

MEDIA RELEASE – EMBARGOED UNTIL MONDAY March 28 (12:01 AM AEDT)

Health consumer voices more important now than ever

Australia’s largest consumer survey of healthcare finds confidence in services has increased but gaps remain in affordability and accessibility for disadvantaged groups and people with chronic conditions.

The Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) and research partners have today released the findings of the latest Health Consumer Sentiment Survey, *The Voice of Australian Health Consumers*, which is the largest health study in Australia based on the general population.

The study provides a national snapshot of health service access, satisfaction and experiences of consumers. More than 5,000 Australians aged 18 and over were included in the survey, conducted in October 2021 during the height of the Covid-19 Delta outbreak. The sample size is five times larger than the previous survey in 2018.

The independent survey is conducted by CHF, the Australian Institute of Health Innovation, and the NHMRC Partnership Centre for Health System Sustainability (PCHSS). It is a barometer of opinions and experiences of healthcare among the Australian population and offers a unique resource to inform policy and practice.

CHF Chief Executive Officer Leanne Wells emphasises the importance of embedding consumer voice and experiences for a future-focused health system.

“It is crucial that consumers are central in the design of health policies and programs. As the largest survey of its kind in Australia the findings are an important tool for all governments, policy makers and healthcare providers as they build on learnings from the pandemic and address systemic gaps in the healthcare system,” Ms Wells said.

“Australians value high quality healthcare services. They believe we have a good healthcare system overall. The survey does show, however, that more must be done to ensure the system remains affordable and accessible, particularly for disadvantaged cohorts and those with chronic health conditions.

“The latest results show that overall satisfaction with healthcare services remains high and consumer confidence in Australia’s healthcare system has increased between 2018 and 2021, in spite of the massive pressures experienced by both consumers and providers over the last two years.

“Australians are more engaged with their health and wellbeing than ever before and this survey demonstrates just how important it is to ask consumers directly what their experiences are, and importantly what they need from the health system of the future.”

PCHSS’s **Associate Professor Yvonne Zurynski** co-designed the survey with consumer researchers from CHF, and said the results raise important questions about equitable treatment of people from vulnerable populations. “With 23% of Australians experiencing discrimination or disrespect when accessing healthcare, it’s time to ensure we implement effective cultural competency training for all who work in the system.”

Professor Jeffrey Braithwaite, Founding Director of the Australian Institute of Health Innovation at Macquarie University, and his research team have spent several months collating the data which identifies the strengths and inequities in Australia’s health system directly from consumers.

“Australia, we listened. Most people told us they are satisfied with the health services they receive, which is a credit to the hardworking people on the frontlines of care, but we also heard that the system is not helping those that need it most,” Professor Braithwaite said.

“Many Australians are struggling to access or afford healthcare, with 24% reporting that they did not fill a prescription or omitted doses of medicine. Clever use of digital health technology such as telehealth and better integration of health services so that people can access the care they need, where they need it, will be key to delivering a better future for all Australians.”

“A [recent report by the OECD](#) tells us that, with few exceptions, the patient voice is often not heard. A survey such as this, and even better, if repeated every two years, would ensure that consumer views inform health policy” said Professor Braithwaite.

Key findings from the Health Consumer Sentiment Survey

Areas of satisfaction or confidence with the system

- 84% of Australians were satisfied with health services they received
- 30% said their confidence in the health system increased since the COVID-19 pandemic
- 71% of Australians who used telehealth said it was as good or better than face-to-face
- 85% with mental distress were satisfied with the care they received via digital healthcare

Areas of dissatisfaction or concerns with the system

- 14% of Australians with chronic conditions could not pay for healthcare or medicine because of cost
- 24% did not fill a prescription or omitted doses of medicine – over a third said this was because of cost
- 55% of Australians in regional and remote regions said they needed more doctors, nurses and health workers
- 23% of Australians reported experiencing discrimination or disrespect when receiving healthcare
- 23% believed that residential aged care services are bad or very bad
- 24% experienced serious levels of mental distress

The 2021 Consumer Sentiment Survey was supported by the Commonwealth Department of Health and the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care.

A copy of the latest [Consumer Sentiment Survey report is available for download here>>>](#)

NOTE: This release and report is EMBARGOED until 12:01 AM (AEDT) on Monday the 28th of March.

The survey findings will be presented via a [webinar and panel discussion](#) on Monday at midday with pre-recorded messages from the Minister for Health, the Minister for Health, the Hon Greg Hunt MP.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

For interview requests with CHF CEO Leanne Wells, Professor Jeffrey Braithwaite or Associate Professor Yvonne Zurynski please contact:

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