

Extending health insurance to GPs would endanger Medicare

MEDIA RELEASE TUESDAY 29 OCTOBER 2019

Any move to extend private health insurance to cover GPs would hit the foundations of Medicare and seriously erode the universal access to primary health care valued by all Australians, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

A report today that health funds are advocating extending private cover to GPs should be dismissed immediately given its likely impact on equitable access to basic health care and the woeful record of hospital insurance in recent years as a result of climbing premiums and shrinking cover, the CEO of Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

“However, we acknowledge that there is much that can be done to achieve improved integrated care in linking community and hospital care and enabling more “hospitals of the future” where people can receive care at home.

The hospital of the future is going to be very different. We can expect to see less care delivered behind hospital walls – an evolution of the system that will occur due to better efficiencies, new modes of delivery and consumer preferences.

“We need - and should expect - to see more support for the movement of services from inside the hospital to community. Such developments are already occurring and have been well-received where they have been offered, in both the public and private systems. This includes services such as chemotherapy and rehabilitation. The high consumer rating given to these alternatives to hospital style services being delivered in the community, suggests we should be open to considering how the private health insurance arrangements can support this.

“The call by the health funds for this significant extension of cover points to the need for a much deeper reappraisal of supply, demand and payment of health services.

“Australia already has a well-established, popular public health insurance scheme: Medicare. A fundamental question is why would the majority of Australians who do not have health insurance want to see the compromise of Medicare’s equity and universal access by the intrusion of health insurance into GP services and the growth of a two-tiered health system?

“To suggest the current strains on the system will be resolved by allowing health funds to cover GP care would be throwing the baby out with the bath water.

Contact: Mark Metherell, 0429 111 986

Consumers shaping health

“We do not want to see a repeat in primary care of what now occurs too frequently in public hospitals where privately-insured patients get precedence over public patients for elective surgery. Australians in most cases can still expect to receive GP care regardless of their means. Introducing health insurance would open the way to incentives for doctors to give preference to those with health cover.

“Before any major health system changes are considered, we need to see much more federal and state government support for integrated care that reduces avoidable hospital admissions.

“It would be nonsensical for any significant extension to health insurance cover to be considered before there is a thorough review of private health insurance which, despite multi-billion-dollar subsidies and unmatched regulatory protection continues to experience declining memberships.

“Claims that unsustainable strains on public hospitals would be relieved by spreading health insurance to GPs ignores the reality that at the moment the private sector is failing to take sufficient pressure of public hospitals as a growing number of private patients switch to public hospital care in order to avoid excessive out of pockets costs.”

ends

Contact: Mark Metherell, 0429 111 986

Consumers shaping health