

At the forefront of health reform in East Gippsland

East Gippsland Division of General Practice has changed its name and constitution in preparation for its bid to be among the first Medicare Local groups to be established in Australia.

The changes will place the new East Gippsland Primary Health Alliance (EGPHA) at the forefront of reforms in Gippsland, chair Dr Yousuf Ahmad said.

Dr Ahmad announced that the EGPHA would lodge its expression of interest with the Federal Government to be one of the first 15 Medicare Locals established by June 2011. By 2012 there will be up to 60 Medicare Locals across the country.

Dr Ahmad said the driving force behind changes to the EGPHA was a determination to keep the organisation local.

"The East Gippsland Primary Health Alliance aims to ensure that our Medicare Local will in fact be local," Dr Ahmad said.

"If we are not successful in the first round we will need to try even harder the second time around or risk losing a locally-based organisation.

"We call upon all primary health care providers to join EGPHA and strengthen our efforts to build a Medicare Local which is lead by local clinicians and responsive to the needs of the local community."

The organisation, previously exclusive to GPs, is now open to all primary health professionals. EGPHA is calling on these local professionals to become a member and support the organisation's efforts to lead the way in health reform locally.

"We have a new constitution which strengthens the role of general practice as it now opens the door to membership for a much broader multi-disciplinary team including specialists, allied health professionals, nurses, practice managers, paramedics and other stakeholders associated with primary care services," Dr Ahmad said.

"This change should ultimately lead to improved services being delivered to the community."

Dr Ahmad said EGPHA was concerned that each Medicare Local group would represent a population of 250,000 to 500,000, as recommended in the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission review.

"This will clearly disadvantage rural areas given the demographics spread over a large area," Dr Ahmad said.

"We are concerned this will result in health priorities that are focused on the larger population centres and may overlook smaller communities."

To become a member of the EGPHA or for more information visit the EGPHA website.