively as a network rather than a loose coalition of individual organisations.

*A sharper focus on leadership across the Network is essential so that all levels of the Network can move forward together to address future challenges.*

In this way, divisions can add value both locally and nationally and strongly impact on the communities in which they are located.

Future Directions, 2006 (Australian Government response to the Phillips review)

## Think local, act national

The divisions network has evolved organically. Its creation has been driven by its members, rather than imposed by government or other external bodies. It has evolved because individuals working within divisions realised how much stronger their organisations could be if they are unified around shared goals and directions, while also maintaining their autonomy, individuality and capacity to act locally.

## Governments are seeking partners

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) issued a Statement in February 2006 which contained significant commitments to 'joined up' solutions to mental health as well as a significant focus on chronic disease management and better primary health care outcomes. There is a clear role for divisions to actively influence and drive this agenda. The Australian Government's response to the Phillips' review clearly recognised our potential.

Our challenge is to convince government to see the Network as the provider of choice for new or expanded primary health care initiatives. This will lead to a more secure, better resourced general practice sector with increased capacity to influence the future direction, management and funding of primary health care.

As a strong, cohesive network we can improve politicians' and government decision makers' understanding of the difference divisions make to the community's health and to the working lives of our GPs, practice nurses and other health care providers.

## A communication and advocacy program

At the 2005 National Divisions Forum we launched the *Primary Health Care Position Statement* which we use as a basis for developing all policy and direction. At the same time, we also identified the need to lift our profile and better communicate the value of what we do. ADGP subsequently consulted the Network to develop a communication and advocacy program to raise the profile of divisions with politicians, the local media and other community leaders.

# The case for networking

## A strong foundation

Around 95 per cent of GPs are members of their local division. The structure grew from the bottom up, with the first local divisions established in 1992, and a national peak body, ADGP, being established in 1998. While each division is independently governed and funded, the drive to make connections was part of the original rationale for the divisions of general practice program. The network has been identified as playing an integral role in multi-sectoral collaboration linking government, primary health care, hospital, community services, consumers and organisations representing health professionals.

Divisions, state-based organisations (SBOs) and ADGP continue to evolve. Divisions increasingly operate as large networked organisations with extensive and efficient connections to a range of other divisions, services, institutions and community organisations. Within the Network, divisions reported a high degree of collaborative activity in 2004-05, with 96% collaborating with other divisions, 94% with their SBOs and 77% with ADGP – substantially higher than the figures reported in 2003-04.

## Making the right connections

Networks give our organisations their strength and allows them to be flexible, robust and responsive to change. In other words, networks can achieve more than the sum of their individual parts. Acting as a network lets us enhance our performance and delivery through:

- exchange of knowledge and skills
- innovation and diffusion of innovation
- flexibility to respond to changes in the environment
- efficiency of operation
- speaking with one voice to convey a consistent message.

Divisions are already seeing this occur, through current collaborations in areas such as mental health and aged care. These achievements can be strengthened through an increased focus on working collectively. Part of creating and maintaining this focus is to formalise what is already happening in practice and establish the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) as the peak body for Divisions of General Practice, working collaboratively to lead primary health care reform in Australia.

## Working with governments

An organisation working just in one area or at one level of government would face challenges in driving significant reform. However, a Network such as the Australian general practice network – with members working at each level of government – is ideally placed to work within Australia's complex health system to achieve real and lasting policy changes.

The flexible structure of the Network and the ongoing two-way communications between all members will allow it to be responsive to the continually changing political landscape, while never losing touch with the day-to-day reality of delivering health care. With an ongoing and sustained effort from AGPN, with all members of the Network equally engaged, achieving major changes is possible – even in the complex and challenging area of primary health care.

## Valuing our differences

One of the greatest strengths of the divisions is their ability to use local knowledge and expertise to bring together different stakeholders in the health system to achieve real change. However, as individual organisations, the influence of each member of the Network will always be constrained by its resources and sphere of influence.

By consolidating divisions' experience and breadth of knowledge and developing comprehensive and organised plans of action, AGPN will focus its collective abilities on influencing policy direction at all levels – from local issues to the highest level of national government - and by doing so make a real difference to primary health care in Australia. AGPN will work with members to set common goals and values and develop plans for organised action, ongoing communication and reciprocity – while maintaining divisions' local flexibility and individuality.

It is vital that the Network maintains its diversity – that is part of its strength. Australia is a diverse country and communities have different primary health care needs and priorities. The Australian general practice network must reflect this diversity if it is to maintain its relevance and influence. However, this should not preclude focussing on agreed priority areas and promoting national primary health care reforms that will help divisions to deliver solutions to health problems at a local level.

# Roles and responsibilities

## Reflecting our strengths

Establishing a formal network involves clearly articulating the roles and responsibilities of each member. These should be complementary – mutually supporting rather than duplicating or conflicting. The strongest networks are those where the individual members' roles and responsibilities reflect their strengths and expertise and, when taken as a whole, they create a coherent and comprehensive organisation.

## Divisions

Divisions make up the largest single group in the Australian general practice network. They provide the 'grass roots' knowledge and experience of primary health care delivery and promote innovation in primary health care throughout the Network.

Specifically, their roles and responsibilities include:

- local GP engagement and support
- program delivery
- involving consumers at a local level
- promoting the division and network priorities at the local level
- links with other health and community related organisations
- developing and supporting general practice multidisciplinary teams
- working with SBOs on state/territory issues
- working with AGPN on national issues.

## SBOs

SBOs work at a state/territory level to promote Network priorities and develop and maintain a good relationship with state/territory governments.

Specifically, their roles and responsibilities include:

- raising awareness of the Network among state governments
- maximising opportunities for Divisions at a state/territory level
- ensuring Divisions are well informed of relevant Australian Government and state government issues
- ensuring AGPN is well informed of all issues that Divisions have raised with regards to national policy and Australian Government operations
- supporting divisions to maximise their capacity and influence and ensuring they have the necessary tools to achieve agreed goals
- working closely with AGPN to form an effective leadership team to present a professional and consistent approach to all levels of government, the media and to divisions.

## AGPN

AGPN has the primary responsibility for relationships with the Australian Government in areas of national policy and issues that affect the divisions network as a whole.

Specifically, its roles and responsibilities include:

- ensuring that the Australian Government and relevant politicians are aware of the Network and its role in providing policy advice and running national programs
- relating and communicating with the SBOs (who act as a conduit of information to divisions)
- ensuring the Australian Government is aware and well informed of all issues affecting, and of concern to the Network
- ensuring that SBOs and, through them, divisions, are aware of all of the threats and opportunities that exist for the Network at a federal level
- working with SBOs to present a professional and consistent approach to all levels of government, community, the media and to divisions to develop national policy positions in agreed areas
- providing effective leadership to the network.

# Speaking with one voice

## Public recognition is important

As a united and cohesive network which is clear about its place in the health system, its priorities and its point of difference from other GP groups and non-government organisations, we can be the change leaders and influence the health policy debate. Through AGPN, divisions can be a recognisable force in driving primary health care reform, and in the delivery of primary health care services.

To achieve this, we need to improve public perception and understanding of the roles of divisions in Australian communities. Public understanding and recognition equals political recognition. The network needs to be valued by our political representatives as solutions brokers. Well marketed consistent messages and branding that constantly conveys the essential business and impact of divisions are vital.

## Better use of the media

Achieving results through the media, representations to government decision makers and politicians, and local advocacy is all about developing a clear and consistent message over time. AGPN will take a much more structured approach to using the media than in the past. This will involve all members of the Network using a range of avenues to communicate our agreed messages.

AGPN has developed a communication and advocacy program to:

- mobilise members of the divisions network to enthusiastically support the rebranding of the Australian Divisions of General Practice as the Australian general practice network
- unite members under a common banner
- focus the health debate on primary health care solutions
- position the Network as the vehicle for delivering integrated, local health solutions to the nation.

# Showing a new face

## Resources for moving forward

AGPN's aim is to get each network member to unite behind the new identity and direction and equip members with the means to communicate the Network's message. This will include a range of tools and resources.

## A new brand

A change in name for ADGP to AGPN allows divisions to indicate in their local branding that they are 'proud members of AGPN', identifying us all as part of a national network. A style guide has been developed with tools to assist with the adoption of the new network 'look and feel' at a local level.

## A new tag line

The tag line 'Delivering local health solutions through general practice' focuses on the key strength of the divisions and the network.

## Value of the Network study

This academically rigorous report is a valuable resource that we can use to advocate to decision makers the value of the Network, and to reinforce the contribution divisions make.

## New clearinghouse on the AGPN website

This is a resource for all divisions to use, to ensure the sharing of Network ideas and information and to avoid 'reinventing the wheel'. We need to make sure that all possible resources are used to improve health outcomes.

## Comprehensive communications strategy

This is a resource for divisions to assist with running local stories, campaigns and targeting local members of Parliament, thereby raising local division profile.

# The importance of our brand

## What is a brand?

The term 'brand' is often misunderstood. A brand is not a just logo, name or set of colours. These are technical elements of a visual identity that ultimately underpin a strong brand, but the essence of a brand is the space it occupies in the minds of our stakeholders.

An accurate definition of the term 'brand' is:

'A complex set of consistent beliefs and meanings, held by purchasers and/or users, which are associated with the product or service, but which exist over and above its obvious physical functioning. These beliefs help consumers in choosing the product which is best suited to their particular personalities, roles, set of needs and situation.'

While the power of strong brands is most often closely related to individual consumer products, it is important to understand the importance of building a strong, credible AGPN brand, and the far reaching benefits this will offer to every corner of our network.

## An analogy

Consider the Wizard Financial Services organisation. Each Wizard branch is franchisee owned and operated; however each is united as part of the Wizard network, sharing common values, beliefs, services and standards. The brand proposition has penetrated every level of the organisation so that the experience is the same for customers in all areas of Australia.

## Our brand

If we are to have an effective network-wide communications strategy, we must start with a strong and effective brand. This will deliver the Network a broad range of benefits. It will underpin and strengthen its activities, support its credibility, build consistent messaging, increase its profile and, most importantly, add perceived value for stakeholders at every level of the Network.

A brand name should have four qualities. It should:

- be easy to pronounce, recognise and remember
- capture or define the 'product's' benefits
- define a 'product's' qualities or appeal
- be distinctive.

Our new brand name, Australian General Practice Network and associated brand-line 'Delivering local health solutions through general practice' follows these principles.

## Implementing the brand

We agreed at Forum 2005 that ADGP would seek membership support to change our name to 'Australian General Practice Network' and that divisions would consider identifying themselves as 'proud members of AGPN' in order to identify us all as part of a national network.

This responds to the desire to be part of a network that has a more highly visible national identity. This result was evident from our survey, with 73% of respondents also indicating that increased local and national media coverage would help promote the Network and assist in achieving a better sense of network cohesion.

# The action plan

## Putting it together locally

AGPN will work with network members to develop a comprehensive communication plan for each 12 month period. This will be based around agreed network priorities and create a structured program of media and advocacy to maximise the impact of the Network's communication activities. We will position the Network as a powerful voice for primary health care and ensure that Divisions' views are heard at all levels of government and throughout the community.

The focus of communications activity will be on the concrete solutions already offered by the Network and the additional benefits that would result from a stronger policy framework for primary health care.

## Communications calendar

Central to the plan will be a yearly calendar of issues, with a focus on one priority area each month. This may be seasonally determined (eg sun protection in Summer, colds and flu in Winter) or may be a general issue of concern to the Network (eg. obesity, mental health). These monthly issues will be the focus of a Network-wide campaign targeting waiting rooms, the local media and local members of parliament.

Agreement on common issues and key messages will enable all members of the Network to work within their local areas to promote national priorities. This will greatly enhance the Network's ability to influence the primary health care agenda.

## Increased media activities

Supporting the plan will increase media activity – at both a national and local level. This will include aiming for a regular branded health spot on local ABC radio stations and, where possible, regular talk-back segments with local GPs. Commercial radio and TV will also be a focus of network campaigns, building on the success of the existing TV community service announcements produced by ADGP. Targeting waiting rooms through women's magazines is another important strategy that will be pursued, along with promoting 'celebrity doctors' representing the Network in magazines, TV and radio, and a Network publication. Dynamic Divisions will continue to be a signature document promoting the excellent work being done across the Network.

## Increased advocacy activities

Promoting the role of the Network and the importance of primary health care among politicians will be a key focus. This needs to occur at a local, state and federal level with all members of the Network liaising with politicians within their jurisdiction to deliver clear and consistent messages. Divisions have a vital role to play in promoting local success stories to their local members and providing them with tangible evidence of the Network's achievements and impact on communities. This will be supported at a state and federal level by enhanced lobbying activities by SBOs and AGPN.

## Support for Divisions

While many divisions are already skilled at dealing with the media and advocating for their members at a local level, many others have not previously had the opportunity or resources to take on this role. AGPN will ensure that all divisions have the support they need to play an active and constructive role in network communication activities through providing practical assistance and resources on an ongoing basis. This will include the following:

### Information and resources

A division-specific resource kit will be available to each division to assist them deliver Network's message to federal/state/local politicians and other key stakeholders and will include:

- media releases – template media releases (already written, with spaces for divisions to insert their name and the details of their spokesperson)
- media contacts (so divisions know where to send the release)
- other suggestions for dissemination of the release (e.g. local politicians)
- suggested talking points for spokespeople when dealing with the media
- templates of newspaper columns/letters to the editor/opinion pieces for local media (using local division personalities)
- posters and other visual materials to support the campaign
- a one page flyer that can be printed off locally and put in waiting rooms.

### Monthly campaign kits

Divisions will receive monthly 'campaign kits' from AGPN which will provide the resources necessary for a local campaign on the agreed issue for that month. These packs will enable Divisions to run their own campaigns, using local knowledge and connections, without a major commitment of divisions' own resources. Campaign kits will be adapted to the specific issue of the month.

Now's the time to really reach our full potential as a Network. So let's work together to make it happen.



