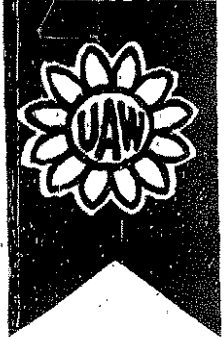


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UNION OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN

Newcastle Branch

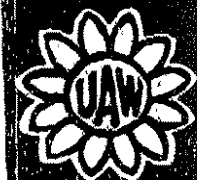
12 Hardy Street
Swansea 2281
PH4971 3507 Fax 4971 4264

M/s Jill Hall
Member for Shortland
Fax 4947 9722

Dear Jill

Please find UAW's submission to the Select Committee on Medicare. Unfortunately I realise it is late, but wondered if it is possible to still be presented. I have also Faxed a copy to Sharon Greirson.

Betty Mawdsley.



UNION OF AUSTRALIAN WOMEN

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12 Hardy Street
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The Secretary
Select Committee on Medicare
Suite S1 30
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

The introduction of Medicare by a Federal Labor Government meant that a Universal Health Scheme was now available to all Australians now matter what their age or affordability, paid for by a percentage of income through taxation. Members of the Union of Australian applauded this scheme because we felt it was by far the fairest method of caring for the health of all Australian citizens. Bulk billing was an important part of this scheme, and made available by the majority of General Practitioners.

However, over the past years, we have noted the sharp decline of bulk billing, in many areas of Newcastle it is now non-existent. Those doctors who do still bulk bill have had to close their books because they do not have the capacity to handle anymore patients. In some cases doctors are charging a gap fee which seems to range from \$5 to \$15; others insist on paying the full fee up front, so the patient then has to attend a Medicare office to obtain a rebate, often far short of the original cost. For those in ill health, often elderly, and parents with sick small children who rely on public transport, getting to a Medicare Office is often difficult. (for instance people at Swansea once were once able to go to a Medicare Office in Belmont, but this Federal Government closed the Belmont office and patients now have to go to the Charlestown office to receive their rebate.). Home visits to very ill patients seem to be almost non existent, and we hear reports that some doctors who agree to home visits, have only been willing to do so provided their fee is paid at the time of the visit.

The Union of Australian Women does not blame the General Practitioner for this situation. We know that many of their costs have increased, especially insurance costs, and they have received no increase from the Federal Government to cover their increased costs. *The offer of one dollar from the Federal Government to cover these costs, is ludicrous and we feel quite insincere. We have to ask, does the Federal Government really want Medicare to continue, or do they want to force all Australians to take out expensive Private Health Care?*

The Union of Australian Women was totally opposed when the Federal Government offered \$300 as an encouragement to people to join a Private Health Scheme, according to them to take the pressure off Medicare. We believe that payment should have been made to G.P.'s to assist them to continue bulk billing. We totally disagree with their proposed scheme to make bulk billing available only to pensioners, turning pensioners into second class citizens. This could develop into a second rate service for pensioners.

Medicare, which includes bulk billing is paid for through taxation and should be available to everyone.

Because of the problems associated with the *present* Medicare situation some doctors are leaving the profession, creating a shortage of doctors. However a far greater reason for the shortage of doctors is the limit that has been placed on the amount of students allowed to study medicine at the universities, and this needs correcting immediately.

We are also concerned that the Dental Scheme, as introduced by the previous Federal Government, has been scrapped. When people have serious problems with their teeth, their overall health suffers also, and families on low incomes are finding it increasingly difficult, if not impossible to pay the high fees demanded by dental practitioners these days.

A fair and sustainable health scheme is what is needed and we hope that this enquiry can come up with some of the solutions to obtaining this.

Betty Mawdsley



Secretary.