



Medical Costs Finder fix, only first step to cure rising health costs

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National Seniors Australia (NSA) supports greater financial transparency among government, insurers, specialists, hospitals, and the private health sector as the Federal Government finally introduces legislation to fix the \$24 million white elephant Medical Costs Finder website, which failed to help people understand costs for medical procedures and specialist services.

NSA, Australia's peak consumer advocacy body for older Australians, supports greater transparency of medical specialist fees but also recommends a full Productivity Commission review of the private health system to lift the lid on rising premiums and out-of-pocket costs.

NSA CEO Mr Chris Grice said NSA research shows private health insurance is the second biggest concern for seniors, behind cost of living.

"Rising private health insurance (PHI) premiums alongside out-of-pocket specialist costs significantly impact older people who may be likely to develop health conditions yet experience reduced income as they move from work to retirement, making affordability paramount," he said.

"While most people need private health, rising premiums and out-of-pocket costs undermine its value. While we acknowledge the government's commitment to fix the Medical Cost Finder – there is an opportunity for real change, real reform."

Continued concerns about the value of private health have prompted NSA to renew its calls for an independent inquiry into the private health system with a focus on:

- the growth of PHI premiums, specialist fees, and out-of-pocket expenses
- the value and scope of product offerings covered by PHI
- reforms to minimise out-of-pocket costs.

Mr Grice said private health insurance holders continue to face premium increases, product limitations, and rising out-of-pocket costs.

"It's time for an independent review of private health to make it more accessible and affordable for older Australians – this is a pressure point for government and the entire economy," he said.

"NSA is also calling for an increase in the PHI Rebate for people on lower incomes to help maintain cover, and avoid being forced into the public health system. Our research shows 68% of older people have gone without or hesitated to access essential healthcare because of cost.

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“To help manage costs, people sadly put up with pain and illness, stretch out the time between appointments or prescriptions, go without one medicine to pay for another, and wait for the condition to worsen to warrant transport and hospitalisation, because it’s free.

“Delaying or neglecting medical care can lead to health and wellbeing issues including untreated problems, undiagnosed conditions, worsening symptoms, and mental health impacts.

“All this is happening on the eve of upcoming increases to private health insurance.”

The government has introduced legislation to allow Medicare data as well as hospital and private health insurance records to be uploaded to the Medical Costs Finder.

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