

A National Health Plan to fix our disconnected care

The Consumers Health Forum has presented Health Minister Greg Hunt with consumer priorities for a National Health Plan, setting out what's needed to bring 21st Century consumer-centred care to our poorly-coordinated system.

Consumer priorities for the Plan centre on two essential starting points:

- Reforms to strengthen Australia's primary health care system to make it more consumer-centred, prevention-oriented, and better integrated with hospital and social care and with more capacity to support transitions of care;
- Boosts to investment in health systems research, shaped by consumer and community priorities to stimulate services that reflect advances in health sciences.

Too often we rely on measures of what the health system does and what it costs. It's time to ask health consumers what matters to us? We know Australia generally has a high standard health care but disconnects within and between services in community and hospital result in less optimal care particularly for those with chronic and complex conditions as well as waste in the system.

Evidence from around the world shows that "people-centred care" delivers better health outcomes for the individual and better economic results for the community. We also propose new ways of involving consumer knowledge and experience in policy setting, research and service commissioning.

Barriers to more effective, evidence-based health service include dysfunctional federal-state health funding arrangements, and the failure of Medicare system – now well over 30 years old - to meet the needs of people with complex and chronic conditions.

Consumer Priorities for a National Health Plan was presented to Health Minister Greg Hunt at a Consumer and Community Roundtable hosted by CHF in Melbourne on 23 August.

CHF outlines reforms in seven key areas:

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE: to expand the focus on new models of care to include children, families and others at risk of chronic illness, and to enhance the role of Primary Health Networks.

PREVENTION: pre-empt chronic diseases like obesity with effective public health measures

RETHINK FUNDING: to better link hospitals with coordinated community-based services

INTEGRATE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES: with physical health, education and employment.

FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE: incentives, education and services to put consumers at the centre of care.

DIGITAL HEALTH FUTURE: support efficient care, more consumer choice and transparency.

CONSUMER ORIENTED RESEARCH: to ensure consumer say in setting research priorities and translating research into practical improvements to services.

See the full report at

chf.org.au/publications/consumer-priorities-national-health-plan