



23 June 2016

Ms Leanne Wells  
Chief Executive Officer  
Consumers Health Forum  
PO Box 3099  
MANUKA ACT 2603  
Via Email : l.wells@chf.org.au

Dear Ms Wells

Thank you for your letter presenting the Consumers Health Forum of Australia's (CHF) Election Platform – *Putting Consumers at the Centre of Health Care*.

Health care is a top priority for Australians and will be a top priority for a Shorten Labor Government.

Labor will always ensure that our health care system provides affordable, accessible and high quality care to all Australians.

Please find our responses to your letter below.

**1. What measures will you put in place to ensure we have an integrated, coordinated and universally accessible primary health care system that meets the needs of people with chronic and complex needs and families?**

Labor is committed to continuously improving our primary care system so it will meet the health care needs of Australians into the future.

A Shorten Labor Government will provide an additional \$100 million over two years to develop, pilot and roll out new models of primary care around Australia.

These models will bring together a range of health care professionals to deliver better integrated care and sharpen focus on patient outcomes and quality of care

New models will include the design of a uniquely Australian model of the patient-centred medical home - 'Your Family Doctor'. This new model will invest in innovative primary care that:

- Encourages a formal and ongoing relationship between patients and their general practice.
- Is based on voluntary enrolment of eligible patients with a specific general practice and a nominated GP.
- Sees patient health care as GP led in partnership with the patient (and their family where appropriate).

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- Rewards the provision of holistic and ongoing care, especially but not exclusively for patients with complex and chronic illnesses.
- Recognises GPs as the centre of a patient's care and that they are best placed to determine the types of care their patients need.
- Expands the allied health services available to patients with complex or chronic illnesses, such as diabetes educators, podiatrists, exercise physiologists, non-dispensing pharmacists located in primary care facilities, practice nurses and nurse practitioners, psychologists and dieticians.
- Improves the integration of general practice with other parts of Australia's health care system, with a key focus on reducing unnecessary hospitalisations.
- Provides incentives for GPs to provide ongoing care that achieves agreed outcomes.
- Draws on new technology for example the CSIRO pilot home monitoring trial.
- Drives quality and safety improvements in primary care.
- Links in with needed social and community services.

A Shorten Labor Government will roll out these models across Australia. Labor will utilise the Primary Health Networks (PHNs) in the rollout. Partnerships between general practices and other primary care service providers, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, Community Health Centres and GP SuperClinics will be considered for launch sites.

Labor will ensure an appropriate mix of PHNs in metropolitan, regional and rural areas, so that the models developed meet the needs of all Australians. Labor also recognises that the capacity of PHNs varies, having been established for less than a year after the Abbott-Turnbull Government's decision to break its election promise that no Medicare Locals would close.

An independent evaluation will be conducted after two years. It will inform the development of a plan to expand access to the 'Your Family Doctor' model nationally via the Centre for Medicare and Healthcare System Innovation.

Labor recognises that reform in primary care takes time. Development, demonstration and roll out of a uniquely Australian model of the patient-centred medical home is not something that can be achieved without significant effort and resources. It will be a decade-long process.

Labor also understands that a properly integrated eHealth record system is vital to improve patient outcomes and realise efficiencies in the system. That is why Labor delivered on the reform when in Government.

## **2. How will you ensure that there is a private health insurance market that has a basic standard of certainty, comparability and affordability that can easily be accessed by consumers?**

Labor believes that private health insurance plays an important role in complementing the public system. When in government, Labor forced health insurers to justify all premium increases and ease pressures on health fund members.

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Labor will:

- Regulate the private health industry to ensure value-for-money products are available to all policy holders.
- Work to eliminate surprise gap payments for private health insurance holders.
- Increase the sustainability of private health insurance for Australians, with specific regard to premium increases.

A Shorten Labor Government will ensure that the insurers justify their claim for increases, and if they do not, we will not approve the increases. We will also look into the quality of insurance policies provided to ensure consumers are getting value for money.

### **3. How will you ensure that the Private Health Insurance Rebate delivers on its objective of taking pressure off the public system?**

Labor believes that both public and private sectors play critical roles in Australia's world-class health system. While governments have sole responsibility for managing the public health sector, they should also support a strong and sustainable private health care industry.

Labor will:

- Ensure public and private health services complement each other.
- Ensure all necessary services are provided in the public health system.
- Encourage public and private hospitals to work together, including for elective surgery.
- Apply high standards to both public and private health services including the reporting of both public and private hospital performance.
- Ensure the benefits of private health insurance rebates are available to Australians who need them most.
- Retain patient choice and good clinical decision-making as the essence of health care.

Labor also believes that the private health insurance rebate should no longer be available for certain natural therapies from 1 July 2017.

The Review of the Australian Government Rebate on Private Health Insurance for Natural Therapies, found that there was no clear evidence that the natural therapies covered by the review were clinically effective. Therefore, they are less of a priority for taxpayer funding.

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

Labor created Medicare, our unique universal health insurance scheme that has seen Australians achieve some of the best health outcomes in the world.

We created Medicare because we believe Australians should get the health care they need, not the health care they can afford.

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Labor believes that all Australians should have access to health care, regardless of their income.

A Shorten Labor Government will:

- Restore indexation of the Medicare Benefits Schedule from 1 January 2017.
- Reverse the Abbott-Turnbull Government's increases to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme co-payments and thresholds.
- Reverse Malcolm Turnbull's cuts to bulk-billing incentives for pathology and diagnostic imaging.
- Stop the Turnbull Government's plan to increase the Medicare Safety Net.
- Reduce waiting times for elective surgery and emergency departments and invest in hospitals.
- Legislate to ensure Medicare remains in public hands.

Labor's policies to reverse the Abbott Turnbull Government's cuts to Medicare and the PBS will save an average couple with two children more than \$400 a year in health care costs.

Labor also recognises that there are growing health disparities within our population:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience a higher burden of ill health that is two and a half times that of other Australians.
- People with physical disabilities and those who live in regional, rural and remote Australia continue to lag unacceptably behind.
- A 2014 review of mental health programs and services found that distressed and vulnerable people are often dealing with a system that is difficult to navigate and doesn't always consider their education, employment, housing, and physical health care needs.

A key focus of the Shorten Labor Government will be to promote equality and accessibility in Australia's health care system.

Labor has announced a number of commitments on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. We will partner with the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health and provide \$5.5 million a year to roll out the 'Deadly Choices' program nationwide. It helps Indigenous Australians to improve their diet, exercise regularly and quit smoking. We will also invest \$9.5 million to Close the Gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's vision loss.

A Shorten Labor Government will also convene a National Taskforce on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kidney disease as a priority to look for holistic solutions to the current crisis. In particular, it will address coordination of the complex and fragmented health and social supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families affected by kidney failure.

Smoking disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Australians with mental illness, people living in rural or remote areas and those in areas of socioeconomic disadvantage.

Based on expert advice, a Shorten Labor Government will invest \$20 million in a scaled-up National Tobacco Campaign. Labor will also invest \$30 million in targeting at-risk populations such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and Australians with mental illness through PHNs.

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**5. 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?**

A Shorten Labor Government will establish a permanent Australian Healthcare Reform Commission to assist all levels of government to continuously improve our health care system.

Within the Commission, Labor will establish a new Centre for Medicare and Healthcare System Innovation. The Centre will develop, trial, evaluate and implement new payment and service delivery models that aim to reduce health expenditure while improving the quality and safety of care. The Centre will also take over the responsibilities of the MBS Review.

Unlike the Liberals, Labor commits to ensuring that where there are any savings realised, they will be reinvested by the Centre into health care system innovation including new models of primary care.

Labor has a long history of reforming Australia's health care system for the benefit of all.

It is thanks to the work of successive Labor governments over the past 70 years that Australia boasts a world-class health care system.

If our health care system is to meet the changing and increasing health care needs of all Australians, we must have a continuing process of policy and program development, implementation, evaluation and monitoring.

Much like the successful National Health and Hospitals Commission, the new Commission will have a key advisory role. It will investigate, develop and evaluate proposed changes to Australia's health system, and advise governments (including State and Territory Governments) on these changes.

The Australian Healthcare Reform Commission will also have a strong implementation capacity. It will be tasked to roll out agreed structural reforms to Australia's health care system, including funding agreements and payment systems.

The Australian Healthcare Reform Commission will embed reform in Australia's health care system, by focusing on:

- Preserving universality.
- Reducing inequality.
- Eliminating waste and duplication.
- Integrating services.
- Improving the collection and use of data and analytics.

The establishment of the Australian Healthcare Reform Commission and the Centre for Medicare and Healthcare System Innovation will ensure that we embed a constant process of reform in our health care, so that our world-class system can continue to meet the health care needs of Australians well into the future.

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The Commission will be created through the consolidation of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, the National Health Funding Body, and functions formerly associated with the Australian National Preventive Health Agency, Independent Hospital Pricing Authority, National Health Performance Authority and Health Workforce Australia which have been transferred to other agencies.

**6. How will you ensure that there is a whole-of-government approach to addressing mental health needs to ensure people with mental illnesses have the same opportunities as others in the community?**

Labor believes that delivering a more integrated, cross-sector and whole-of-government mental health system is a national priority and requires national leadership.

Nearly one in five Australian adults will experience mental ill health each year and nearly half of our adult population will experience a mental illness at some point during their lives.

Labor largely supports the recommendations of the National Mental Health Commission's review and a Shorten Labor Government will outline its priorities for implementation within its first 100 days in office.

We will lead the negotiation on the development of the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan, which will be based on the principles of national leadership and regional integration as recommended by the National Mental Health Commission.

We will also use existing PHNs to deliver regionally tailored mental health programs. Evidence shows that outcomes for people are improved when they have good access to care that provides individualised coordination and management focused on the needs of the whole person.

If elected, a Shorten Labor Government will ensure that people living with mental illness who are not eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme still receive the support and care they need.

A Shorten Labor Government will actively support and promote the Mentally Healthy Workplace Alliance to better support mental health and wellbeing at work, and remove the stigma and discrimination surrounding mental ill health. We will also establish a new Heads Up award for excellence in mental health and wellbeing at work, as part of our recognition of the best employers in Australia.

Labor has committed to keeping the early psychosis program in place and will ensure that youth mental health services remain a national priority.

Labor also strongly supports the headspace model and a Shorten Labor Government will provide the funding certainty needed to ensure headspace centres remain open in the more than 95 locations across the country where they have been established.

A Shorten Labor Government will also restore the independence, integrity and transparency of the National Mental Health Commission, following the removal of its independence under the Liberals.

Suicide prevention

A Shorten Labor Government will commit to the National Mental Health Commission's recommendation to reduce suicides by 50 per cent over the next ten years. We will work with people with lived experience and the mental health service sector to develop and implement a National Suicide Prevention Strategy which will establish clear incremental targets and measurable outcomes.

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Labor will provide \$72 million to implement 12 suicide prevention pilot initiatives – six urban, four regional and two remote – that are tailored to local community need. We will work with experts and State and Territory Governments to identify these sites within the first 100 days of government.

Suicide is the fifth leading cause of death for Indigenous Australians. Labor will take action to reduce suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by working with communities to implement the recommendations of the University of Western Sydney's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project. Labor will also ensure that at least three of the regional suicide pilot projects are in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

A Shorten Labor Government will provide \$9 million towards a National Suicide Prevention Fund. The Fund will support research into reducing suicide deaths, and programs which reduce the stigma around suicide and seeking help when contemplating suicide.

The National Mental Health Commission has identified the need for improvements in suicide data systems as an area that warranted national priority.

A Shorten Labor Government will commission Australia's first national data-set of suicide deaths and map where they occur across the country.

This will build on the work being undertaken by The Black Dog Institute in NSW and allow experts to better understand the prevalence and location of suicide deaths across the country and help identify vulnerable population groups with consistent and timely access to quality data.

Labor will also work with the States and Territories to standardise and harmonise suicide reporting to provide consistent and timely data at a national level and establish a national suicide register to record all suicide deaths.

#### National Plan for Excellence in Perinatal Mental Health

A Shorten Labor Government will also invest \$20 million to establish a universal perinatal depression screening program for every expectant woman and new mother across Australia.

Labor's National Plan will:

- Ensure that all pregnant women are screened to identify their risk of perinatal depression and the presence of possible symptoms, in a cost efficient and sustainable way.
- Empower women and families with tailored information to guide and support them.
- Facilitate best practice early intervention, treatment and support.
- Integrate screening results into the My Health Record to ensure seamless referrals to health practitioners.
- Collect consistent national data to support monitoring, evaluation, awareness raising, research, education and continued destigmatisation activities.
- Encourage private practitioners to adopt screening as a key element of a woman's perinatal care.

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## 7. What measures will you put in place to improve access to oral and dental health care?

Dental health is important to overall general health and strongly linked to socio economic status. Labor recognises the importance of addressing the dental health needs of all Australians.

The lack of appropriate dental care for many disadvantaged Australians represents a significant gap in the provision of universal health care.

Labor believes universal access to dental care is a vital component of ensuring a healthy, productive nation.

Labor's Child Dental Benefits Scheme, which provided around 10 million affordable dental services to one million Australian children since its introduction was a significant step forward in this process.

The Turnbull Liberal Government's decision to abolish the Scheme comes in spite of a report by the Health Minister's own Department that found it to be a success.

The Liberal Government's alternative will see five million children join the five million adults already awaiting a spot on overcrowded public dental waiting lists; a move which will see patients wait years for treatment.

Labor will do everything it can to protect the Child Dental Benefits Scheme, and the dental health of Australian kids.

Labor will:

- Improve the delivery of dental services in Australia and work with the States and Territories to reduce public dental waiting lists.
- Develop a plan to deliver fairer access to dental care with the long-term goal of universal dental access. This plan will prioritise the expansion of the provision of dental care to the most vulnerable in our community.

## 8. How will you ensure there is national and whole of government approach to prevention to reduce the risk of chronic disease?

A Shorten Labor Government will tackle Australia's chronic disease crisis through a preventive health package that helps families to raise healthy children, and keeps Australians healthy throughout their lives.

Chronic diseases are the leading cause of illness, disability and death in Australia. One in three Australians suffer from at least one chronic disease, like heart disease or diabetes.

Many of these diseases are due to preventable risk factors such as physical inactivity, poor nutrition, smoking and the harmful use of alcohol.

Labor has a five-point plan to prevent chronic disease:

1. Investing in 50 Healthy Communities nationwide, to help communities at the greatest risk of chronic disease to stay well.
2. Tackling obesity through Australia's first National Physical Activity Strategy and a National Nutrition Framework.

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3. Expanding the successful Better Health Channel into a nationwide platform for health information.
4. Continuing the push to reduce smoking rates, particularly in at-risk communities.
5. Addressing the harmful use of alcohol through a National Alcohol Strategy.

Labor will provide an additional \$300 million over four years for this package.

#### Healthy Communities

A Shorten Labor Government will establish 50 Healthy Communities.

Labor will identify the communities that are most at risk of chronic disease and invest in keeping them healthy.

These communities will receive targeted support that is specific to their needs.

For example, Labor's investment will help food producers, distributors and vendors to make healthy food options available in schools, workplaces and communities.

Labor will also work with local and State and Territory Governments to encourage physical activity, for example, by building walking and cycling paths.

#### Tackling obesity through a National Physical Activity Strategy and Nutrition Framework

A Shorten Labor Government will develop Australia's first National Physical Activity Strategy.

Australia is one of the most overweight countries in the world. About two-thirds of Australian adults and a quarter of Australian children are overweight or obese.

Participation in sport and both formal and informal activity will play a big part in Labor's Strategy. A key finding from international experience is that we need to build physical activity into the day-to-day lives of all Australians – not just those who play organised sport – for example, by encouraging people to stand and walk more.

A Shorten Labor Government will also introduce a National Nutrition Framework. As part of the Framework, a Shorten Labor Government will work with food producers and retailers to expand the utilisation of the Health Star Rating system.

On top of these population-wide measures, Labor will ensure a particular focus on children's nutrition, including through a \$5 million commitment to the Stephanie Alexander Kitchen Garden Foundation. Improving what kids eat can help to address the alarming rates of childhood obesity, as well as establish healthy eating habits for life.

#### National Better Health Channel

A Shorten Labor Government will make the Better Health Channel a national health information platform, providing the health information that all Australians need, and linking them to the services and supports available in their communities, to help Australians better manage their own health.

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### Driving down smoking rates, particularly in at-risk communities

A Shorten Labor Government will help vulnerable groups stop smoking.

Thanks to Labor's world-leading tobacco control measures, such as advertising bans and plain packaging, just 16 per cent of Australians now smoke daily. But smoking still kills 15,000 Australians a year, and remains one of the top three causes of disease.

Smoking also disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Australians with mental illness, people living in rural or remote areas and those in areas of socio economic disadvantage.

Based on expert advice, a Shorten Labor Government will invest \$20 million in a scaled-up National Tobacco Campaign. Labor will also invest \$30 million in targeting at-risk populations such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and Australians with mental illness through PHNs.

As announced in November 2015, a Shorten Labor Government will also continue the existing annual 12.5 per cent annual tobacco increases for a further four years from 2017: a measure since copied by the Turnbull Government.

### Addressing harmful use of alcohol through a National Alcohol Strategy

Some Australians drink at levels that put themselves and those around them at risk. More than one in four Australians binge drink at least once a month. This sort of consumption puts drinkers at higher risk of injury; brain and liver disease; and other chronic diseases like obesity.

A Shorten Labor Government will develop a new National Alcohol Strategy. The Strategy will focus on evidence-based measures to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms, including alcohol-related violence. It will also focus on the riskiest behaviours, such as binge drinking, and the most vulnerable populations, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and young Australians.

As part of the Strategy, Labor will strengthen work to limit alcohol advertising to children and work with State, Territory and local Government to reduce children's exposure in other settings.

### **New Approaches to Palliative care**

While not specifically requested in CHF's seven key issues, we note that CHF is calling for improved end-of-life care to better reflect consumer preferences.

A Shorten Labor Government will help support Australians to exercise greater choice and control over how and where they live their final days by investing in new models of palliative care.

Right now, many Australians are not able to choose where and how they are cared for before they die.

According to the Grattan Institute, up to 70 per cent of Australians want to die at home, but only 14 per cent do so.

More than half of Australians die in hospitals and around a third die in nursing homes. Unfortunately, the rate of hospitalisation is increasing.

Labor is committed to improving palliative care in all settings, and to helping all Australians be as comfortable as possible at the end of their life.

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That is why a Shorten Labor Government will invest \$35 million over four years to roll out new models of palliative care.

Labor new approach to palliative care will include:

- \$21.7 million for new Palliative Care at Home packages. Under these packages, five PHNs will be funded to commission the services that Australians need to stay at home at the end of their lives.
- \$9 million over four years to roll out the Proactive Palliative Care model. Labor's Proactive Palliative Care package will fund palliative specialists to partner with residential aged care facilities to promote palliative and end-of-life care, and lead case conferencing where appropriate.
- Working with the States and Territories, through the Council of Australian Governments, to expand the use of consistent advanced care directives across Australia.
- \$2.3 million over three years to allow Palliative Care Tasmania to continue its important work.
- \$1 million over three years to fund Palliative Care Australia to improve paediatric palliative care support, including to:
  - Develop new resources for families, such as on talking to terminally ill children and their siblings about death.
  - Create an online community for the families of terminally ill children, so that parents and carers are less isolated.
  - Build evidence on paediatric palliative care needs across Australia, to address current gaps and plan services and supports for the future.

Labor is committed to ensuring that all Australians is comfortable and able to live their final days in the circumstances of their choice.

Labor has announced further health policies in this election campaign and details of these and the policies outlined in this letter are available at: [www.alp.org.au](http://www.alp.org.au).

Thank you again for presenting the CHF's election Platform and for the opportunity to outline Labor's policies.

Sincerely,

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 Australian Labor Campaign Headquarters  
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