



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

C/- PO Box 280 Deakin West ACT 2600 ABN 64 051 645 674
www.healthreform.org.au

ALP Cancer policy – good but is it fair?



Out-of-pocket health care costs are a major barrier for many Australians to accessing the care they need. Out-of-pocket costs (OOPs) impact disproportionately on those with higher healthcare needs and fewer financial resources. The level and type of OOP associated with health care can differ widely from person to person, place to place and provider to provider, even for the same healthcare service, with little or no regard for patients' needs and ability to pay.

OOPs compound the already significant disadvantage experienced by people on low incomes and those with chronic illnesses and disabilities. This results in significant inequity in access to care and can also reduce the efficiency of the health system as cost barriers to preventive care and lead to an escalation of problems until they require more expensive treatment.

The barriers created by OOPs affect hundreds of thousands of Australians every year. In 2016–17, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that 663,000 people did not see or delayed seeing a GP at least once when needed and 974,000 people avoided or delayed filling a prescription because of cost. These findings are backed up by a 2018 survey of 1200 people undertaken by the Consumers Health Forum of Australia which found that one in six people reported that health care costs had a significant impact on their lives, with some having to draw down on their superannuation to pay for needed care.

AHCRA supports action to address these cost barriers and to increase access to high quality preventive care. In this respect we support the intention of Labor's Cancer Package to reduce OOPs for people seeking treatment for cancer.

However, we are concerned about the equity of this initiative in targeting people with a specific disease instead of those with greatest need. There are many other consumers with costly and debilitating diseases who also require assistance in meeting their health care costs.

AHCRA urges the Labor Party to consider the broader needs of health consumers and to build on its Cancer Package to develop a policy on OOPs within the health system to ensure that all Australians, no matter what illness or disability they experience, can feel confident that they can access the care they need.

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