



**THE HON PETER DUTTON MP
MINISTER FOR HEALTH
MINISTER FOR SPORT**

TRANSCRIPT

**E&OE TRANSCRIPT
Doorstop – Canberra
4 March 2014**

SUBJECT: Launch of 7th Asthma Handbook, Consumer Health Forum paper.

JOURNALIST: So what is the importance of the updated handbook that has been released today?

PETER DUTTON: Two point three million Australians suffer from asthma and we want our doctors and our nurses and our pharmacists to be armed with the best information possible to try and deal with, treat and manage asthma.

It's incredibly important that people engage well with their general practitioners, with their nurses, with their pharmacists and this Handbook will give a lot of advice and valuable information to those doctors and those primary care workers.

So for our country – we have one of the highest rates of asthma in the world - I want to make sure we can get a message early to parents and to doctors so that we can manage asthma - and we need to do much better in indigenous communities - and I think this research today, and the information that will be provided to medical practitioners with the Handbook today, I think has the potential to change the face of the way in which we deal with asthma over the course of the next decade.

And I think it's a great tribute to all of the researchers and the people who have collaborated to put together what is a very significant internationally recognised piece of work.

JOURNALIST: How much does it differ to what there's been in the past?

PETER DUTTON: Well families, particularly parents who have kids who suffer from asthma, will understand how important it is to both understand the symptoms and the signs, but also to have the discussion with their GPs. We want both GPs and people who need to manage their asthma or their children's asthma to be properly informed and I think this tool will go a great way to achieving that.

JOURNALIST: I guess the challenge is ahead to keep going, to keep it internationally recognised and in the forefront?

PETER DUTTON: Well I think if you look at the breadth of experience not just from the GPs, but from all of the allied health care workers, primary care workers, the clinicians otherwise, the researchers, all of those people have come together. These are world class people and they've come together to put this research at the fingertips of doctors and of nurses and pharmacists and others and if we do that we will be world leaders in the way we manage what is a very serious disease.

But the fact that one in ten Australians suffer from asthma means that we need to continue the effort in the fight against asthma. And we need to have early detection, we need to make sure that people are having good discussions with their GPs, people need to manage the asthma appropriately both in terms of medication, but also through diet and lifestyle including exercise.

So it's a very important issue and I'm very happy to be here today and I thank the organisers very much.

JOURNALIST: Minister the Consumer's Health Forum today has released a report on co-payments finding that if they are introduced they would hit the sickest and the poorest and would not generate too much savings for the government, what do you thoughts about that?

PETER DUTTON: I think people have made their arguments for and against co-payments and other changes to the health system and all of that work has been fed into the Commission of Audit and obviously the Government will receive the Commission of Audit, consider the deliberations and we can respond at that point.

The only other point that I'd make is that my desire as Health Minister is to strengthen Medicare, to strengthen our health system so that we can support 2.3 million Australians who have asthma, to make sure that we can support the 170 per cent increase in numbers of Alzheimer sufferers over the course of the last decade, to make sure we can pay for the genomic testing and all of the personalised cancer medicines that we are going to have to pay for over the course of the next decade or two. I want to make sure that we have a system that is strengthened into the future and really that's what I hope to bring to the table.

JOURNALIST: Are you actually considering means-testing Medicare?

PETER DUTTON: Well we are not considering anything until we have a look at the Commission of Audit and the recommendations that it would make.

I'd just make this point – the Government inherited \$123 billion of accumulated deficits, the nation's debt is running towards \$667 billion, we spend at the moment in this portfolio over \$60 billion a year and yet out of the Medicare levy we raise less than \$10 billion.

So if we want to be realistic about the ageing of our population – ten years ago we had 2.5 million Australians over the age of 65 - in ten years' time we'll have 4.5 million Australians over the age of 65 and I want to make sure that we can continue

to provide world class services to them in the health area. So we want to make sure that we can strengthen Medicare and that's what we're considering at the moment.

JOURNALIST: Are GP co-payments still on the table?

PETER DUTTON: Well again people have made their arguments for and against. The co-payments and other changes to the system that's with the Commission of Audit at the moment and we'll consider those recommendations in relation to this portfolio, but across government otherwise and then we'll respond in due course.

JOURNALIST: Are you still arguing for the co-payments though, you said there needed to be a debate?

PETER DUTTON: I've said there needs to be a debate in relation to strengthening Medicare as we go forward.

I haven't expressed a position in relation to co-payments, I've said we should have a discussion about how it is we are going to pay for the ageing of our population, for the technologies, the robotic surgery, for the personalised medicines, for all of that testing that needs to take place over the course of the next decade or two.

Medicare was system that was devised in the 1970s and 1980s; I want to make sure we can strengthen Medicare so that we can provide for Australian patients into the years ahead.

JOURNALIST: Is the Coalition still committed to restoring the private health insurance rebate or is that something that is under consideration given the budgetary situation?

PETER DUTTON: No, our position remains consistent, both before the election and since the election; we've said that we would want to restore the changes so that we could make private health insurance more affordable. We wanted to do that when we could financially afford it. The fact is that Labor ripped \$4.2 billion out of private health insurance; I want to make sure that we can continue coverage because if we don't have a private system that is strong, complemented by a public system that is strong then we don't have a health system going forward.

So I want to make sure that we continue our significant investment into the public sector and the private sector because one needs the other in this country and I want to make sure we strengthen Medicare going forward.

JOURNALIST: Do you anticipate though that from the Budget that people who can afford to pay will pay more for their health care?

PETER DUTTON: Well again we'll wait for the recommendations of the Commission of Audit.

My desire is to strengthen Medicare to make sure we can pay for all of those medical services that will be needed over the course of the next couple of decades, that's my desire and we'll wait to see what the Commission of Audit has to recommend.

JOURNALIST: Can the Government still be the best friend Medicare ever had and introduce co-payments?

PETER DUTTON: Only the Liberal Party can be the best friend of Medicare because we manage the economy successfully.

You see the problem with Labor was that they ran out of money. The problem is that they ran up enormous debt. And not only did they inherit a situation where the debt had been paid off and they had money in the bank, but they ran up enormous debt.

They did it by creating these great, big new bureaucracies – 12 of them in health – they spent the money in areas that didn't provide services and support to frontline practitioners including our GPs, they attacked GPs, they attacked pharmacists, they attacked private health insurance. And if we want to be the best friend that Medicare ever had, if we want to strengthen Medicare into the future then we have to recognise that it was a 1980s model, that we need to modernise it and strengthen it for the future because there are costs and threats coming down the line with an ageing population that can't be paid for otherwise.

So I want to make sure that we can have a system into the future that sees all the medical services - and many more - provided to patients as they age, as we need robotic surgery, as people will want personalised cancer drugs, as lifesaving drugs come online, as we pay for genomic testing and the resulting clinical interventions out of that, all of that needs to be paid for.

Kevin Rudd spoke about this in 2007, but the problem is that Labor did nothing about it.

I want to make sure that we can strengthen Medicare going forward - that's the desire of the Prime Minister and myself - and I am absolutely determined to make sure we can have a health service and a health system for the 21st century for our country and I will make sure that we deliver that. Thank You.