

Divisions of General Practice—leading change in the Australian Primary Healthcare environment

In 1994 the Australian Federal Government introduced a new element into the primary healthcare environment with the Divisions of General Practice Program. Ten pilot sites were chosen to form networks of local primary health physicians, general practitioners, with a view to bringing them together with a set of common objectives. Until then general practitioners as a sector had been a fragmented group often working in small private practices with little real connection and influence on the broader health agenda.

Fifteen years later Divisions of General Practice have grown into a national network that makes general practice and primary healthcare a significant theme in the health policy. Covering the whole of the Australian landmass this network provides local infrastructure, connections and knowledge to achieve health programs that are nationally important and locally relevant.

This paper describes the origins and development of the network; examines some examples of programs and services that Divisions and general practice deliver to local communities and looks at possible futures for the network under a national government that has a significant health policy reform agenda.