



## **Budget eases pressures but must make healthcare easier to use, consumers say**

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Australia's peak health consumer body has warned the federal Budget has fallen short in addressing the out-of-pocket costs crushing Australians trying to access essential health care.

The Consumers Health Forum of Australia acknowledged that the wider cost-of-living agenda in the budget will have a meaningful flow-on effect on people's health.

CHF CEO Dr Elizabeth Deveny said: "You can see that the Government understands that someone's health is shaped long before they walk into a clinic."

"Health pressure starts outside the health system. Some of today's announcements will help here. But for health, the real test is whether people can actually use the healthcare available to them in real life."

CHF welcomed several Budget measures including the ongoing funding of Medicare Urgent Care Clinics, digital health share by default, fewer repeat tests, earlier access to information, and a commitment to focus on specialist fees.

"Permanent funding for Urgent Care Clinics is an investment in accessible care, and one Australians need. This is free, walk-in care seven days a week means fewer people sitting in emergency departments for hours when they don't need to be there," Dr Deveny said.

"This Budget also contains welcome investments like additional PBS medicines, free RSV vaccination for eligible older Australians, measures to lift childhood immunisation, as well as targeted women's health investments in endometriosis, contraception, stillbirth support and Birthing on Country.



The Government will provide \$3.2 million over two years from 2025/26 for implementation and to undertake consultation on further reforms to improve the private healthcare system.

“We've been calling on the government to address specialist out-of-pocket costs for over ten years, so it is genuinely welcome to see this elevated as a national priority,” Dr Deveny said.

“This crucial first step towards tackling unwarranted price variation in specialist costs is welcome and overdue.”

Dr Deveny also welcomed the ongoing extension of access to the Child Dental Benefits Schedule through state services.

“This will help children in lower-income families access basic services such as check-ups, cleaning, x-rays and other important work before problems escalate.

“We look forward to seeing that commitment translate into real relief for consumers.”

CHF also called on the government to invest in educating Australians about health initiatives already on offer and for sustained funding of consumer engagement in health policy, so people who use the system have a genuine say in how it is designed and run.

"The government should be proud of reforms like 60-day prescriptions - but too many Australians still don't know they exist or how to access them. A health system only works if people can use it in real life, and more investment is needed in health consumer, consultation, co-design, and education," Dr Deveny said.

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