



Prof John Horvath AO
via mlreview@health.gov.au

23 December 2012

Dear Professor Horvath,

Submission to the Medicare Locals Review

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (the Council) is the leading peak organisation for the community services sector in Western Australia, and represents 300 members and the over 800 organisations involved in the provision of services to individuals, families and children in our community. WACOSS has strong relationships with the community services sector and represents the interests of the sector and the communities they serve.

The Council and its members both advocate for and directly provide services which support the mental and physical health, as well as broader wellbeing of the Western Australian community. The Council is making this submission in recognition of the role Medicare Locals (MLs) were designed to play in improving the coordination and integration of primary health care in local communities, addressing service gaps, and making it easier for patients to navigate their local health care system. To provide an opportunity for members of the community services sector in WA to come together to consider the implications of, and the opportunities for engagement with MLs, the Council hosted a forum in August 2012.

While some of the Council's members have had the opportunity to directly engage with one or a number of MLs, the Council itself has not had the resources to take on a more active role. We would however, like to raise a number of issues for consideration in the Medicare Local Review currently being undertaken.

Issue 1: *Should Medicare Locals be purchasers and/or providers of services?*

As the Council understands it, when the concept was originally developed, it was understood that Medicare Locals would be commissioning bodies — not direct providers of services themselves.

While several of the eight Medicare Locals established in Western Australia initially opted for this model, all the Medicare Locals in this state are now both purchasers and providers of services. This, in the Council's view represents a clear conflict of interest and the review provides the opportunity to clarify that.

Western Australian
Council of Social Service Inc.
ABN 32 201 266 289

City West Lotteries House
2 Delhi Street
West Perth
Western Australia 6005

Phone (08) 9420 7222
Fax (08) 9486 7966
Email info@wacoss.org.au
www.wacoss.org.au

Issue 2: *Inconsistent boundaries are a hindrance to more integrated services*

When the MLs were established in Western Australia, the eight bodies formed were effectively the amalgamation of existing Divisions of General Practice. When established, some of the new MLs, such as the Kimberley Pilbara Medicare Local, were assigned boundaries which (while covering vast distances) are consistent with key health and community service providers in their local area (at a state, regional and local government level as well as community services). Others such as the Perth Central East Metro Medicare Local have totally unwieldy areas, bearing little or no resemblance to the boundaries of those other organisations who they most relate to. The Council contends that a better alignment of the existing boundaries is essential to build effective working relationships to improve local health outcomes and deliver more integrated and coordinated care.

Issue 3: *Lack of a Western Australian AMLA State Co-ordinator*

While the Council appreciates that the previous Government made the decision to cease funding the state-based GP Networks and instead fund the newly established Australian Medicare Local Alliance, we are concerned that the AMLA has to date only established state co-ordinator positions for Queensland, NSW, Victoria and South Australia. Given both the distances within this state and the difficulties of national bodies based on the eastern seaboard reflecting the needs of Western Australia, the rationale for such a decision is not apparent.

The Council thanks you for the opportunity to provide feedback in relation to the various aspects of Medicare Locals' functions. Should you have any queries, please contact Chris Twomey, Director Social Policy at WACOSS on (08) 9420 7222 or chris@wacoss.org.au.

Yours sincerely,



Irina Cattalini
Chief Executive Officer