

Recommendations

The Committee's recommendations are listed below in prioritised order.

A single concession card

1. **The Committee recommends a major overhaul of the concession card system. (Paragraph 5.13)**
2. **To this end, the Committee recommends that there be a single concession card, entitled the *Commonwealth Concession Card*, issued under the following conditions:**
 - **to all eligible recipients of income support payments; and accessible through a single, simple application form for low-income households (at a determined cut-off level); and**
 - **As an interim measure, until full implementation of smart card technology enables on-line verification of concession entitlements, the card should be colour-coded (no more than two different colours) to indicate the level of concession the holder is entitled to. This could be in the form of level 1, giving greatest access to Commonwealth and State and Territory concessions, and level 2, offering most Commonwealth concessions and limited State and Territory concessions. (Paragraph 5.14)**
3. **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card should continue to be issued separately, until smart card technology enables full integration with other concession entitlements onto a single card. In the interim, the design and colouring of the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card should ensure it is easily distinguished from the single concession card. (Paragraph 5.15)**
4. **The Committee recommends the conduct of a concession smart card trial, involving the Commonwealth and selected State/Territory governments, within the next six months.**
 - **The trial evaluation should be carried out jointly by the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments involved for a six month period, and should include a cost benefit analysis as well as an assessment of privacy implications and the technical requirements for the implementation of a national concession smart card.**
 - **A successful trial should be followed immediately by the introduction of a single concession smart card, to be used to access all Commonwealth and State/Territory concessions. This card should replace the current Pensioner Concession Card, Health Care Card and Commonwealth Seniors Health Card. (Paragraph 5.30)**

5. **The Committee recommends that a concession smart card not require a Personal Identification Number (PIN) to access concessions. (Paragraph 5.35)**
6. **The Committee recommends that smart card technology be gradually introduced in a manner conducive to enlisting the co-operation of cardholders. (Paragraph 5.36)**
7. **The Commonwealth Government must ensure that concession smart cards and the relevant equipment (smart card readers, customer kiosks, information phone lines etc) are available to all eligible Australians, wherever they live. (Paragraph 5.39)**
8. **The Committee recommends that before and during introduction of concession smart cards, there should be an extensive education campaign informing the target populations, particularly older people, how the new technology will affect them and how they can gain access to concessions. (Paragraph 5.40)**
9. **The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security and other agencies involved with design, implementation and information dissemination of the smart concession card take particular account of the importance of individual privacy, including the guidelines set out in the *Privacy Act 1988*.**
 - **The Privacy Commissioner must be consulted during the design and implementation of the smart concession card, to ensure privacy concerns are met. (Paragraph 5.56)**

PharmaNet

10. **The Committee recommends that the Health Insurance Commission conducts a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed PharmaNet claims system for Australia. (Paragraph 5.81)**
11. **Subject to a favourable cost-benefit analysis, the Committee recommends full-scale implementation of the PharmaNet system for the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme claims process in Australia, taking into account the privacy issues outlined in this Report. (Paragraph 5.82)**

Review of eligibility requirements - ensuring equity

12. **The Committee recommends that eligibility criteria for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card be extended to include independent retirees whose income does not exceed by more than 40 per cent, the income limit set for qualification of a part pension. (Paragraph 6.29)**
13. **The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security target Divisions of General Practice for information dissemination on the eligibility requirements for different concession cards. This should**

include specific background on the veterans' repatriation health cards, as these differ from the Commonwealth concession cards. (Paragraph 6.32)

14. **In the interest of greater consistency in concession availability, the Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security undertake an extensive review of the concession card eligibility criteria, taking into account the issues of equity, access, uniformity and reciprocity canvassed throughout this Inquiry, and propose revised criteria to the Minister for Social Security. (Paragraph 6.43)**
15. **The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government and all State/Territory governments formally adopt a written agreement on the following national standards for concessions:**
 - **horizontal equity: similar outcomes for households in similar circumstances;**
 - **vertical equity: able to respond to different household circumstances (such as household size);**
 - **clarity for recipients;**
 - **cost effective administration;**
 - **flexibility to respond to tariff and price changes, and differences across Australia;**
 - **consistency with competition policies and practices; and**
 - **a recognition that concessions should not try to compensate for deficiencies in the Social Security system. (Paragraph 6.59)**

Access to concessions

16. **The Committee recommends that people qualifying for concession entitlements who live in areas without access to public transport concessions, be given the option of receiving only the transport component of their entitlement in a monetary or voucher form. The monetary payments should be made quarterly rather than annually, to help ensure the money is managed well and is used for relevant expenditure. (Paragraph 6.78)**
17. **The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security review its current information dissemination strategy regarding concessions and initiate a more effective information campaign. The campaign should target the following groups:**
 - **Older people, especially those at retirement age, regarding their entitlement to concession cards and the actual concessions they confer. This should include an emphasis that concession cards are not needed to access free hospital care, or to give preferential**

hospital treatment as all Australians are entitled to equal care under Medicare;

- People from a non-English speaking background;
 - Members of the financial advisory sector; and
 - Professional service providers such as General Practitioners. (Paragraph 7.3)
18. The Committee recommends that the new Youth Allowance application form include an application section for the low-income Health Care Card (*Commonwealth Concession Card*, when introduced). (Paragraph 7.8)
 19. The Committee recommends that the Department of Social Security review the Health Care Card take-up rate of people participating in the Community Development Employment Program or other equivalent programs. The Department should develop new strategies for ensuring these recipients are aware of their eligibility to apply for a low-income Health Care Card and also ensure easy access to application forms and information. (Paragraph 7.9)
 20. Whilst recognising States' primary responsibility for dental care, the Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government conduct an annual review of waiting periods for public dental treatment, with a view to ensuring waiting periods do not revert to those experienced prior to the introduction of the Commonwealth Dental Health Program. (Paragraph 7.11)
 21. The Committee recommends that the Federal Minister for Transport and Regional Development initiate a negotiation process with all State and Territory Transport Ministers, to implement a national transport concession system on all rail and bus services. (Paragraph 7.19)
 22. The Committee recommends that the Mobility Allowance be extended to allow disabled people to access all forms of transport in areas where there are no public transport services specific to their needs. (Paragraph 7.35)
 23. The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government initiate a negotiation process among all State and Territory governments regarding disabled taxi transport subsidy, with a view to establishing a national scheme of reciprocity. There should be uniform eligibility criteria for disabled taxi transport concessions in all States and Territories, and a uniform fare subsidy of at least 50% throughout Australia, payable by the traveller's State or Territory of residence, regardless of where the travel is undertaken. (Paragraph 7.50)

The Administrative Framework

- 24. The Committee recommends that officials from the Department of Social Security, the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Department of Health and Family Services, Centrelink and the Health Insurance Commission form a working party to investigate current legislative complexities within the concession card system.**
- **Any reform of the concession card legislative framework should include relocating the bulk of concession entitlement provisions from the Health and Family Services portfolio to the Social Security portfolio.**
 - **The Department of Social Security must hold responsibility for all concession card policy. However, major decisions must be taken in consultation with the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Australian Government Hearing Service, the Health Insurance Commission and Centrelink.**
 - **In recognition of the special status of veterans, the Department of Veterans' Affairs should retain responsibility for determining eligibility and allocating concession cards and repatriation health cards to veterans and their partners.**
 - **The concession card and health repatriation cards issued by the Department of Veterans' Affairs should incorporate a distinctive feature to indicate veteran status, and this should continue on a permanent basis.**
 - **Centrelink should be responsible for production of all concession cards, and for delivery of cards to all beneficiaries except those of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. (Paragraph 8.17)**
- 25. The Committee recommends that the Health Insurance Commission, the Australian Customs Service and the Australian Federal Police further strengthen their fraud control programs, and recommends training for relevant officers about the export of Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme drugs in contravention of the *National Health Act 1953*. (Paragraph 8.27)**
- 26. The Committee recommends that current concessions available to Pensioner Concession Card holders and veterans travelling on AN Rail passenger services continue to be partially met by the Commonwealth government. The Government should draft a contract with Great Southern Railways for the ongoing provision of concessionary rail travel. (Paragraph 8.41)**