Social Policy Minister John Dalli said yesterday that in the coming days he would be presenting a consultation document outlining the government’s strategy to strengthen primary health care services in Malta and Gozo. The government’s overall aim “is to reposition primary care to the centre of our health care system”, he told the Primary Health Care conference. The experience gained over the last two years in the migration to Mater Dei hospital has served to underline the pressing need for the strengthening and development of the primary care system “in order to allow Mater Dei to fulfil its mission, namely that of being a tertiary centre for specialised care,” he said. “We have been very careful in planning the proposed system to build on the important element of ‘personal’ primary care wherein we seek to further develop and strengthen the relationship between the patient (and his / her family) and the primary care provider.” Mr Dalli said they would build on the primary care system offered by the private sector which is already accounting for around 70 per cent of patient contacts. This needs to be developed and strengthened.

“Concurrently, we will be redesigning the public primary healthcare system into one which is based on the concept of regional hubs offering specialist services and emergency services in the community supported by clusters of satellite health clinics which could offer diverse services to support the populations in their areas and the private primary care providers.” Expanding on the points made by Mr Dalli, Health Parliamentary Secretary Joseph Cassar told the conference that the consultation document due to be published soon should be seen as the first step to build strong primary health care services that will meet the increasing needs and demands of the population. By strengthening and modernising primary health care services, “we will be laying solid foundations that will ensure the best possible health care for our population, care that is principally directed towards • Prevention • Early intervention • Holistic rehabilitation and support.”

Government will be proposing a single system under which all persons resident in Malta and entitled to public health care services will form part of this personal primary care system. The relationship between the primary care provider and the patient will be officially recognised through the system in such a way that the primary care provider will have the necessary access to information, to further investigations and to results. Indeed investment in ICT is a key pillar for the success of this reform proposal. Our e-health plan for the coming years also places the patient, through his / her primary care provider at the centre of all the systems. It is only in this manner that we can concretely act on our plans to place the patient at the centre of our health care system,” Dr Cassar said. On the fine details themselves, Dr Cassar said that perhaps people may be asking, what will become of the health centres and the bereg we have today? “It is our intention to invest substantially to upgrade the facilities available in the
community. Our working proposal is to have a number of regional centres. These regional centres will offer 24 hour walk-in medical services as necessary, thus really serving to support the primary care providers as well as to ease the burden from the Accident and Emergency Department at Mater Dei Hospital. “However, these centres will also be hubs for a host of specialised services. The existing specialist services will be strengthened while new secondary care services will be developed according to need and demand. These centres will be run on the principles of interdisciplinary working, a key feature for care in the community.” The intention is to support these regional centres with clusters of health clinics. It would be premature to try and determine at this stage exactly how these health clinics should be configured, where they should be sited and what services exactly will be offered. “Instead, what we plan to do is to allow the personal primary care system to be fully rolled out and then decide upon the health clinic clusters according to the different needs in the various parts of Malta,” he said.