



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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National Alliance urges continuing support for universal health care and equity

A major alliance of health professional, consumer and service organisations has released a new policy document putting the case for the continuation of Australia's universal health care policy and system.

“There are many reasons for Australia to continue to support universal health care and Medicare, rather than regarding it as just a safety net for the most disadvantaged,” said Tony McBride, Chair Australian Health Care Reform Alliance. “There are important social justice and equity principles at stake. Many people will remember that pre-Medicare (and the original Medibank) there was a two-tier system with 2 million uninsured people (15% of Australians) who were reliant on charity and public hospitals for their health care. It was the poorest and most disadvantaged that had the worst health status and shortest lives and they had the least support before Medibank/Medicare.

“AHCRA argues Australia should not return to those days. Universal health care through Medicare has served us well over the last 40 years, bringing major reductions in inequities for timely and affordable access, an efficient payment system with low administrative costs and importantly a widely acknowledged and supported sense of security that health care is available to all.”

AHCRA welcomes the Federal Minister of Health's recent announcement of a review of Medicare's Medical Benefits Schedule. This is something badly needed. However AHCRA urges the Minister to think more broadly than the MBS item numbers and explore how we can shift more resources towards prevention and early intervention, how the primary health system can support people with mental health conditions better, and how to use our health workforce more creatively and effectively, and not be stuck in practitioner roles that have changed only marginally in a hundred years.

“Even with our universal system, Australia has one of the highest levels of consumer out-of-pocket expenses in the OECD and we should not increase payments for health practitioner visits. The taxation system is a fairer system of paying for health costs and avoids us heading towards a two-tier system, the kind of which causes bankruptcy and heartache in the US”.

AHCRA has outlined a range of short, medium and long-term strategies to create a more effective and sustainable health system.

These include: quarantining GP services from the introduction of private health insurance; restoring indexation to Medicare rebates; adequately resourcing Commonwealth and State/Territory partnership agreements on dental health to ensure universal access to basic and preventive dental care; and restoring the Federal/State hospitals funding agreement.

Over the next 2-3 years AHCRA recommendations include: a review Australia's medicine pricing systems against the world market price for pharmaceuticals; an efficiency review; and new funding systems to create more flexible care arrangements based on consumer not professional needs.

In the longer term the Federal Government should trial a single funder system for all health care with one state government, and abolish the private health insurance rebate.

The full paper can be downloaded at: www.healthreform.org.au

This is one of eight new policy papers being released by AHCRA over autumn/winter 2015 as a contribution to the development of future health policy.

** AHCRA is a coalition of over 35 national and state organisations, including those representing the medical profession, nursing, allied health, rural and remote health, health services and consumer groups.*

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