

Better health for the next generation

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The doubling in Australia's per person health spending over the next 40 years projected in the Intergenerational Report reinforces the need to act now to counter big drivers in health costs like chronic disease and avoidable hospital admissions, the Consumers Health Forum says.

The huge health expenditures that loom in the future should convince governments of the value of introducing right now the long-term health measures that will deliver better health outcomes as the population ages, the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

"The 2021 IGR provides an ideal opportunity to consider where we need to invest for sustainable health and related care that will deliver healthy bonuses into the future and reduce pressure on health and hospital budgets.

"We can respond to consumer needs and preferences in providing value-based health services, such as more self-care support, more accessible primary health care, better developed sub-acute care arrangements such as pre-hospital, and hospital step-down services such as those recommended by the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission a decade ago.

"And we need to see much more support for national preventive health initiatives that rein in poor diet and inactivity that trigger so much avoidable chronic disease.

"Our consumer surveys have shown strong support for measures to curb promotion of unhealthy food, particularly to children, and better supports for people to access the right health care.

"These are not quick fixes but if the forecasts of the IGR are going to be taken seriously, feasible options are where we need to invest for a better health horizon.

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Consumers shaping health

“We can do more to reduce the waste of low value interventions and medical procedures that are not necessary, by ramping up the Choosing Wisely movement and by supporting the continual review of Medicare items to ensure best and most cost effective interventions.

“Encouraging innovative digitally-enabled service models could reduce churn in health services, lead to better health outcomes and reduce repeat presentations.

“And measures promoting self-care including social prescribing and improved health literacy --- sometimes seen as soft policy options --- can reduce demand for expensive treatment options.

“The report says health accounts for the largest compositional shift in spending over the next 40 years, increasing from 19 per cent of total government spending in 2021-22 to 26 per cent in 2060-61.

“The report also states that climate change is likely to become a more prominent element in Government spending.

“What the report does not say but should be obvious is that the implications for Australia’s health of climate change make these two key areas a crucial focus for strong and coherent government policy,” Ms Wells said.

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