

## Labor's plan to lessen medical bill shock

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The Consumers Health Forum welcomes Labor's \$10 million plan to support the long-awaited development of an informed financial consent standard to ensure patients are given clear and consistent information about the costs and options of their treatment.

Labor says a national standard would help ensure that Australians undergoing surgery and cancer treatment would not be hit with hidden costs that leave them with large unexpected bills.

"Medical bill shock has been a big concern for health consumers and it has taken too long for Australian health leaders to agree on a standard to cover this pivotal point in health care," the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

"It was way back in 2008 that Australia's health ministers agreed on the Australian Charter for Healthcare Rights which includes the right to be informed about services, treatment options and costs in a clear and open way.

"This new initiative gives us heart that finally there will be development and implementation of a standard, with input and education of consumers, that can be applied across all medical episodes.

"Labor will provide \$10 million over two years to establish a ministerial working group to develop the standard, building on the work of Cancer Council Australia and other groups including the Consumers Health Forum.

"This is important. Our *Out of Pocket Pain* survey last year reported on frequent cases of people suffering shock and anguish as a result of high bills.

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“And a position statement published in January by CHF and Melbourne University on specialist fees and performance transparency states that ‘there is a fundamental disconnect between what providers think constitutes informed financial consent and what consumers experience’.

“We welcome Labor’s pledge to work with doctors, patient and cancer groups to give patients clear and consistent information about the costs they will incur over the course of their cancer treatment.

“Should Labor form government, CHF trusts that the standard will also apply to treatments for all other conditions. Unexpected medical bills are by no means restricted to cancer treatment.

“We would encourage the Coalition Government to match this plan as a companion measure to the medical fee disclosure website announced in the Budget,” Ms Wells said.

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