

HEALTH REFORM FACT SHEETS

Primary Health Care Organisations

Primary Health Care Organisations (PHCOs) Information for community stakeholders and consumers Fact sheet 5

What will PHCOs mean for consumers?

For consumers, PHCOs will mean better access to frontline health care and a simpler system that is easier to navigate. Much of this will be possible through stronger relationships between doctors and allied health services, and the development of new approaches and models to health care delivery by multidisciplinary health care teams. Consumers will more often receive the care they need at the right time in the right place.

What will PHCOs mean for community stakeholders?

Community engagement will be a significant factor in the establishment and ongoing role of primary health care organisations (PHCOs). A key role for PHCOs will be better coordination and linking of health services in their regions in order to improve health care access and make the system easier to navigate for patients. PHCOs will also play a major role in identifying and addressing areas of market failure and service gaps. To achieve this, PHCOs will have relationships with communities, health professionals and service providers, including General Practitioners (GPs), allied health professionals and Aboriginal Medical Services. It is also envisaged that PHCOs will link with services that interact with the health system, such as children at risk, people with serious mental illness and homeless Australians. Again, this will help provide services to those groups of people who really need, but often miss out on, care.

How will consumers and communities be involved with PHCOs?

PHCOs will give community stakeholders as well as consumers an opportunity to become more involved in improving the quality and range of primary health care services available in their local regions. PHCOs will operate with strong local governance, including broad community and health professional representation, as well as business and management expertise.

There are many mechanisms through which community engagement could be fostered in PHCOs to ensure continuous, constructive dialogue with the community at a local level. Some will be structural, such as community/consumer advisory groups and/or Board representation, others will be built into the ongoing work of a PHCO such as consultation with the community about specific plans or strategies)

PHCOs will also be expected to have some common membership of governance structures with their local hospital networks (LHNs). A number of community stakeholders already interface with both primary care and the hospital sector, so this shared membership will further emphasise the important linkage between these two sectors in ensuring that consumers experience a more streamlined, integrated system.

Overall what benefits will flow to the community from PHCOs?

The nationally funded, locally managed structure of the health and hospitals network, including LHNs and PHCOs at the regional level means that, in the future, health care will have a much more regional approach with broader community input and a greater focus on consumers' needs. The reforms will be introduced over several years so these changes will not happen overnight. Starting from 2011, however, people in the community will notice more and more differences, for example:

- There will be more access to health care services. PHCOs will be responsible for helping their communities' access health care, especially where there are service gaps. This could mean working with community stakeholders and allied health professionals to get a psychology service into a local town, getting a GP or nurse to a rural area or getting Aboriginal Health Workers to remote indigenous communities
- Prevention will be a significant focus for PHCOs who will work at the national level with the new National Prevention Agency. PHCOs will be responsible for looking at how they can get services and health messages out to where they are really needed in their region. This will mean working closely with other health professionals as well as with other service providers and will be an important opportunity for a broad range of community stakeholders to work with and provide input into the types of services that will work best for their communities. For consumers, it means that staying healthier will become easier, as consumers will get more advice about preventing illness and more support to tackle the things that can damage health - such as smoking and being overweight
- PHCOs will ensure that different services will be better connected or "joined up". This means that consumers won't have to keep giving details about their condition to different health providers. For other service providers, it means that different professionals and teams will become better at sharing information and will be more linked up through improved referral and communication systems, so minimising frustrating delays and duplications for both health professionals and consumers. As PHCOs will work closely with their local hospital networks, this improved system integration will occur both within primary care as well as between primary and secondary (hospital) care
- PHCOs will provide more chronic disease care in the community. Consumers with conditions like diabetes or asthma will be seen more often by teams of GPs, nurses and other health professionals in their community for support to better manage their illness. Consumers will more easily be able to access the full range of services they need and less likely to have to attend hospital for their care as it will be better managed closer to home