

# Out of pocket pain – Share your experience

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The thousands of Australians who have faced high out of pocket medical bills now have a chance to make a difference by sharing their story.

With the issue of these costs now the subject of an investigation by an expert Government committee, the Consumers Health Forum is launching the *Out of Pocket Pain* survey <https://chf.org.au/out-pocket-pain> for people to record their experience with these costs.

The results will assist CHF to illustrate the extent of the problem, allowing us to highlight to the committee the hardships now confronting many patients and their families, and to shape solutions to this health policy dilemma.

“Now is an ideal time for people to have their voice heard on this vital issue and relayed to the Government,” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

“Many Australians experience an added setback when they undergo medical treatment with many receiving large bills that are not covered by either Medicare and/or private health insurance if they are insured.

“In recent weeks the fresh revelations of these high out of pocket costs whether they be gap medical bills for a specialist consultation outside hospital or for a procedure performed in hospital, have underlined the costs issues that are eroding access to health care in Australia.

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“Not only can people face additional costs of thousands of dollars for a routine operation, official surveys have found striking variations in fees charged, generating confusion and uncertainty about the overall costs facing people opting for private care.

“We need to see a clear picture of the reality of costs facing health consumers and the impact they are having on access to health care.

“Australia has prided itself on the performance of our health system, its universality and its unique public – private mix”.

“We fear we are getting close to the point where we can no longer make that claim. Increasingly people are choosing public hospital care to avoid the out of pocket costs billed by specialists in private hospitals. This is causing strains in both public and private care and will continue to do so if the trend is not arrested.

“And outside hospital, among insured and uninsured people there are now many who are putting off seeing specialists they have been referred to because of the costs.

“Nearly half of the respondents 45 years and over to a major national coordination of health care study said that the cost of the appointment was a reason they did not see a specialist doctor when they felt they needed to<sup>i</sup>.

“Shining more light on this issue and introducing greater transparency so patients can make choices based on both fees and the performance record of specialists is long overdue.

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“This is why CHF has proposed the establishment of an authoritative website which carries fee and performance details of all specialists.

“We hope that a strong response to the Out of Pocket Pain survey will ensure urgent action,” Ms Wells said.

Complete the survey at <https://chf.org.au/out-pocket-pain>

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<sup>i</sup> ABS (2017) *Survey of Health Care* see:  
<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4343.0>

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