

A ‘no surprises’ budget but true health reform awaits

Consumers Health Forum, the peak body representing Australian health consumers, acknowledges the government’s efforts to strengthen Medicare and primary care but says there is a long way to go before true health system transformation.

“This is the budget we were expecting but perhaps not the one we dreamt of,” CHF CEO Dr Elizabeth Deveny said. “It is a ‘no-surprise’ budget that delivers on the government’s election commitments, but the promise of true health system reform is still ahead of us.

“Health consumers will be very pleased about the reduction in the cost of medicines but for those on pensions or very low incomes, it would have been good for the PBS safety net threshold to be reduced further,” Dr Deveny said.

“We applaud the government’s commitment to strengthening Medicare. One of the underlying principles of universal healthcare is that consumers are able to access services, when and where they want them.”

CHF said that the funding of several initiatives to improve system navigation was evidence that the health system makes it too difficult for people to find the service they need without expert guidance.

“What health consumers want is for their health journey to be as seamless as other parts of their life – where services can be accessed via digital channels, face-to-face or a hybrid,” Dr Deveny said.

“We have a long way to go before that is achieved due to fragmentation of services, various models of care and a range of stop-gap measures.”

Dr Deveny said that, as stated in the Wellbeing budget paper, measuring what matters is the ultimate test of system performance.

“What we want to see in the future is that the consumers’ experience of care is measured, and that the consumers’ voice is hard-wired into all policy and healthcare decisions,” she said.

“Sadly, the budget did not include any funding to improve the health literacy of consumers, which empowers them and gives them the tools to share in decision-making around their healthcare.”

Dr Deveny said while CHF applauded the investment in housing and climate change, both of which directly impact health, it would have been good to see a greater focus on preventative health.

CHF’s views on healthcare budget initiatives:

- Mental health – while restoration of psychiatric telehealth services loading in rural and regional areas is welcome, we would like to see the commitment to mental health services extend beyond Headspace and 10 session Better Access.
- The commitment to strengthening First Nations’ health is very welcome. Highlights are the additional 500 workers and traineeships codesigned with NACCHO, 17 new clinics, doubling the funding for rheumatic heart disease and 120 more dialysis chairs
- Rural and Regional – welcome the workforce and training packages and incentive payments to GPs with advanced skills.
- Would like to see models of care and workforce solutions in remote communities
- We called for a CDC in our election platform so good to see this commitment.
- We also welcome the establishment of a National Health Sustainability and Climate Unit.

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