

## Health debate highlights need for a transforming vision

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The National Press Club election health debate today provided a rare if welcome opportunity for the rival health policies to come under the sort of scrutiny we need to see more of, the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

“We congratulate the Health Minister, Greg Hunt, and Shadow Health Minister, Catherine King, for exposing themselves and their policies to questions on their health policies.

“This was a reasoned debate with only the odd heated exchange. However, the debate demonstrates that what we have is a patchwork of piecemeal proposals to fix various problems in the health system.

“What the Australian health system needs is a more holistic vision and coordinated health strategy that focuses on consumer needs.

“Both speakers put hospitals and medicine first. Neither spoke of the social determinants of health, such as housing, education and employment, which have such an impact on health.

“What we want to see is prevention and transformative primary care being central to the vision for better health in Australia.

“Each side is offering different initiatives, whether it be Labor’s bumper \$7.5 billion boost to public hospitals, cancer care and pensioner dental treatment, or the Government’s plans to reform primary health care for the elderly by enabling easier communications with the doctor.

“Mr Hunt emphasised the individual benefits for patients able to access life-saving and highly expensive drugs through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, while Ms King said that on overall policy there was a stark choice between the two sides.

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### Consumers shaping health



“Even before the debate yesterday, both sides of politics launched fresh initiatives. The Coalition announced earlier in the day a \$308 million expansion in subsidies for medicines prescribed to patients with multiple conditions — a pledge Labor said it would also meet.

“Labor also announced a \$115 million preventive health plan, including a national obesity strategy which we welcome.

“The two parties’ views on a variety of issues ranging from mental health, to health insurance rebates to codeine regulation, highlight the diversity of costly and complex issues that bedevil health care.

“What Australian health consumers need now is a more joined up approach that gives much more emphasis to integrated care in the community,” Ms Wells said.

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