

Universal Healthcare

Nearly all countries support universal access to health care. Achieving and maintaining it, however, can be difficult. With ageing populations, growing burdens of chronic disease and escalating health care costs, health systems in many countries are under pressure, and universality is being undermined.

Although Australians have had access to universal health care for more than 30 years, our system is not immune from these pressures. Bulk-billing rates for GPs are currently relatively high, but out-of-pocket costs for health care in Australia are also quite high and pose a major barrier to accessing care for some people.

Recent attempts by the Government to introduce co-payments for GP, pathology and imaging services have been strongly opposed by the public and the health sector.

For many people living in rural and remote Australia, gaining access to timely care, especially specialist care, can be difficult. And, in some specialty areas, waiting times for care in the public system can be very long: much longer than they are in the private sector, which raises concerns about equity within the healthcare system and balance between the public and private sectors.

In the search for reform options, it is important that the strengths of the existing system are built upon and to preserve the principles that Medicare was founded on: equity, efficiency, simplicity and universality.

AHHA POSITION:

- ✧ After more than 30 years, reforms to Medicare are needed to ensure that patients continue to receive high-quality and timely access to care.
- ✧ However, reforms to Medicare need to build on existing policies and programs, rather than making wholesale changes to a system that is built on solid principles.
- ✧ All Australians should continue to have timely access to high-quality health care services regardless of their ability to pay.
- ✧ The introduction of broad-based co-payment schemes as price-signals are opposed.
- ✧ Australia's health insurance system, Medicare, should be preserved and remain compulsory for all citizens.
- ✧ Medicare should continue to be funded, in part, through the taxation system.
- ✧ Governments should give greater consideration to finding an equitable and fiscally sustainable way of operating Medicare alongside the private health insurance system.
- ✧ Governments should consider developing health care financing and payment methods that are better able to ensure patients receive seamless care between primary, hospital, disability and aged care.
- ✧ Reforms should focus on improving efficiency, including the identification and removal of low value healthcare items, rather than cost shifting to clinicians and consumers.
- ✧ Governments should not impose indexation freezes across the entire Medicare Benefits Schedule.