

Consumers want urgent Budget investment to make healthcare more affordable

Monday 16 March 2026

The Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) today launched its [2026–27 Federal Budget Submission](#), calling for targeted Budget investments to make healthcare more affordable for all Australians.

CHF CEO Dr Elizabeth Deveny said consumers continue to express confidence in Australia’s healthcare system, but rising out-of-pocket costs are pushing many to the brink.

Consumers consistently tell us two things that should concern policymakers,” Dr Deveny said. “They trust Australia’s healthcare system, but they are increasingly worried they won’t be able to afford to use it. That gap between trust and affordability is where the system is starting to strain.”

The [Consumer Sentiment Survey 2024 Final Report](#) showed that one in ten Australians could not afford the medical care they required, and almost 20% skipped dental visits due to cost. Many also report struggling to navigate the system.

Dr Deveny said recent Government investment to Strengthen Medicare has made a real difference. “Recent investments to strengthen Medicare have helped, particularly around bulk billing and primary care,” Dr Deveny said. “But consumers are telling us clearly that affordability pressures are still growing. Strengthening the system can’t stop halfway - the next round of reforms needs to tackle the costs people are facing when they actually try to use care.”



CHF's 2026–27 Budget Submission outlines three practical and achievable investments that will deliver immediate benefits, improve long term sustainability, and build a more person-centred health system:

1. Implement the National Consumer Engagement Strategy

\$45 million over four years

The Australian Government recently finalised its National Consumer Engagement Strategy. CHF is calling for dedicated funding to implement the strategy and embed meaningful consumer engagement across the entire policy cycle, from design to evaluation.

“Health policy works best when the people who use the system help design it,” Dr Deveny said. “At the moment consumer engagement is often treated as an optional extra. If we want better policy and better value for public investment, consumer participation must be built into the system - not bolted on afterwards.”

2. Fund priority oral health access schemes and expand public dental services

\$15.7 billion over four years

CHF is urging the Government to introduce priority dental benefit schemes for older Australians, First Nations peoples and people on low incomes, alongside major investment to boost public dental capacity.

“Dental care has quietly become one of the clearest examples of inequality in our health system,” Dr Deveny said.

“People are delaying treatment for years or even withdrawing their super just to fix their teeth. When Australians are taking money out of their retirement savings to afford basic dental care, it’s a clear sign the system isn’t working the way it should.”

3. Establish a national Medicare community education program

\$10 million over four years

Consumers Health Forum OF Australia

CHF is calling for a national, co-designed public education program to lift health literacy, strengthen consumer agency to keep themselves well and help people navigate Medicare with confidence.

“One of the most common things we hear from consumers is that they simply don’t understand how the health system works,” Dr Deveny said. “People don’t know what Medicare covers, how to avoid unnecessary costs, or where to go for help.

A national education program would give Australians the knowledge they need to navigate the system with confidence and avoid being hit with unexpected bills.”

Dr Deveny said all three measures reflect what consumers have repeatedly asked for: affordable care, accessible services, and a real say in decisions that affect their health.

“Australians want a health system that works with them, not one they have to struggle to navigate,” Dr Deveny said. “These investments are practical steps that would ease cost pressures now while building a stronger and more sustainable health system for the future.”

Media contact

Benjamin Graham

Public Affairs Manager CHF

0461 545 395

b.graham@chf.org.au