

'Cash for care' as Australia moves to private primary healthcare by stealth

The nation's leading health consumer peak body, Consumers Health Forum (CHF), believes Australia's primary health system is in danger of becoming privatised 'by stealth'.

"It's becoming a situation of 'cash for care' where only people who can afford out-of-pocket costs can access timely services such as visiting a GP, getting a script or seeing a psychologist," CHF CEO Dr Elizabeth Deveny said.

"Increasingly, we are seeing private profit-driven companies move into primary health to provide these services – whether that is corporate-style GP chains replacing the traditional local GP, or even retailers like Woolies who are now promoting telehealth services.

"We are moving towards an American-style two-tier system where only the rich can pay for fast care and we're moving away from the basics of universal healthcare which Australians really value.

"Ordinary Australians are getting angry and frustrated and in the last two weeks we've had over 1000 people sign our [petition](#) calling on the Australian Government to listen to consumers and give them a real voice in the Strengthening Medicare reforms," Dr Deveny said.

"The voices of consumers are being drowned out because all we've heard in the lead-up to the Federal budget is the doctor and pharmacy lobby groups battling it out in a professional turf war.

"Australians loved Medicare when it was introduced by Labor in 1983 but cracks started to appear over the next decade. [Thirty years on](#) little has been done by successive governments. We're well overdue for real healthcare reform and we look forward to Health Minister Mark Butler taking action in the May budget."

CHF said reform is not just about lifting the Medicare rebate because doctors may also increase their fees leaving consumers with substantial out-of-pocket costs.

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The top priorities for consumers are:

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1. Making GP visits more affordable
2. Better, faster access to all primary healthcare services
3. Help to navigate the health system.

“Consumers do not feel they are being listened to and they want to be supported and educated about any changes to Medicare,” Dr Deveny said.

“For 30 years CHF has advocated on behalf of consumers in scores of health system reviews, reports, and roundtables, but we’re tired of talk. It’s time for action.”

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