

Eric Manning

SUBMISSION TO SELECT COMMITTEE ON MEDICARE

The great strength of Medicare is its universality. The proposals by the Howard government would dilute this appeal and create a distinction between Commonwealth card holders and the rest.

The proposals will create a class of the "deserving poor" who are the holders of concession cards and get their health services as a charity. Doctors' incomes will be supported by the increased fees imposed on the rest of the Australian population, including a great number of working class families with no concession card.

These proposals treat the concession card as an indicator of need, poverty, or low capacity to pay for services. The card is a poor indicator in both senses, if you will pardon the pun. Cards are held by many who are not poor by any reasonable standard, and cards are not provided to working people, even when their income is rock bottom and they are supporting a dependent family or spouse. These people are needy by any standard.

Away from the cities, the shortage of doctors certainly is a problem, but it is not only doctors. Other health care and related social services are unavailable, or at least harder to find. In remote and rural localities, these ancillary health services, would be best provided by salaried professional staff working in community centres. Government centres with a concentration of profession staff, dental, nursing, psychological counselling, and environmental scientific services could be more easily created, moved, and even closed, in accord with a range of social indicators. The present fee-for-service provision is never going to provide services in remote places without subsidies, hidden or otherwise.

The 30% rebate on private health insurance should be eliminated. It contradicts and undermines Medicare's ideology of universal coverage by its regressive nature.

The Medicare levy is regressive at the outset. It should be abolished and Medicare should be funded from the general taxation system, though even that is increasingly regressive as a consequence of the many loopholes in the taxation system which the Howard government has refused to close up.

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