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CALLS TO PREVENT CHRONIC DISEASE 'JUGGERNAUT'

Health leaders have called for action in reforming primary health care to tackle the 'juggernaut' of chronic disease issues about to hit the health system at a meeting in Melbourne.

The meeting, *More strategic use of the health dollar?*, explored approaches to improve primary health care in Australia with a view to getting a better return for health spending, the Director of the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute (APHCRI) at ANU, Professor Nicholas Glasgow, said.

"Primary health care professionals are aware of a large number of public health issues on the horizon – childhood obesity, diabetes and the illnesses associated with aging are just some of these," Professor Glasgow said.

"These, combined with serious workforce problems, mean we have to examine new ways of organising and funding primary health care so Australians have a healthy future."

Health profession leaders joined their policy colleagues, consumers and health academics from Australia and New Zealand to discuss ways of improving health care in Australia, including exploring alternative funding models to serve the needs of local populations.

Consensus was reached that reform was needed through careful definition of problems and tailoring appropriate solutions.

Better community engagement, more multidisciplinary team working and flexibility to respond to local needs were considered important components of any future models of primary health care, the meeting found.

Peak health bodies will now explore innovative approaches to organising and funding quality health care for patients and community, while APHCRI will undertake research to build a knowledge base for reform.

"This was a meeting that brought a number of perspectives to the table, all with the ultimate aim of tackling the pressing health issues that Australia is facing, and we look forward to progressing this work further," Professor Glasgow said.

The outcomes of the meeting are reported in a paper published the quarterly publication of the Institute, APHCRI Dialogue. More information: <http://www.anu.edu.au/aphcri/index.php>.