



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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Complacent parties taking eye off the ball in health

Health care is one of the most important issues to voters at this election but the policies of both major parties fail to deliver on key measures, according to the Australian Healthcare Reform Alliance (AHCRA). “Whilst there are some valuable initiatives from both sides, they fail to add up to a genuine effort to address the scale of the current health system problems. There is insufficient action to address serious inequities in health and health care or longer term problems – they have taken their eye off the ball,” said Tony McBride, AHCRA chair.

“Closing the health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians should be one of the highest priorities for government. Yet Indigenous health has barely been mentioned by either major party during this campaign.

“The current Labor Government has introduced some promising reforms, such as Medicare Locals and national funding of children’s dental services and more public adult services, a move that will address inequities. AHCRA therefore welcomes the Coalition’s broad support for these positive reforms, but is very concerned that there are too few details of how they will be progressed if they win power.

“Another major threat to our health system is the increasingly high co-payments faced by people when accessing care. Unless co-payments are addressed, they will continue to be a severe barrier that undermines the equity and universality of health programs such as Medicare and reverses any gains made by the reform process.

“Most importantly, neither major party has their eyes on the future and on how the looming health funding crisis in the next decade can be avoided as health care costs escalate. Neither party has a robust plan to keep people well and out of hospital by supporting prevention, by seriously addressing the social determinants of health that cause so much ill-health or by effectively managing chronic disease in the community. Without such action, the pressure on hospitals will simply grow to unaffordable levels and society as a whole and health care will become increasingly inequitable.

AHCRA welcomes Labor’s commitments to mental health, medical research, and better stroke care. But overall its initiatives and vision are far too modest.

AHCRA welcomes the Coalition’s significant investment in support for general practice teaching and the 500 additional nursing and allied health scholarships for

students and health professionals in areas of need. AHCRA also supports the Coalition's more detailed plans for mental health research and other initiatives to improve care, especially for young people. However it is concerned about the Coalition's plans to hand back hospitals to local rather than regional boards which will not serve consumers' needs for a highly integrated system unless there is a universal commitment to consumer-centred care. Additionally the plan to restore the private health insurance rebate to the wealthiest Australians makes no financial or health policy sense given the take up of private health insurance has actually increased since the rebate was cut.

AHCRA strongly supports the Greens' universal dental plan but disappointingly even they do not place health among their top ten policies.

Mr McBride called on both major parties to "address the holes in your health policies before the 7th September and commit to building on the early gains of the reform agenda. Deliver a world class health system for Australia's future that is effective and financially sustainable by addressing equity and focussing much more on prevention and primary health care" he concluded.

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