

## **Australian Medical Association Limited**

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**Transcript:** AMA Vice President, Dr Danielle McMullen, Outlet: Channel 7 Sunrise, Monday, 17 April 2023

**Subject:** Need for federal government to hand down a 'health budget', funding for primary care

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**NATALIE BARR:** Well, doctors are this morning calling for the Albanese Government to commit to a health focussed federal budget when it's handed down next month after it was revealed only one third of GPs offer bulk-billing for new patients. That means more of us are forking out, with the average out of pocket cost now over \$40 for a 15-minute consultation. In some electorates, bulk-billing no longer exists, like Fairfax on the Sunshine Coast, Newcastle, Mayo, which takes in the Adelaide Hills, and Franklin around Hobart.

Joining me now is Vice President of the Australian Medical Association, Danielle McMullen. Morning to you. So the Medicare rebate is now about \$40. The gap we have to pay in many cases is more than that. Are we heading for a day in Australia where there will be no bulk-billing?

**DANIELLE MCMULLEN:** Look, what that figure shows us is how previous governments stripped so much out of Medicare, and particularly in general practice, that now the cost of providing a consultation is more than double that rebate that Medicare gives back to patients. So we are in difficult times already where patients are facing higher out-of-pocket costs, and as doctors we want to take care of our patients and particularly our more vulnerable patients. But to do that we need to be able to keep our doors open as well. And patients deserve an adequate rebate for seeing a GP with their complex health conditions.

**NATALIE BARR:** So we know why we're paying more. Explain to us why doctors have to charge so much to keep their doors open.

**DANIELLE MCMULLEN:** The sad fact is that previous governments stripped nearly \$4 billion out of Medicare out of general practice alone since the Medicare freeze. And so with the increasing cost of living, which is no surprise to your viewers, the rebate back for those consultations has stayed stagnant. So someone has to fill the gap. And when government hasn't been filling it, that falls upon patients to have to cover that gap fee.

**NATALIE BARR:** So the flow on effect is there are fewer doctors to go round. practices are closing, people are ending up in emergency rooms. It's hard to even get a doctor's spot now. So how do we solve that problem? Getting pharmacists to hand out prescriptions - would that be one way?

**DANIELLE MCMULLEN:** What we really need to see is this government put their money where their mouth is. They've been talking a lot about general practice, and we need this budget to be a health budget. We need the Medicare rebate, particularly for longer consultations, to be increased so that patients can get more time with their GP. We need investments in afterhours care and in that team-based care in general practice. So we do want to work in teams - we want nurses, pharmacists, midwives working with us in general practice

to help serve patients. But Band-Aid solutions like pharmacy prescribing outside of general practice where there's no coordination with your usual GP is going to cost the system lots of money and not provide those health benefits that Australians need.

NATALIE BARR: It'd help though. I mean, why do I have to go and pay \$50 or \$60 at a doctor to get a repeat on my prescription? That's ridiculous, especially in the country.

DANIELLE MCMULLEN: So the important thing that goes into reviewing prescriptions is not just writing that piece of paper but actually reviewing your health, making sure that you still need to be on medication and that it's the right medication at the right dose. And it's that coordination with your usual GP, at least annually, that we think is important for people, particularly with chronic disease. And so there are solutions that government could put in place to make that easier and help to make sure that patients have accessible, affordable access to their usual doctor.

NATALIE BARR: Okay. Thank you very much, Danielle.

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