

What's the point of medical research advances if people can't afford to go to the Doctor?

The Victorian Medicare Action Group condemns the Treasurers' announcement of a \$7 co-payment to see the GP. Meredith Carter, VMAG spokesperson said tonight.

Treasurer Hockey has tonight announced funding for the *Medical Research Future Fund* from savings made by charging a \$7 co-payment to see the doctor. **But how will any new cures for health problems help those who are sick and can't afford to go to the doctor because of the \$7 co-payment announced in the budget tonight?**

This is a short term, short sighted decision. **The introduction of a flat \$7 fee for all is equivalent to a flat tax - the rich pay it and the poor pay it. This is an extremely unfair tax.** \$7 co-payments will likely see people defer seeking healthcare, resulting in more expensive treatments being needed later and further overcrowding of emergency departments. Those with chronic illnesses; people on low incomes; people living in rural and remote areas; young families; and older Australians are all going to suffer as a result of tonight's announcement.

All developed countries recognise that spending on prevention, i.e. GPs and related services, is the best way to address hospital overcrowding and reduce health care costs. **This is a backward approach to the provision of universal access to health care.** Universal access to health care recognises not only the importance of prevention in terms of health of individuals but the health of the broader community. We are all at risk if people do not gain the healthcare they need the obvious example being contagious diseases. What irony that just as the US has taken major steps towards universal access to health care with the introduction of the Affordable Care Act the Australian Government walks away from it and significantly undermines Medicare.

Analogies previously used that the co-payment is equal to a cup of coffee a week misses the point that many people, particularly those with chronic illnesses; people on low incomes; people living in rural and remote areas; young families; and older Australians already have to budget so tightly that a cup of coffee a week is already a luxury they cannot afford. **\$7 co-payments to attend the GP will mean a much more serious decision has to be made: can I go the doctor, or do I buy food for myself and my family, can I afford to turn the heater on.**

VMAG concurs with Stephen Duckett's¹ summation: '**Bulk billing is gone, health reform agreed by all states and territories is demolished, funding to the states is slashed and promises are broken**'.

About the Victorian Medicare Action Group (VMAG)

VMAG is an informal alliance of interested people and organisations. VMAG has a large membership including health practitioners, health organisations, community organisations, policy advocates, religious organisations, unions and consumers. VMAG is apolitical and open for all consumers and organisations to join. The group has previously run successful save Medicare campaigns.

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