



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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MEDIA RELEASE 29 April 2013

Health care getting less affordable and hitting low income earners hardest

“Consumers Health Forum have pinpointed a worrying trend in Australian health care with their news today of the rising proportion paid directly by consumers, “ said Tony McBride, Chair of the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance, (AHCRA). “AHCRA agrees this is a significant problem, forcing people to miss out on essential care, and especially hitting low-income Australians.”

The average share of health costs paid for by consumers has just gone up from 17% to 19%, according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. In some areas like dental care, the cost is effectively 85%- 100%. Over 70% of specialist visits have a copayment (on average \$50) and allied health services, such as physiotherapy, are rarely fully covered by Medicare or private health insurance. And the majority of Australians do not choose to have or cannot afford private health insurance.

These rising costs are making it increasingly difficult for those with significant health problems but doubly difficult if they do not have sufficient financial resources to cover these extra costs. We have known for a quite a while that about 30% of Australians each year do not take up essential health care or medication because of the costs. Rising charges will exacerbate this.

The Federal Government needs to consider more effective and equitable funding mechanisms such as block or per capita funding, and increased salaried doctors, particularly specialists. These would replace fee-for-service and reduce or eliminate co-payments and encourage health services to use more innovative ways of providing necessary care.

AHCRA will be releasing a series of MR soon on the key issues facing the key Federal parties in the lead up to the election.

** AHCRA advocates for a fairer health system. It is a coalition of about 30 national and state peak health groups, including those representing the medical profession, nursing, allied health, the rural health sector, as well as consumer groups.*

Tony McBride is available for interview on mobile 0407 531 468