



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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MEDIA RELEASE

23 April 2014

Fair and equal access is an essential quality of our health system

There seems to be a real danger that decisions to be made in the forthcoming Federal Budget may result in a less equitable health system. This would be a disastrous consequence for a health system that ought to provide health care in proportion to need, not according to ability to pay.

"The health system belongs to all Australians but those in greatest need should receive the greatest proportion of care," said AHCRA Chair, Tony McBride.

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance is very concerned about the signals being given out about three possible elements of the forthcoming Budget. They seem to indicate that decisions about health services are being driven entirely by fiscal circumstances and not by the principles that ought to inform such decisions. This would leave people in greatest need worse off, especially those with lower than average incomes and people in rural and remote areas.

First the \$6 extra co-payment for GPs will affect those with limited purses more than those on higher incomes. It will push more people into emergency departments at the expense of the States' budgets. Australians already pay one of the highest levels of co-payments for health care in the OECD. There are many more equitable and efficient ways of increasing government income for health care, or spending it more efficiently.

Second, there are unconfirmed proposals for an increased role for private health insurance in primary health care, along the lines of the model being trialled in Queensland. This has the potential to create a two-tier system where those able to afford cover get priority access. This approach would see lower earning taxpayers subsidizing services because of the Government's rebate for private health insurance.

Thirdly, if Medicare Locals were to be scrapped that would set back the very desirable principle of having a local agency in each area actively working on ensuring a fair and efficient primary health care system. The primary health care system is funded predominantly by the Commonwealth and yet they have historically taken little responsibility for planning at the local or regional level until they created Medicare Locals. This has led to vast inequalities in access to GPs and other primary health care professionals and services.

** AHCRA is a coalition of some 30 health groups, including those representing the medical profession, nursing, allied health, rural and remote health and consumer groups.*

Available for interview

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