

Primary health care reform is the answer to Australian concerns about health care affordability

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The Consumers Health Forum (CHF) is calling for political leaders to put the health of Australians front and centre this election with prudent reform of primary health care.

CHF is [highlighting crucial initiatives](#) that could have the most impact on the health of Australians, and the health care system.

CHF CEO, Ms Leanne Wells said that for too long, primary health care, the backbone of the Australian health system, has been under severe stress with compounding pressures on all sides.

“The extraordinary demands from the extended pandemic coupled with an aging population, the growing health burden associated with chronic conditions, and vulnerable or displaced people on low incomes create the perfect storm for inequality and unaffordability,” she said.

“Responsive and timely health care that meets needs and preferences matters to Australians, as the recent [Health Consumer Sentiment survey](#) showed, with 84% saying they were satisfied with the health services they received, and 30% said their confidence in the health system has increased since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic,” she said.

But 14% of Australians with chronic conditions could not pay for healthcare or medicine because of cost.

24% did not fill a prescription or didn't take their medicines, with more than a third saying it was because of cost and 55% of people in regional and rural areas say there aren't enough doctors, nurses and health care workers.

“This new data tells us that we need to do more to address timely access to healthcare, and the affordability pressures Australian health consumers constantly report to us.

Addressing health care affordability particularly for people with complex chronic conditions is a priority for this Election.

The current government has laid the groundwork in developing a 10 Year Primary Health Care Plan and the 10 Year Preventive Health Strategy. Serious investment is now needed to bring these ideas into reality.

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"Intention and commitment are needed from future government leaders to make sure these valuable consultations and strategies doesn't go to waste," said Ms Wells.

"A fundamental shift to a prevention-oriented primary health care system with enhanced capacity for multidisciplinary, coordinated team-based care coordinated through general practices will give better value for health consumers and assist GPs to provide the complete, 'wrap around' primary care that people are looking for to keep themselves well and out of hospital," said Ms Wells.

"We are strongly advocating for a comprehensive GP-coordinated primary health system, which allows for holistic team care, enrolled patients, and is resourced to support all care needs and promote wellbeing.

"The general practice would provide continuity of care working with nurses, pharmacists and allied health providers." said Ms Wells.

"Another priority is the roll-out plan for regional collaborative commissioning to meet pressing local health needs by Primary Health Networks and local hospital networks.

"There is concern that the two years' work of consultations and agreements will be wasted if the newly elected government does not make use of the current 10 Year Primary Health Care Plan." said Ms Wells.

Preventive health is another way the government can use vision and efficient policy implementation to manage better outcomes for the health of Australians with lower long term costs.

"The 10 Year National Preventive Health Strategy provides the case for action on preventive health measures. It lays out a progressive and sustainable staged approach to coordinate preventive health care."

"A newly elected government should recognise that health care savings from new preventative health measures can offset spending on more acute areas of health over time. New and innovative models of care, uptake of digital health and technology, and addressing issues such as obesity, mental health and health literacy are fundamental approaches to managing health care better," said Ms Wells.

"A priority is to start a national social prescribing scheme for people experiencing loneliness, social isolation, and mental ill-health. Social prescriptions would greatly assist those with chronic conditions to self-manage," said Ms Wells.

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“We need to think about long term planning and strategies to manage our resources; our tax dollars, our indispensable health workforce, and managing the health of Australians in safe and cost effective ways that give them empowerment in their health care decisions,” said Ms Wells.

Part of this is to develop the consumer voice in health with an [Australian Health Consumer Leadership Academy](#) and continued support for youth health consumer advocates through the [Youth Health Forum](#).

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