

Our congratulations come with three priorities for the re-elected government

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The Consumers Health Forum, Australia's leading health consumer advocacy body, congratulates the Coalition on its re-election and Greg Hunt on his re-appointment as Health Minister.

"The Government in its last term made encouraging steps towards improving the health system including in primary care and health insurance. Now we urge Mr Hunt and the Morrison Government to work with CHF and other national stakeholders to take further strides to build a health system that reflects 21st century needs," the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

CHF's top three priorities for action are:

- A national preventive health strategy aimed particularly at ending the high incidence of overweight and obesity in children
- Building on existing primary health care trials for those with chronic illness to develop integrated, team-based care led by GPs and incorporating allied health professionals working in a system that supports patients to self-manage their health around Australia
- Expanding the public dental system to reduce unacceptable prevalence of low-income Australians forced to live with the misery of poor oral health.

"These goals are vital if we are to have as many Australians as possible living healthy and productive lives.

"We were heartened by Minister Hunt's comments at the AMA National Conference this weekend where he signalled a commitment to a prevention partnership and a ten-year national primary health care plan as among his priorities during this term. It is essential that these are designed in close consultation with consumers and the community" Ms Wells said.

"We also propose a series of measures to ensure Australia's health system makes the most of the potential offered by its high standards and skilled health workforce.

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“As recommended by the Government’s expert review of pharmacy regulation and remuneration, pharmacy professionals need to play a more active part in mainstream primary health care extending beyond the retail pharmacy setting.

“On out of pocket medical costs, the Government has gone some way to introduce more incentives for transparency of medical fees through the proposed website listing, and through changes to health insurance policies to make them simpler and more comparable. The pressure of out of pocket costs on families is not going away. We seek urgent consideration of a mix of solutions such as more adequate safety nets, incentives for specialists to bulk-bill, and a national standard for informed financial consent. Without a more comprehensive approach we risk the universality of Medicare leaving those on low incomes waiting or going without the care they need, and declining effectiveness of private health insurance.

“Mental health services, including hospital and community care, remain out of reach of too many seriously ill people, and management of patients with both mental and physical illness too often involves inappropriate and inadequate care. It is time to better integrate services regionally so that co-morbid mental and physical health is better managed: continuing to silo care is not the solution.

“We applaud the appointment of Ken Wyatt as the first ever indigenous Minister for Indigenous Australians and his focus on a Closing the Gap refresh.

‘On child and youth health, we thank the Minister for the \$1 m pledge to allow us to roll out our Youth Health Forum. A strong voice for the issues facing young people in healthcare is critically important and we look forward to designing, in collaboration with the Forum, a youth health action plan for Government consideration.

“We welcome the establishment of a Ministerial portfolio dedicated to youth and welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with Senator Richard Colbeck to advance the health of young Australians with advice from our Youth Forum.

“There are severe deficits in health services in aged care and these need urgent attention. This should not be held up until the Royal Commission reports and we also look forward to working with Senator Colbeck on a healthy ageing agenda.

“We acknowledge we are presenting a challenging to-do list for the Government, but these priorities are all achievable, necessary for a sustainable 21st century health system and, most importantly, for a healthier productive Australia” said Ms Wells.

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