

The Secretary
Select Committee on Medicare
c/- Parliament House
Canberra 2600 ACT
14 June 2003

Eastern Riverina Greens
c/- 57 Trail Street
Wagga Wagga
NSW 2650

Dear Sir/Madam,

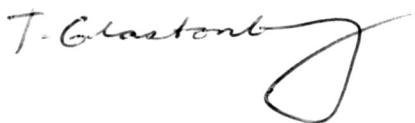
The Eastern Riverina Greens wish to register their objections to the government's proposed changes to Medicare. The federal government's package is a continuation of its dismantling of Medicare so that the system can no longer provide universal and equitable health care for all Australians.

Our major concerns are as follows:

1. All Australians contribute to the cost of Medicare and all Australians should be entitled to bulk billed services. The Howard government's changes to Medicare have already seen the bulk billing rates drop from about 80% to just below 70% and as these new proposed changes will discourage general bulk billing the trend is likely to continue.
2. As the costs of general practice have increased (especially the cost of medical indemnity insurance), while the Scheduled fee from Medicare has not kept pace, doctors have had little option except to abandon bulk billing if they are to survive in general practice. The government's proposals will further discourage doctors from bulk billing because they entrench co-payments, or out-of-pocket expenses for patients.
3. If co-payments rise, as many health economists predict, then people may be discouraged from seeing their GP or taking their children to the doctor. This approach is short-sighted as early detection or prevention of conditions is far cheaper – for the individual and the greater community – than hospital treatment and ongoing care.
4. Under the government's proposals, self-funded retirees earning up to \$50,000 – or \$80,000 per couple – will have access to bulk billing but low-income individuals and families without a concession card will not. This is unfair and destroys, what should be, an equitable system for all Australians.
5. If Medicare becomes a safety net for the needy then Australians who are better off may start to resent paying for Medicare through their taxes. This could lead to political pressure for people to 'opt-out' of Medicare, which would undermine the universality of the scheme, leaving us with a two-tiered health system where the rich have access to quality health care while the poor are left with the massively underfunded government system.
6. The government's plan for Australian to take out private health insurance for major health expenses (above \$1000 per year) is unreasonable. All Australians should be able to rely on a strong, well-funded and reliable public system providing quality health care. This is particularly important for people who have chronic conditions or a catastrophic illness.
7. The Private Health Insurance Rebate is an inefficient use of public funds. Most of the benefits go to high-income earners. The rebate should be abolished and the money redirected to the public health care system.

The proposed changes to Medicare must be reconsidered so that all Australians continue to have access to quality, affordable health care, irrespective of income.

Yours faithfully,
Tara Glastonbury



(on behalf of Eastern Riverina Greens)