



# Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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## **COMMUNITY NEEDS STRONG SAY IN HARD DECISIONS ON HEALTH**

“Hard decisions are looming for the increasingly expensive health care system in coming years and decisions cannot be left just to politicians and clinicians. Citizens needs a much stronger say in health care decisions, especially about how Australia is going to afford health care in the future,” says Mr Bo Li, spokesperson for the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance.

### **What is the problem?**

The cost of health care has been rising much faster than inflation for many years (5.3% over the 2001–2011 decade) and will eventually make the health system unaffordable (some theorise the States’ health budgets will reach the levels of the current total government budgets by 2034). Governments have been loathe to address this.

At some point, this looming crisis will force clinicians, health service managers and politicians to make some hard decisions about who does and does not receive care for which conditions under which circumstances. Indeed it is already happening. So what set of values will guide such decisions? At the moment, there is no mechanism for such decision–makers to be influenced by the values and perspectives of health consumers or citizens more broadly. Indeed most of the community has little idea that such a crisis is approaching – quite the opposite – their expectations about health care are ever increasing.

### **What needs to happen?**

We need a significant non–political dialogue with the community about the implications of the squeeze on health funding and the type of decisions that may need to be made. This should involve the provision of good quality information to the public and then a range of consultation mechanisms, from online programs to local meetings to phone surveys to citizens’ juries to special more informal conversations with more disadvantaged communities. These should all aim to develop a set of relevant common values and priorities that could then guide decision–makers in the future.

This will need to be accompanied by complementary strategies to raise the level of health literacy among the population. The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates only 40% of Australians are health literate.

AHCRA calls on both parties to start to tackle the looming health care funding crisis by initiating a meaningful community debate about the future, and to make a commitment to raise the level of health literacy of the Australian population.

\* 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.

**This is one of a series of media releases on the key health issues AHCRA believes urgently need fixing in the current health system. AHCRA is seeking commitment to the necessary action from the major parties in the coming election.**

#### **Media contacts**

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