

# Budget must make it cheaper and easier for Australians to access healthcare

**Tuesday 7 May 2024**

With one week to go until the Federal Budget is delivered, the Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) says the budget must make it cheaper and easier for Australians to access healthcare, particularly as many people continue to struggle through the prolonged cost-of-living.

“CHF wants to see more money going into health literacy so Australians can understand their health and how to navigate the healthcare system, we want to see Australians being able to better afford visiting their dentist, their doctor and their psychologist and we want to see more being done to make medicines cheaper for everyone,” said CHF CEO Dr Elizabeth Deveny.

A top priority for CHF is funding for community education (*Understanding Medicare – Understanding your health*) which helps explain to everyday Australians what they can access under the current Medicare system and how to better navigate the healthcare system. The *Understanding Medicare – Understanding your health* program has been backed by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners.

“In the 40<sup>th</sup> year of Medicare we think now is the time to go into the community and explain what exactly Medicare does and doesn’t provide. We haven’t really done this type of community education about the health system since Medicare was first introduced in the mid-80s,” said Dr Deveny.

CHF wants to see consumers paying less for their medicines when they visit their local pharmacy. In its budget submission, CHF called for the third and final tranche of 60-day dispensing to be brought forward to 1 July 2024, which would see more medicines added to the 60-day list, meaning consumers will save money and time.

“We also want to see the recording of PBS Safety Net move to a digital recording system instead of the current paper-based one. The reliance on the paper system means that consumers aren’t always aware when they are close or have hit the safety net. Many consumers we speak to still don’t know that the safety net exists. Our hope is by automating the recording into an online system, consumers can track their spend and know when they can start benefiting from the safety net,” said Dr Deveny.

The package of five recommendations from the National Oral Health Alliance (NOHA) should be accepted. These recommendations would make it cheaper and easier for more Australians to see their dentist when they need to, by investing \$500 million into the public dental scheme.

“Affordability of dental care is just not where it should be for a country like Australia, it has been like this for some time. In that time, the sector has come together, through NOHA, to make a trip to the dentist more affordable and accessible. The recommendations also call for the establishment of a 10-year Australian National Oral Health Plan and appoint a Chief Dental Officer, which CHF strongly supports,” said Dr Deveny.

Increasing the access and affordability of allied health care remains a priority for consumers.

“Whether it’s seeing a speech pathologist for your child or psychologist, we want to see consumers paying less out of their own pockets to access this important care, which in many cases helps people manage chronic conditions and keeps them well and out of hospital,” said Dr Deveny.

CHF’s full budget submission, including 18 recommendations to government, is available on [the CHF website](#).

***Dr Deveny is available on Budget night for media comment from 8pm in Parliament House.***

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