

**Date:** 23 January 2004

**Subject** NIB sponsorship to support community health

NIB Health Funds' role of providing top quality health care to members will be enhanced following confirmation of a partnership with Hunter Postgraduate Medical Institute (HPMI) which will provide ongoing education for health professionals in the region.

HPMI has provided continuing development programs to health professionals throughout much of New South Wales, including the Hunter and Central Coast, since 1981.

The organisation has close affiliations with peak regional health bodies such as Hunter Area Health Service, Hunter Urban and Rural Divisions of General Practice and the Faculty of Health at the University of Newcastle.

Professor Alan Hewson, Director of Studies at the Hunter Postgraduate Medical Institute, said NIB's support will greatly assist in improving the standard of care in the local community.

"Ongoing education, particularly at General Practitioner level, has shown to lower the use of hospital services and therefore reduce health care costs," Professor Hewson explained.

"General Practitioners are certainly a target group for further education as they have the opportunity to speak directly to their patients about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and preventative medicine."

NIB Health Funds Chief Executive Officer, Mr Mark Fitzgibbon, said the fund's support of HPMI will enable participating GPs and specialists to attend a range of free educational seminars over the next 12 months.

"GPs play a crucial role in preventative health and the continuing education of this group is vital to the maintenance and improvement of quality of care in our community," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

NIB provides private health cover for more than 140,000 people throughout Newcastle and the Hunter Region.

"A reliance on GPs as a first point of contact for health matters means it is important for us to support their work and ensure they are able to offer the best care, not only to NIB members, but the entire community."

The NIB Gold Series lectures begin on 14 February and will be held monthly until November. The first lecture will discuss preventative medicine and will be followed by topics such as psychiatry, sports medicine, diabetes and men's health.

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