

7 May 2019

Ms Leanne Wells
Chief Executive Officer
Consumers Health Forum of Australia
PO Box 73 Deakin West ACT 2600

Dear Ms Wells,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the Coalition on important issues facing your members. A response to your questions is attached.

This election will have real consequences for Australia's economy and our future.

Despite global headwinds, our economy is strong. This year, for the first time in more than a decade, the Government will deliver a Budget surplus.

A stronger economy means we can deliver on our plans to:

1. Create 1.25 million more jobs over the next five years.
2. Maintain budget surpluses and pay down debt.
3. Deliver tax relief to encourage and reward hard working Australians.
4. Guarantee increased investments for schools, hospitals and roads.
5. Keep Australians safe and our borders secure.

The alternative at this election is Mr Shorten. Labor's risky agenda includes billions of dollars of higher taxes – on retirees, housing, incomes, investments, family businesses, electricity and more.

Thank you for communicating our response to your members.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Hirst
Federal Director

MORRISON GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO CONSUMER HEALTH FORUM

The Morrison Government is guaranteeing the essential services Australians rely on. The Morrison Government is increasing funding for hospitals, medicines and Medicare. **This record investment in healthcare under the Morrison Government means more doctors, more nurses, more medicines and more services.** It is the tangible benefit of a strong economy and is why the Morrison Government is so committed to keeping our economy strong.

Our Plan for Strengthening Australia's World-Class Health System is available here: <https://www.liberal.org.au/our-plan-strengthening-australias-world-class-health-system>

1. How will you ensure there is national and whole of government approach to prevention to reduce known causes of chronic disease such as obesity?

The Morrison Government is investing significantly in preventive health. This includes investing significantly in the promotion of physical activity; tackling obesity; screening programs for bowel, cervical and breast cancer; anti-smoking campaigns; and providing significant investment in medical research focused on prevention. The Morrison Government is also prioritising the mental health of Australians and the prevention of suicide.

In February this year, the Morrison Government held a *National Obesity Summit* which was an important first step towards a new national cohesive strategy on obesity prevention and control. This is in addition to national activities and priorities to encourage a healthy lifestyle that have been led by the Coalition including:

- \$300 million investment to support greater physical activity and participation in sport;
- *the Health Star Rating system* which helps consumers make informed decisions when purchasing their food;
- *the Healthy Food Partnership* – which is a collaboration between the Australian Government, the food industry and public health advocates to encourage healthy eating; and
- *the Government Healthy Weight Guide website.*

The Morrison Government is committed to ongoing medical research that focuses on prevention and being ready to respond to future challenges. The Coalition has established the \$20 billion in *the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF)* which is the single largest boost to research funding in Australia's history. The Morrison Government's medical research missions, as part of the MRFF, tackle major health challenges, support future medical advances and focus significantly on prevention including:

- \$125 million *Australian Brain Cancer Mission* aims to double the survival rates and improve the quality of life for patients with brain cancer over the next ten years;
- \$500 million *Genomics Health Futures Mission* aims to transform the lives of more than 200,000 Australians through research into better testing, diagnosis and treatment with precision medicine;

- \$185 million *Dementia, Ageing and Aged Care Research Mission* will improve the quality of life of older people, enhance workforce capability and improve quality of care;
- \$220 million *Cardiovascular Mission* will improve health outcomes through prevention strategies, earlier detection and improved outcomes for patients suffering a heart attack or stroke;
- \$160 million *Indigenous Health Research Fund* will support practical, innovative research into the best approaches to prevention, early intervention, and treatment of health conditions of greatest concern to Indigenous communities including \$35 million for rheumatic heart disease;
- \$150 million *Stem Cell Therapies Mission* will advance stem cell research that could potentially grow kidneys, repair damaged spinal cords and cure dementia;
- \$50 million *Traumatic Brain Injury Mission* will enable nationally co-ordinated medical research to improve the recovery of patients with a traumatic brain injury and identify the most effective care and treatments; and
- \$125 million, 10 year *Million Minds Mental Health Research Mission* will assist up to one million people affected by mental illness.

The Morrison Government is committed to ensuring our community is protected against harmful diseases through vaccination. Under the Coalition a record number of Australian children are now fully immunised, with the five year old immunisation rate at a record 94.6 per cent. To further improve Australia's world leading immunisation rates the Morrison Government is investing:

- \$39.5 million to provide the whooping cough vaccine to every pregnant woman in the country, protecting babies and mothers from this life-threatening disease;
- \$52 million to protect Australian teenagers against meningococcal, with the launch of a new free national program for 14 to 19 year olds in addition to the program for infants twelve months of age;
- \$12 million over the next three years to extend the reach of the childhood immunisation education campaign;
- to provide all 12 and 13-year-old girls and boys with free access to the Gardasil 9 Vaccine, to protect them from the human papillomavirus and cervical cancers and save lives;
- to provide record numbers of flu vaccines through *the National Immunisation Program*; and
- to continue our highly successful *No Jab, No Pay* initiative which led to an additional 210,000 extra children were vaccinated in its first year.

The Morrison Government is investing significantly in prevention and earlier diagnosis for cancer:

- \$20 million for a pivotal anti-smoking campaign to improve population health by reducing smoking rates and \$183.7 million to *the Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) program*;
- \$10 million to encourage participation in the free and life-saving *National Bowel Cancer Screening Program*;

- \$64.3 million over four years in the 2017-18 Budget to enable *BreastScreen Australia* to continue to actively invite women aged 70 to 74 to screen for the early detection of breast cancer;
- ongoing funding for more accurate cervical screening; and
- \$7 million to develop a ten year Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder Strategic Action Plan 2018-2028, this builds on our investment of \$19.7 million since 2014.

The Morrison Government will invest \$45.4 million to support the implementation of the next *National Blood Borne Virus (BBV) and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) Strategies (2018-2022)*. This investment has been acknowledged as the greatest increase in funding to prevent, diagnose and treat STIs and BBVs in at least two decades.

2. What measures will you take to make oral and dental care more affordable for the whole Australian population?

The Morrison Government will invest a further \$1 billion to provide core dental services for children and enable families to claim up to \$1,000 in benefits under *the Child Dental Benefits Schedule*.

This is in addition to the adult program, in which an extra \$100 million has been invested to ensure low-income households, including pensioners, can receive affordable public dental care. It means an extra 180,000 services will be delivered at little or no cost to patients.

The extension of the *National Partnership Agreement on Public Dental Services for Adults* will see funding of \$350.3 million from January 2017 to 30 June 2020.

The Morrison Government is also implementing the most comprehensive rural health package in decades. This includes \$84.1 million in additional funding for the *Royal Flying Doctor Service* to provide dental care, mental health services and emergency aeromedical services to rural and remote communities.

There are 13 million Australians who rely on private health insurance which supports their dental health. Over 41 million claims for dental treatment are made each year by the one in two Australians who rely on their private health insurance to provide cover for dental care. Over \$900 million per annum of the \$6 billion *Private Health Insurance Rebate* supports dental services.

The Morrison Government is completely committed to maintaining the private health insurance rebate. This rebate is relied upon by millions of Australians and takes pressure off the public system.

Labor plans to remove the rebate on low cost private health insurance policies, which would increase the cost of private health insurance for over 65,000 Australian families and putting privately funded dental care at risk.

Labor has repeatedly refused to rule out scrapping the full private health insurance rebate, which would destroy put at risk the model of dental care that is funded by private health insurers.

3. What measures will you put in place to ensure we have an integrated, coordinated and universally accessible primary health care system that allows providers to evolve to meet growing needs?

Support for primary care providers through Medicare is at record high levels. The Morrison Government will increase Medicare spending by \$6 billion from \$24.7 billion in 2018-19 to \$30.7 billion in 2022-23 – far exceeding the \$19.5 billion allocated by the former Labor Government in 2013.

Almost nine out of 10 Australians who visit the doctor have no out-of-pocket costs, with GP bulk billing rates at a record 86 per cent, up from 82 per cent under Labor. Bulk billing rates for out of hospital pathology services is at a record high of 99.4 per cent.

The Morrison Government is delivering a \$1.6 billion to modernise and strengthen primary care to support Australia's doctors and specialists to deliver improved access and outcomes for patients. The Coalition has done this in close collaboration with *the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)* and *Australian Medical Association*.

A new \$448.5 million funding and service model will support GPs to provide enhanced care to patients, many whom will have chronic and complex conditions. This will allow Australians aged over 70 to enter into a new type of agreement with their general practice to receive more personalised, consistent and coordinated care. GPs and others in their practice will be able to provide consultations, referrals, scripts and test results by email, phone, FaceTime or Skype – making it easier and more convenient for patients.

Doctors will also be supported by a \$201.5 million boost to the *Practice Incentives Program*, to treat aged care residents.

This builds on the \$512 million package in the 2018–19 MYEFO, which included expanded telehealth for rural Australians, a boost for services in residential aged care and after hours services.

Under the Morrison Government, funding for diagnostic services will also increase for the first time in 20 years. This will include MRIs and PET scans, helping to keep the costs down for families who need to access these important services.

4. What will your government do to help Australians become more confident and skilled in managing their own care and navigating the health system?

The Morrison Government recognises the importance of digital health in enabling patients to make informed choices when using health services and to proactively improve health outcomes.

The benefits of advancements in digital health for patients are significant and compelling: hospital admissions avoided; fewer adverse drug events; reduced duplication of tests; better coordination of care for people with chronic and complex conditions; and better informed treatment decisions. Digital health can help save and improve lives.

The Coalition launched Australia's *National Digital Health Strategy* in July 2018. The strategy will ensure that health information is available whenever and wherever it is needed. The key mechanism to achieve this priority is the *My Health Record* system, an online summary of an individual's health information.

Between 16 July 2018 and 31 January 2019, Australians had the opportunity to decide if they wanted a *My Health Record* and to opt out if they didn't want one. The *My Health Record* opt out period concluded with the proportion of the Australian population having a record increasing from around 25 per cent to over 90 per cent.

Australians can cancel at any time and the record will be permanently deleted. They can also set permissions regarding who can access their health information.

The *My Health Record* provides patients and health professionals with immediate access to all of their necessary health information on line to improve co-ordinated care outcomes, reduce duplication and provide vital information in emergency situations.

The Morrison Government is also supporting the development of new models of care and support for patients to navigate the health systems. We are providing \$1.5 million for a new pilot program that will help patients of serious and rare diseases connect with the best health services and treatment. *The Patient Pathways program*, is an initiative that will place specialist telehealth nurses in community organisations. For the first time in Australia, the program will also provide a pathway for patients to talk about their experience so that this information can inform future research, treatment, care, information and support across the health sector.

5. What measures will you put in place to ensure access to health care is determined by health need not capacity to pay?

The Coalition has established the *Medicare Guarantee Fund*, which is guaranteeing the ongoing funding of the *Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS)* and the *Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)* with \$36.6 billion in 2019-20.

The Morrison Government will increase Medicare spending by \$6 billion from \$24.7 billion in 2018-19 to \$30.7 billion in 2022-23 – far exceeding the \$19.5 billion allocated by the former Labor Government in 2013.

The Coalition removed Labor's Medicare Freeze with the re-indexation of Medicare and diagnostic imaging, totalling \$2.4 billion from 2017-18 to 2022-23.

Under the Morrison Government, almost nine out of 10 Australians who visit the doctor have no out of pocket costs with the GP bulk billing rates at a record 86 per cent, up from 82 per cent under Labor. Over 133 million free GP services were delivered in 2017-18 – an increase of 5.7 million from 2016-17 and 27.3 million more than Labor managed in their last year.

Bulk billing rates for MBS pathology services are even higher with 99.4 per cent of out-of-hospital pathology services having no cost to patients.

Unlike Labor, the Morrison Government continues to list on the PBS every medicine approved by the independent expert *Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee*, making new, essential medicines affordable for all Australians. The Coalition has helped to improve

the health of Australian's by subsidising \$10.6 billion worth of new and amended medicines, many of which would be prohibitively expensive without subsidy. The Coalition has:

- approved over 2,000 listings on the PBS since 2013; and
- listed over \$1.4 billion in new cancer medicines in the last year alone, including many new immunotherapy medicines that will change and save the lives of Australian patients.

The Morrison Government's approach to the PBS differs dramatically to Labor who in 2011 stopped listing medicines on the PBS, when Bill Shorten was Assistant Treasurer, because Labor could not manage the economy or the budget. Labor's 2011-12 Budget stated "*given the current fiscal environment the listing of some medicines would be deferred until fiscal circumstances permit*". This included medicines for asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, endometriosis and IVF amongst others.

A re-elected Morrison Government will also invest \$308 million to further cut the cost of life changing prescription medicines for over 1.4 million Australians who require multiple medicines.

From 1 January 2020 the Safety Net threshold to receive free or cheaper medicines through the PBS will be lowered by 12 scripts for concession card holders and the equivalent of 2 scripts for non-concession card holders.

This change will mean that people will take less time to reach their safety net threshold saving them up to \$80 per year and providing them earlier access to free medicines or medicines at a reduced co-payment.

This will be of particular benefit to families who require multiple medicines per month and pensioners and individuals with multiple chronic conditions such as heart disease, high cholesterol, arthritis, asthma and diabetes.

The Morrison Government has launched a national strategy to address excessive out of pocket costs charged by a minority of doctors. The development of a national searchable website to provide the public with greater access to information about the costs of specialist services will be funded. The Morrison Government will also fund an education initiative to increase the understanding of medical out of pocket costs among consumers, their families and GPs.

The Morrison Government will also seek to address the practice of state and territory hospitals prioritising private patients in public hospitals at the expense of public patients. The Morrison Government will remove incentives that exist in the system to prioritise private patients, and ensure treatment timelines are based on clinical need not capacity to pay.

6. What approach will your government take across all portfolios to ensure that the multitude of social and economic factors determining the health and wellbeing of Australians are made a priority?

The Morrison Government's *Long-Term National Health Plan* is providing Australians with access to quality medical care, record hospital funding, affordable life-saving medicines and breakthrough research for new drugs and treatments.

The Morrison Government recognises that there are interdependent policies across the Federal Government and also with the states and territories.

This is why the Minister for Health will continue to work closely with Prime Minister Morrison, the Minister for Senior Australians and Aged Care, the Minister for Indigenous Health and other members of the Government to lead and implement our plan at a federal level to strengthen our world class health system.

This is also why Morrison Government will continue to take a leadership role in strengthening our world class health system through the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) and COAG Health Council (CHC) to improve health outcomes in every state and territory and to ensure consistency of policy, practice and service delivery.

In addition, the Morrison Government will continue to work closely with, and take advice from, advisory bodies across the health portfolio. This includes *the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee* (PBAC), *Medical Services Advisory Committee* (MSAC), *Prostheses List Advisory Committee* (PLAC) amongst others. The Morrison Government is focused on ensuring that consumers have a seat at the table through these bodies through consumer representatives and more broadly through the *Consumer Consultative Committee*.

7. How will your government ensure the best start in life for children, families and young people in Australia?

The Morrison Government is committed to infant and maternal health. The Coalition has updated *Pregnancy Care Guidelines* to ensure health professionals have up-to-date and evidence-based recommendations on providing the highest quality of antenatal care for women.

The Morrison Government is providing \$77.9 million to improve infant and maternal health outcomes, including measures to reduce the risk of preeclampsia, stillbirth and neonatal deaths.

The Morrison Government is providing \$43.9 million for a new perinatal mental health program to support those affected by perinatal mental illness during or after pregnancy, or grieving after the death of an infant.

An additional \$600,000 to *the Miracle Babies Foundation* to support families of premature and sick babies was provide in the Budget.

The Morrison Government has launch the first *National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020-2030 (The National Action Plan)* which will improve children and young people's health by focusing on healthy upbringing, prevention, addressing risky behaviours and childhood mental health.

The Morrison Government will provide \$4 million to support the implementation of this action plan on top of our significant investment for the health of children and young people in the last twelve months.

The National Action Plan has been produced and endorsed by a broad group of stakeholders as a roadmap for enhancing the collective health and wellbeing of Australia's children and young people.

The National Action Plan identifies the steps needed so our children and young people have the best start in life and was developed and endorsed by key stakeholders in the health system. Importantly The National Action Plan will be delivered in partnership with all levels of government as well as health professionals, parents and carers, and young people.

It has a particular focus on young indigenous Australians, LGBTIQ+ young people and those experiencing difficult socioeconomic circumstances in rural and remote regions.

The National Action Plan will:

- improve health equity across populations;
- empower parents to maximise healthy development;
- tackle mental health and risky behaviours;
- address chronic conditions and preventive health; and
- strengthen the health workforce.

To support the implementation of the National Action Plan the Morrison Government will provide:

- \$1 million over three years to the *Consumers Health Forum* (CHF) to support the roll of their *Youth Health Forum*.
- \$1 million to the *Reconnect National Program* - provides evidence-based sport and art programs to disadvantaged Australians to create socially inclusive, life-changing opportunities.
- \$1.5 million over 4 years in contestable grants to support programs focussing on the key priorities of the strategy
- \$500,000 to support the up-skilling of health professionals and the development and dissemination of accessible and culturally appropriate health information on childhood health.

The Coalition has also invested \$100 million for Australia's first *Comprehensive Children's Cancer Centre* and a rebuild of the *Children's Hospital at Randwick*. The *Comprehensive Children's Cancer Centre* brings clinical care, research and teaching together in the one place.

We are also investing \$503.1 million in the *Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan* which is the largest suicide prevention plan in Australia's history and focuses on expanding the headspace network, Indigenous suicide prevention and early childhood and parenting.

The Morrison Government will also invest \$19.7 million for Royal Far West (RFW) to expand their Telecare services, meaning allied health services like speech therapy, occupational therapy and psychology that aren't available locally, can be delivered to more children in regional and rural Australia.

8. What measures will you put in place to ensure that we have a sustainable health system that encourages high value and discourages low value care and ensures all Australian have access to similar care?

The Morrison Government is committed to equity in healthcare for all Australians and guaranteeing the essential services Australians rely on. The Coalition is increasing funding for hospitals, medicines and Medicare.

Federal funding for public hospital services under the Morrison Government has increased from \$13.3 billion in 2012–13, to \$21 billion in 2018–19 and will further increase to \$29.1 billion in 2024–25. Our new five year *National Health Reform Agreement* will deliver \$31 billion in additional public hospital funding from 2020–21 to 2024–25, taking the overall funding to over \$130 billion.

In addition, patients in every state and territory will have access to improved health and hospital services under our landmark \$1.3 billion *Commonwealth Health and Hospitals Program*, which will support patient care while reducing pressure on community and hospital services.

People living in rural and regional Australia deserve the same access to high-quality healthcare services as those living in capital cities. That is why the Morrison Government will invest \$550 million for *the Stronger Rural Health Strategy*, which delivers 3,000 additional doctors and more than 3,000 additional nurses and allied health professionals in rural general practice over the next decade.

The Morrison Government supports rigorous *Health Technology Assessment (HTA)* when assessing the quality, safety, efficacy, effectiveness and cost effectiveness of health services.

The Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) advises on new listings on MBS and *Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC)* for medicines listings on the PBS.

The MBS Review Taskforce has been looking at more than 5,800 MBS items to ensure that Medicare services reflect clinical best practice, removing obsolete items and reinvesting funding into new services like 3D Breast Tomosynthesis and renal dialysis in remote Australia.

The Morrison Government respects these independent processes so that new medicines, devices and services are funded in line with best medical advice focusing on outcomes and value.

The sustainability of our health care system depends is reliant on a mixed model of public and private funding. There are 13 million Australians who rely on private health insurance.

The Morrison Government have taken steps to make private health insurance more affordable and easier to understand. This includes:

- Encouraging young Australians to take it up, by allowing private insurers to discount hospital insurance premiums for 18 to 29 year olds by up to 10per cent.
- Better cover for mental health, by allowing people with hospital insurance that doesn't offer full cover for mental health, to upgrade without a waiting period.

- Enabling insurers to offer travel and accommodation benefits for treatment for people in regional and rural areas.
- Helping Australians easily understand what they're getting – by requiring insurers to categorise products as: gold; silver; bronze; basic. We're also requiring insurers to use standard definitions to make it clear what's covered and what isn't.

These reforms have resulted in the lowest premium changes in 18 years at 3.25 per cent.

The Morrison Government is completely committed to maintaining the private health insurance rebate. This rebate is relied upon by millions of Australians and takes pressure off the public system.

Labor plans to remove the rebate on low cost policies, forcing over 65,000 Australian families raising their premiums by 16 per cent. Labor will take an axe to private health insurance.

9. CHF has joined many in supporting the Uluru Statement from the Heart, what will your party do to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a voice across all government portfolios and with all Australian governments?

The Morrison Government is increasing its efforts towards *Closing the Gap in Health Equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*. The Morrison Government committed to exploring new and better ways to meet the health needs of Indigenous people, in close collaboration with local communities.

Funding of \$4.1 billion over the next four years will improve access to health care through *the Indigenous Australians Health Program*. This represents an increase of around 4 per cent a year.

The Morrison Government will provide further \$51 million of funding will be provided under *the Indigenous Australians Health Program* for a range of new initiatives that will improve services, health and wellbeing. This includes:

- the provision of up to \$25 million in grants to communities and organisations to implement their proposals to improve local health;
- increasing the number of Indigenous Australians working in health, to encourage a culturally safe health sector and provide employment and positive role models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- improving access to quality health services by investing \$7.5 million in capital works for remote Indigenous specific health facilities and providing \$1.5 million to build three specialists storage units for lifesaving kidney dialysis and treatment;
- the provision of \$2.8 million to support birthing on country; and
- providing \$2 million to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and the Australian Bureau of Statistics to improve the health database, which is vital to ensure programs are working effectively.

The Morrison Government will also provide \$8 million to *National Aboriginal Community Control Health Services* to continue to deliver culturally appropriate health care in very remote areas.

In addition, a \$160 million *Indigenous Health Research Fund* has been established to deliver rapid solutions to some of the biggest preventable health challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people such as ending avoidable blindness and deafness and rheumatic heart disease.

Tragically, the suicide rate in Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander communities remains significantly higher than in the non-Indigenous population. The Morrison Government is addressing the high rate of youth suicide through our *Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan*, which includes \$34.1 million for Indigenous suicide prevention and mental health initiatives. Specifically \$4.2 million has also been provided for the Young Indigenous Ambassadors, Yarn Safe Campaign, and a fast-tracked roll-out of the Be You program in the Kimberley.

In addition the Morrison Government will invest \$12.5 million from *the Million Minds Mission* for research on the best approaches to prevent Indigenous suicide. This forms part of the Morrison Governments commitment to support one million people with mental health issues access new and innovative approaches to prevention, diagnosis, treatment and recovery.