



Consumers Health
Forum OF Australia

Making Health Better: Priorities for the 2019 Federal Election

How the Parties Stack Up

MAY 2019

How CHF has rated the Parties

CHF identified eight key policy areas in its 2019 Election Priorities. Across these, we called for 37 key commitments from Australia's political parties which would lay the groundwork for a sustainable health system that ensures people get the right care, at the right time and at the right cost.

We invited the Liberal-National Coalition (the Coalition), Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Australian Greens (the Greens) to respond directly to our reform recommendations. We indicated to all parties our intention to publish their responses alongside our appraisal.

We have received responses from all three parties and these are published on our website alongside this summation. We also collected statements made by the parties during and in the months prior to the 2019 Federal election campaign and compared them to our calls for reform.

This appraisal is confined to how the parties' rate against our election priorities in [*Priorities for the 2019 Federal Election: Making Health Better*](#) launched on 23 April. We have conducted this appraisal using two sources: public statements made by the major parties during the election campaign and the parties' responses to our letter. It is not CHF's comparative assessment of the major parties' health platforms overall.

Here's how CHF rated the parties' positions:



Where a party made an **explicit commitment** in-line with CHF's priorities, we scored their position as having **MET** ours.



Where a party made a **statement that is supportive** of CHF's priorities, but without making an explicit commitment to reform, we scored their position as **SUPPORTING** ours.



Where a party **did not make any apparent statement** supporting CHF's priorities, or made a statement in opposition to CHF's priorities, we scored their position as having **MISSED** ours.



7 Priorities Met

9 Priorities Supported



16 Priorities Met

10 Priorities Supported



21 Priorities Met

12 Priorities Supported

Overall Assessment

CHF developed its priorities for Election 2019 from extensive consultation across its membership. They were also informed by recommendations generated by policy roundtables we hosted throughout 2016-2018 and the results of our Consumer Sentiment Survey which we undertook to try to find out how people viewed the health system. The survey told us that, overall, Australians think we have a high-quality health system but there are some major gaps.

In summary, CHF was looking for:

- leadership with a vision for what our health system might look like and how to get there
- measures that moved us along the path to a consumer-centred health system with consumers being involved in the design and implementation of the future health system
- early action in three main priority areas: childhood obesity, primary care and dental reform.

When it comes **to primary care**, we welcome the commitments from all parties to making the system universal and improving access through the pillars of Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. But we see this as more of the same: it offers nothing new and, more importantly, nothing to move the system into a new paradigm that will make it fit-for-purpose and sustainable in the future.

Announcements addressing elective surgery waiting lists and emergency department waiting times predominated. Health is more than hospitals: what is needed is a major strengthening and investment in primary health care, including enhanced access to mental health care in the community.

We note that the ALP has made a commitment to match all health promises in the 2019 Federal Budget in addition to their \$7.5 billion health spending pledges.

To their credit, the Coalition has continued the journey towards patient and family centred health care homes. A new funding and service model will support GPs to provide enhanced care to Australians over 70 who enter into a new type of agreement with their general practice to receive more personalised coordinated care. This will help modernise Medicare by paying for consultations by email, FaceTime and Skype. This is to be matched by the ALP.

However, the absence of a transformational agenda for primary care is a missed opportunity this election. For example, it is disappointing that there was silence from all parties about the potentially powerful role Primary Health Networks could play in accelerating improvement and innovation in primary care and implementing local solutions to Emergency Department and hospital demand and avoidable hospital admissions given the significant investment in setting up this regional infrastructure.

It is clear the time has come to ensure **oral and dental health** is treated like any other form of health. The Coalition offered nothing new for dental health other than a continuation of the Child Dental Benefits Scheme, and in their response to us see it sitting firmly in the private arena with private health insurance as the funding mechanism. The ALP's Pensioner Dental Plan has taken welcome first steps with a targeted program for older people but this falls well short of what is needed although we note it was described as "the next step towards Labor's vision of universal access to dental care in Australia". This, combined with the ALP's pledge to negotiate with the states to maintain their existing spending on public dental health services, will substantially increase access.

For too long prevention has been the poor cousin in terms of health investment. This election has seen some new investments pledged from all parties, although very different approaches are taken. Some focus on tackling **obesity**. The Greens look to a governance solution in the form of an Independent Preventative Health Commission. The ALP presents us with a menu of initiatives targeting obesity, sun safety, bowel and lung cancers and consumption of tobacco and alcohol. Australia needs a stronger focus on prevention and the Coalition have some well targeted measures too although many of their promises are for secondary prevention measures, not public health focused actions.

Despite these promises neither the ALP or the Coalition commit to spending five 5 per cent of the health budget on prevention – a goal that is universally recommended by leading Australian public health advocates.

All parties acknowledge and make various pledges to address the urgent need to prevent suicide in the Australian community, particularly among high risk groups. However, the Coalition is are reluctant to use arguably powerful regulatory levers (such as industry food reformulation targets and advertising restrictions on alcohol products) to prevent chronic condition risk factors and address the burden that growing rates of obesity will inevitably have on our system.

Both the Coalition and ALP offered little for patient leadership with the exception of a welcome bipartisan commitment to a Youth Health Forum to bring young voices in national health policy discussions. There is still a long way to go for consumers to be viewed as equal partners in the health system and, importantly, for them to be supported with leadership and capability to do so, whether that be through shared decision making and support to better self-manage at the point of care or leadership development, so they can act with more impact and influence in shaping policy and services.

The Greens offered the most hope with commitments to patient leadership and some major developments around dental care, prevention and the social determinants.

A key issue missing from both the Coalition and ALP is a commitment to addressing the social determinants of health, particularly measures to alleviate poverty, and measures to reduce health inequality. The evidence around the importance of housing, education, income on health outcomes is unequivocal. If these are not addressed the risk is that many of the initiatives and expenditure promised across the parties will be wasted.

Patient Leadership

We called for...	The Coalition	ALP	The Greens
<i>An Australian Patient Leadership Academy</i>			
<i>Scaling up of CHF's Collaborative Pairs Australia</i>			
<i>Indexation funding for the Health Peak and Advisory Bodies</i>			
<i>An independent national voice for mental health consumers</i>			
<i>Support for the Youth Health Forum</i>			
	<i>1 of 5 Met</i>	<i>1 of 5 Met</i>	<i>2 of 5 Met</i>
Overall	<i>0 of 5 Supported</i>	<i>0 of 5 Supported</i>	<i>1 of 5 Supported</i>

Our commentary

CHF is committed to moving to a consumer-centred health system. We are pleased that the Australian Greens indicated specific support for a Patient Leadership Academy and Collaborative Pairs Australia. We also like their overall commitment to legislate for consumer groups and citizens to be involved in meaningful discussions, and to ensure young people/organisations and bodies representing them are heard and provided with support. In an article published in *The Australian* the ALP expressed concern that the Health Peak and Advisory Bodies Programme was unindexed and indicated an intention to address this.

It is disappointing that we have not seen any commitment from the two major parties to prioritise consumer involvement in discussions about reforms and priorities for health in Australia. We see promise in the ALP's proposed Australian Health Reform Commission however the response from the ALP does not include any mention of how consumer leaders will be involved. We would be looking for strong patient leadership, for example appointing consumer commissioners and for a clear commitment to consumer insights shaping the early priorities of the Commission.

It is pleasing to see the Coalition have announced funding for the National Child and Youth Health Action Plan 2020-2030 including funding for CHF's Youth Health Forum. This has bipartisan support. All parties have made significant announcements about mental health and yet none have made a commitment to an independent national voice for mental health consumers. Such a voice is critical to ensuring the system and services are people centred, designed by people for people.

Primary and Integrated Care Reform

We called for...

A national centre focusing on innovation and improvement in health care

Broaden the funding framework for primary health care

Continue funding for patient and family-centred health care homes

Initiatives to link up the system

Remove restrictions on where hospitals provide services

Remove professional service funding from the Community Pharmacy Agreement

Develop a primary health care data set

Continue to fund and improve the My Health Record system

The Coalition



3 of 8 Met

3 of 8 Supported

ALP



7 of 8 Met

0 of 8 Supported

The Greens



6 of 8 Met

2 of 8 Supported

Overall

Our commentary

Both the ALP and the Greens have committed to establishing a national centre to steward and test health system reform and address the fragmented health journey experienced by many Australians. This commitment would ideally be supported by initiatives, training and resources for primary health care providers to better deliver and measure patient-centred care, and to better support patient activation and self-management. There is across the board support for some action to improve integration of services which is important as it should deliver a smoother patient journey, reduce consumer frustrations and save the system money. Equally there is a strong appetite across all parties to shift away from fee-for-service funding arrangements for general practice and primary health care – a recognition that this is better for comprehensive coordinated care. The support for a primary health care data set from the ALP and Greens is welcome as we need any changes to be evidence driven and without good data we don't have the evidence. The AIHW is developing a primary health care data asset under a previous Budget commitment.

Prevention in Place

We called for...	The Coalition	ALP	The Greens
<i>A National Prevention Plan to 2030</i>			
<i>Prevention expenditure to increase to five per cent of total health funding</i>			
<i>Commitment on the recommended actions to address obesity</i>			
<i>Investments in programs to address childhood obesity</i>			
<i>Processes to ensure high quality patient resources and digital tools</i>			
	<i>0 of 5 Met</i>	<i>2 of 5 Met</i>	<i>5 of 5 Met</i>
<i>Overall</i>	<i>4 of 5 Supported</i>	<i>3 of 5 Supported</i>	<i>0 of 5 Supported</i>

Our commentary

Prevention is key to making the health system sustainable in the longer-term. It has tended to be underdone in policy promises and initiatives in the past. This time round there are some promises. The Greens demonstrate a strong commitment to prevention through their Independent Preventative Health Commission and plans to address some of Australia's biggest health concerns such as obesity through comprehensive strategies.

We welcome Labor's commitment to public health initiatives targeting obesity, sun safety, bowel and lung cancers and consumption of tobacco and alcohol. Australia needs a stronger focus on prevention and we would like to see firmer commitment from them on industry food reformulation targets and advertising.

CHF was disappointed by the lack of preventative focus in the 2019 Federal Budget and by any substantive measures from the Coalition since then. There was \$1.4 billion worth of measures badged as prevention in the Federal Budget and they are all worthy in their own right. However, most of these with the exception of the anti-smoking campaign, some immunisation measures and physical activity programs, were targeted secondary prevention focused initiatives, not population-level primary prevention-oriented programs.

All parties underscore and make various pledges to address the urgent need to prevent suicide in the Australian community, particularly among high risk groups.

Patient activation, self-management and health literacy

We called for...	The Coalition	ALP	The Greens
<i>A patient self-management initiative</i>			
<i>Social prescriptions for people at risk of chronic disease</i>			
<i>Involve consumers in regional funding and planning</i>			
<i>Consumer reviews of health information and resources</i>			
	<i>0 of 4 Met</i>	<i>0 of 4 Met</i>	<i>2 of 4 Met</i>
<i>Overall</i>	<i>0 of 4 Supported</i>	<i>1 of 4 Supported</i>	<i>2 of 4 Supported</i>

Our commentary

CHF would like to see consumers involved in making changes to ensure the system is easier to understand and navigate and that health literacy and self-management is prioritised across all areas of the health system. Transformational reform, particularly in primary care, needs more than change to the way services are funded. We also need to implement the evidence that better outcomes and experiences, as well as reduced health inequities, are possible when people have the opportunity to actively shape their care and support – when people can exercise more choice and control in their health and care.

The reforms proposed by the Greens show a commitment to making the health system more patient-centred and is explicit in involving consumers in planning and funding processes to improve service delivery and experiences at the point of care. In particular, the Greens were the only party to acknowledge that the integration of shared decision-making, social prescribing, supported self-management and a service coordinator workforce would add value to new ways to deliver primary health care.

The ALP and the Coalition's initiatives are silent on this critical area. They fail to acknowledge and embrace the importance of consumers taking control of their own health care. As with patient leadership this is a fundamental part of a consumer-centred health system. The ALP has made some limited commitments to help patients navigate certain parts of the health system e.g. a national standard for informed financial consent for surgery and cancer care, and additional support services for cancer patients.

Social Determinants of Health

We called for...	The Coalition	ALP	The Greens
<i>A National Wellbeing Dashboard</i>			
<i>Regular review and indexation of social support payments</i>			
<i>Raise the rate of NewStart payments by \$75 a week</i>			
<i>Respectful delivery of social support to promote economic and community participation</i>			
<i>Lead legislative changes to enshrine fair treatment in the health and justice systems</i>			
<i>Initiate a Productivity Commission review of the private health insurance system.</i>			
	<i>0 of 6 Met</i>	<i>1 of 6 Met</i>	<i>3 of 6 Met</i>
<i>Overall</i>	<i>0 of 6 Supported</i>	<i>2 of 6 Supported</i>	<i>2 of 6 Supported</i>

Our commentary

It is important to reduce the inequities in health outcomes and to do this there needs to be changes to the broader social supports that contribute to health and wellbeing, not just the health system. The responses from the both the Coalition and ALP are disappointing and this is clearly an area which needs more action from the incoming government.

Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

<i>We called for...</i>	The Coalition	ALP	The Greens
<i>Action on the recommendations of the Uluru Statement from the Heart</i>			
<i>Expand the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation model</i>			
<i>A National Strategy on the Social Determinants of Health</i>			
	<i>0 of 3 Met</i>	<i>2 of 3 Met</i>	<i>1 of 3 Met</i>
<i>Overall</i>	<i>1 of 3 Supported</i>	<i>1 of 3 Supported</i>	<i>2 of 3 Supported</i>

Our commentary

Bi-partisan support for the Closing the Gap Partnership Agreement has been a positive step. The support from the ALP and Greens for the Uluru Statement from the Heart seeking constitutional recognition and achieving meaningful reform for First Nations peoples is an important step.

There has been good commitment from all parties to action on preventable diseases that are overrepresented in communities. However, we would like to see a firmer commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research into the social determinants of health that are leading to the prevalence of these in communities. We are pleased that the Greens have provided in principle support to this priority.

Oral and Dental Health

<i>We called for...</i>	The Coalition	ALP	The Greens
<i>Roll out a dental benefits scheme for all Australians</i>			
<i>Commit to Australia's National Oral Health Plan</i>			
<i>Overall</i>	<i>0 of 2 Met</i>	<i>0 of 2 Met</i>	<i>0 of 2 Met</i>
	<i>0 of 2 Supported</i>	<i>2 of 2 Supported</i>	<i>2 of 2 Supported</i>

Our commentary

Oral and dental health is the most neglected area of health care and needs a long-term commitment to address inequity of access to services in Australia.

There is some action on this front with the Greens policy to achieve Medicare-funded dental for all Australians phased in by 2025. The ALP targeted funding for essential dental care for eligible seniors and pensioners is a step in the right direction accompanied by pledges to negotiate with the states and territories to maintain spending levels to increase overall access. The ALP's commitment is that this is a first step towards their vision of universal access under Medicare for all Australians.

The Coalition has nothing additional to offer on this important issue other than a continuation of the Child Dental Benefits Schedule.

Early Childhood, Youth and Family

<i>We called for...</i>	The Coalition	ALP	The Greens
<i>Positive parenting programs</i>			
<i>Fund the Parenting Today in Australia survey</i>			
<i>Support for healthcare providers</i>			
<i>Commit to including the Youth Voice in national consultations</i>			
	<i>3 of 4 Met</i>	<i>3 of 4 Met</i>	<i>2 of 4 Met</i>
<i>Overall</i>	<i>1 of 4 Supported</i>	<i>1 of 4 Supported</i>	<i>1 of 4 Supported</i>

Our commentary

Child and youth health have not received the attention it deserves for some time. All parties are increasingly taking a life course approach and acknowledge the importance of improving services for children and young people to lay the foundations for better health later on. There are significant pledges across the board on the need to improve access to mental health services for young people 18-25 years, although there is some variation in early intervention services available in early childhood.

Young people's needs of and experiences with the health system are quite different from older adults. A consumer-centred health system needs to ensure it caters for diversity and consumers of all ages and backgrounds. The transitions of care between paediatric and adult services is a major issue raised by CHF's Youth Health Forum. CHF is pleased that all parties are committed to including the youth voice in national policy setting and program/service design although the mechanisms they are suggesting are quite different.