Maximising the rural health benefits of a reformed health system: Medicare Locals

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A total of 61 Medicare Locals are operating across all regions of Australia. Medicare Locals are independent primary health care organisations, established to coordinate primary health care delivery and address local health care needs and gaps.

Access and equity of access to services generally is a big issue for the country’s more rural and remote areas. While access to general practitioners is sometimes a problem, access to allied health practitioners (important players in the care chain/patient journey), specialist services and after-hours and post-hospital care are common issues for people living in rural and remote areas.

While individual practitioners are still responsible for a patients’ care, Medicare Locals play an important role in working collaboratively with general practitioners, other primary health care providers, local hospital networks, rural workforce agencies and communities to better integrate and coordinate the delivery of health care services.

From 1 July 2012, all Medicare Locals are being provided with flexible funding under the Regionally Tailored Primary Health Care Initiatives through Medicare Locals Fund. Medicare Locals largely have discretion to choose which activities will be funded to respond to local health priorities and address service gaps identified through a population health needs assessment process.

The soapbox presentation will focus on some of the smart approaches being adopted by Medicare Locals to address the unique health care challenges in rural and remote areas.