



# Australian Healthcare Reform Alliance

## Media release

28 May 2007

### Health care costs forcing Australians to go without essential care

It's official: Australians are facing increasing out of pocket costs health care costs and an increasing number are failing to seek essential health care because they can't afford it, the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA) said today.

A new international comparison of health care by the Commonwealth Fund (USA) has revealed that in recent years 34% of Australians have either not filled a prescription, had a health problem but didn't see a doctor, or failed to complete a recommended medical test, treatment or follow-up, because of cost. And 43% of Australians have needed dental care but did not see a dentist because they couldn't afford it. Australia ranked fourth out of the six countries surveyed in these measures of access to care.

"This is a disgrace in a country as wealthy as ours, with a supposed universal health care system, that people are unable to access essential health care," Australian Health Care Reform Alliance spokesperson Jill Sewell said.

"One of the essential principles of health care in a modern democracy is that access to health care is a right, and should be available on the basis of need, not the ability to pay," Dr Sewell said.

"Our alliance, representing many thousands of health professionals, consumers and researchers, who all work within and for our health system, is deeply concerned about the increasing inequity of health care in Australia today, and believe urgent and fundamental reforms must be made to our system to ensure a sustainable and accessible system of health care is available to all Australians.

"Future productivity depends on the health and well being of our community," Dr Sewell said.

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance is particularly concerned about the dire state of Indigenous health and is calling on all governments and all Australians to commit to action to reduce the health inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Alliance is holding a national health reform summit in Canberra in July where some of Australia's most expert health care researchers and analysts will explore options for reform to address some of the major problems with the health system.

"Our vision is a health system that assists individuals to be healthy and delivers compassionate and quality health care to all," Dr Sewell said. "This isn't happening and the situation is getting worse for some Australians. Reform is necessary and it must happen soon."

Media enquiries/interviews: AHCRA Spokesperson Jill Sewell 0418 372 328  
AHCRA Chair Kerren Clark, 0427 559 448

#### AUSTRALIAN HEALTHCARE REFORM ALLIANCE (AHCRA)

Audiological Society of Australia, Australian College of Midwives, Australian Consumers' Association, Australian Council on Intellectual Disability, Australian Council of Social Service, Australian Healthcare Association, Australian Health Promotion Association, Australian Nursing Federation, Australian Physiotherapy Association, Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation, Catholic Health Australia, Centre for Clinical Governance Research, Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association, Country Women's Association of Australia, Doctors' Reform Society, Effective Healthcare Australia, Health Consumers' Association, Health Issues Centre, Health Consumers' Network, Health Professions Council of Australia, Maternity Coalition, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, National Public Hospitals Clinicians' Taskforce, National Rural Health Alliance, Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health, NSW Council on Intellectual Disability, NSW Nurses' Association, Public Health Association of Australia, Public Hospital and Medicare Alliance (Qld), Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Royal Australasian College of Physicians, Rural Doctors Association of Australia, South Australian Salaried Medical Officers Association, Victorian Medicare Action Group