

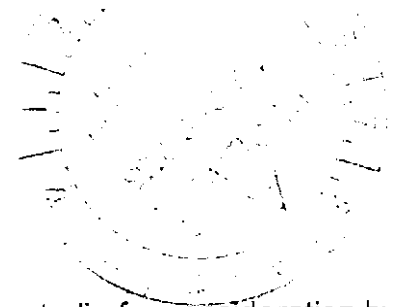
SUB 11 ✓

Defend and Extend Medicare - Australia

"healthcare is a right not a charity or a luxury"

Spokespersons; Dr. Joseph Toscano, Ms. Julie Jones, Mr. Brendan Bride.
Address: PO Box 5035 Alphington 3078 Melbourne Australia. Telephone: 0439 395 489
email: info@defendandextendmedicare.org web: www.defendandextendmedicare.org

Attention: Senate Select Committee
Medicare Plus Package,



Dear Senators,

Enclosed a submission by Defend and Extend Medicare Australia for consideration by the Senate Select Committee on the Howard government's proposed Medicare Plus Package.

The submission includes:

- A) SAFETY NET FATALLY FLAWED
- B) HO!! HO!! HO!! MERRY CHRISTMAS
- C) DIFFERENTIAL REBATE SPELLS THE END OF BULK BILLING
- D) IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE MESSAGE, SHOOT THE MESSENGER
- E) ADVOCATING UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE NOW A CRIME
- F) POSTER FOR FOURTH MEDICARE RALLY 13TH DECEMBER 2003
- G) LIST OF DELEGATES OF DEFEND AND EXTEND MEDICARE
- H) PHOTOCOPIES THREE ARTICLES FROM MELBOURNE HERALD SUN 5TH, 6TH AND 9TH DECEMBER 2003.

Attachments

F,G,H, attachments
not available electronically

I understand that you are ^{hearing} oral submissions on the 19th of January 2004 in Canberra. Defend and Extend Medicare is very keen to attend and speak on the day.

Two of our Joint National Convenors would be available to present our opinions anytime in January.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Joseph Toscano/Joint National Con-venor Defend and Extend Medicare – Australia.

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SUBMISSION A

SAFETY NET FATALLY FLAWED

The Howard government's disingenuously labeled Medicare plus package spells the end of a universal health care delivery system that has, in one form or another served Australians well for nearly thirty years. The proposed changes if passed in the Senate by the Democrats and the independents will mark the beginning of the end of the egalitarian principles that underpin Medicare, a universal health care delivery system that allows all Australians irrespective of who they are, where they live and how much they earn, to access private out of hospital health services. The major proposals advocated in Abbott's Medicare plus package will destroy what is left of Medicare.

The safety net proposed by the Howard government is both illusory and dishonest. Abbott's claims that 12 million Australians will receive an 80% rebate for out of hospital expenses when their bills reach 500 dollars a year and that the government will cover 80% of the costs of the other 8 million Australians, when out of pocket expenses for out patient health care services reach a thousands dollars, does not add up. Abbott's safety net is tied to the government's recommended medical fees for particular medical services. Doctors who charge up front fees normally charge more than the recommended fee. This means that patients will continue to have out of pocket expenses beyond those covered by the Howard government's proposed 80% rebate.

As the government does not have the constitutional power to fix doctors fees, not tying the proposed 80% rebate to the recommended fee would lead to a dramatic escalation of non-hospital medical costs. If the government proposes to use taxpayers money to pay 80% of whatever fee a private doctor chooses to charge, if a patient's out of pocket expenses are over a thousand dollars, there is nothing stopping a doctor from charging a hundred dollars, two hundred dollars, maybe five hundred dollars for a single general practitioner visit.

Abbott's proposal to introduce a differential rebate between concession card holders and children under sixteen and adults who don't hold concession cards, spells the death of Medicare. General practitioners who continue to bulk bill all their patients will find that they will receive thirty dollars for concession card holders and children and twenty five dollars for non-concession card holders for a standard general practitioner consultation. Within a few months doctors will stop bulk billing adults who don't hold concession cards and will charge ever increasing up front fees. The bulk billing rate will plummet to below 50%, not increase as claimed by John Howard and Tony Abbott. The proposed changes are not just dishonest, they will create a two tier system where those Australians with assets will be able to buy the best health care money can buy, while the rest will have to do with a second rate system.

What was a highly efficient, affordable relatively simple system will be transformed into a highly complex, expensive discriminatory health care delivery system. Abbott and Howard are more interested in imposing their user pay ideological agenda on Australians than ensuring that access to health care in Australia is a right, not a charity, or a luxury. The current drop in bulk billing rates is a direct consequence of government policy. Bulk billing rates could be restored by one very simple measure – increasing general practitioner rebates for the services they provide. Over 80% of general practitioners bulk billed when rebates reflected the cost of running a medical practice.

Howard and Abbott's proposals need to be resisted by all Australians, if they are not vigorously opposed, the Australian Democrats and the independents will roll over as they have done in the past and pass the legislation in the Senate. The Australian Democrats and the independents need to understand they face political oblivion if they allow Abbott and Howard's Medicare plus package to pass through the Senate.

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SUBMISSION B

HO!! HO!! HO!! MERRY CHRISTMAS

After finishing off another 10-hour day seeing patients, I like many other of my colleagues, dream about a sea change. Maybe I was day dreaming or maybe, aliens had beamed me up onto their spacecraft, but I have distinct memories of seeing Tony Abbott dressed in a Santa suit and John Howard strutting his stuff as a good elf. They were prattling on about the MedicarePlus package around which they were wrapping pretty paper and a bow. The MedicarePlus package was their Christmas present to the Australian people. Tony Abbott was concerned the Chrissy present didn't have any warranty, John Howard told him not to worry because most people expect all those whiz bang presents they are given for Christmas to break down before the holidays are over.

Excited about what was in the package, I hung onto their every word. It was obvious listening to their conversation that the introduction of a differential rebate for children under 16 and concession card holders and other Australians, marked the end of universal bulk billing. What doctor in their right mind would continue to bulk bill all their patients if they received \$5 less for seeing patients who were not children or concession card holders.

Then I thought, maybe the safety net component of the present will have something in it for everyone, I listened intently. As I listened, my heart sank, it seems that the safety net had been bought from a \$2 shop. It looks great when you first open the present, but when you start playing with it, it tends to fall apart. The much vaunted safety net, is a safety net in name only. Firstly it takes ages to reach the threshold because costs incurred by the patient only include the difference between the Medicare rebate (85% of the scheduled fee) and the government recommended fee - the scheduled fee. As most doctors who don't bulk bill charge more than the scheduled fee, it will take patients most of the year to reach the out of pocket expense levels nominated by the government.

Forget about it I said to myself, it's Christmas, we should be charitable to wise men who bear us gifts. Lets pretend we reach the Holy Grail, what does it all mean Virginia? Well, it may mean that the government will only pay 80% of the costs incurred by the patient, covering the gap between the rebate and the scheduled fee. In that case, it's not a safety net. As the Federal Government does not have the constitutional power to force doctors to charge a particular fee and as most doctors who don't bulk bill charge more than the scheduled fee, patients will only be reimbursed for a small fraction of their out of hospital medical costs.

It's Christmas, there must be something in that glittering MedicarePlus package for someone. Eureka!! I have it. The costs incurred by patients are not limited to the scheduled (government recommended) fee, it's open slather. Father Christmas Abbott and his offsider the good elf Johnny Howard will pick up 80% of the tab for any fee I care to charge a patient for my services. I can double, triple my fees and the patient who has reached the government threshold receives 80% of the fee back. I could offer them a 20% discount if they pay up front and they get it all back from the Government. I can feel that sea change coming on. I've been given a key to the treasury.

Bugger!! Just as I was about to organise a few overseas trips and buy a few beachside properties, Consumer Affairs dressed as the Australian Democrats and the Independents turned up, they wrestled the MedicarePlus package from Santa Abbott and the good elf John Howard, telling them they're guilty of false advertising and that it's not fit for human consumption. At this point I woke up slumped across an unfinished medical report, those bloody aliens they've been playing with my grey and white matter again.

Dr. Joseph TOSCANO / Joint National Convenor Defend and Extend Medicare Australia

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SUBMISSION C

DIFFERENTIAL REBATE SPELLS THE END OF UNIVERSAL BULK BILLING

The introduction of a differential Medicare rebate between concession card holders, children under sixteen and other Australians, on the 1st of February 2004, by the Howard government, marks the end of Medicare as a universal health care system.

The idea that access to the health care delivery system was a right enjoyed by all Australians irrespective of how much they earned, where they lived and the severity and type of health problems they had, has been destroyed by the introduction of a differential rebate.

What has been trumpeted by Abbott as an innovative initiative that will stop the decline of bulk billing rates and possibly increase them, will have a diametrically opposite effect. A five dollar increase in the fee paid to a general practitioner who bulk bills concession card holders and children under sixteen, will not increase bulk billing rates for children under 16 and concession card holders and will lead to the abandonment of bulk billing for all other patients by doctors who currently bulk bill all their patients.

No doctor in their right mind would accept a rebate of thirty dollars from the government for seeing concession card holders and children under sixteen and a rebate of twenty five dollars for providing the same service to their other patients. The main aim of the introduction of differential rebates is to force those doctors who bulk bill all their patients to stop bulk billing and charge up front fees for their patients who are not concession card holders, or children.

Those doctors who have never or no longer bulk bill will not be tempted to change their billing arrangements as a result of the differential rebate. They already charge much more than the government scheduled fee (recommended fee) and would be reluctant to take a wage cut and bulk bill concession card holders and children under sixteen.

The introduction of a differential rebate by the Howard government in their disingenuously named Medicare Plus package has succeeded in creating a two tier health system where those who have the resources, have access to the best health care money can buy and the rest will have to make do with second best. Access to health care is no longer a right, it has become a luxury that many will have difficulty accessing.

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SUBMISSION D

IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE MESSAGE, SHOOT THE MESSENGER

The extra-ordinary attack that's being launched against Defend and Extend Medicare- Australia, in Melbourne's Herald Sun (5&6/12) indicates that our campaign is hurting the Federal Government's plans to destroy Medicare.

The article included many statements that were factually incorrect. They also made a number of allegations that could land both the Herald Sun and Tony Abbott in court. Tony Abbott the Federal Health Minister, has badly miscalculated by airing these allegations outside coward's castle (parliament).

The Herald Sun's editorial team and reporters that put together these articles could find that their boss, Rupert Murdoch may not be too happy about helping to finance the retirement plans of many of the activists mentioned in the article. Over the next few months it's likely that the courts and the Australian press council could be dealing with this matter.

Considering how the information for the articles was collected and the implications this has for civil liberties in this country, we may even see the matter taken up by a senate select committee. The federal government is very concerned that Defend and Extend Medicare has been able to put together a coalition of radicals, conservatives, the political and the apolitical in the same organisation. We have been able to apply enough political pressure on the Australian Democrats and the independents in Federal parliament to temporarily stop them passing Abbott's much vaunted Medicare minus package.

Our analysis of the issues have hurt the government because they have shown that their package will kill off Medicare and that their safety net proposals are totally flawed.

The coalition's ideological agenda has been exposed for what it is, an extremist proposal that will increase healthcare costs for the community and the individual while decreasing people's access to the public health care sector. This government's health agenda is totally bankrupt, Abbott is not up to the task, he does not have the experience or temperament to deal with the complex health portfolio. The job is beyond him! He should resign from the portfolio.

Questions need to be raised about the relationship between the Herald Sun and the government and the use of intelligence agencies by the government to harass activists and criminalise legitimate legal political activity. Reading these articles it seems that anybody who organises against any government initiative is a criminal and an undesirable. The incestuous relationship between the Federal government, the Herald Sun and the countries intelligence agencies has been exposed in the Herald Sun's pages.

The Herald sun claims they have interviewed an intelligence officer and have used material provided by Tony

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Abbott's office and their interviews with the government's intelligence arm to write their stories about the Defend and Extend Medicare. Who authorised and organised the interview with the intelligence officers. Who organised and approved the surveillance of Defend and Extend Medicare? It seems that the Herald Sun, a private corporation is acting on instructions that have been passed on to it by Abbott's office. It looks like Abbott's office has organised for intelligence officers to brief the Herald Sun about files held by this countries intelligence agencies about individuals in Defend and Extend Medicare - Australia.

Abbott's behaviour makes him unfit to hold the office of Health Minister. The Federal government knows it's health policies are on the nose and that it needs to create a diversion in the public mind by targeting Defend and Extend Medicare – Australia.

Membership to Defend and Extend Medicare is extended to anyone who believes access to healthcare should be a right not a charity or a luxury. The group hopes to establish a group in each of Australia's 150 Federal electorates. We are non-party political have members from all political walks of life and do not ask people for their political affiliations when they join.

Each Federal electorate based group is autonomous and responsible for organising its own campaigns. Each group sends a delegate to a delegates meeting. Delegates co-ordinate local, state, regional and Federal actions. The group does not care which political party maintains and extends Medicare. As long as access to universal health care is maintained and extended to other sectors of the health care delivery system - dentistry, physiotherapy, podiatry, psychological services etc., we're happy.

The attack in the Herald Sun strengthens our resolve to continue and extend the campaign. The government is hurting, the opposition, Independents, the Democrats and the Greens are being forced by the level of the current debate to re-assess their health care policies. Access to health care is an issue that effect's all Australians, it's every bodies business. The extremists in the Federal government must not be allowed to hijack this debate and use it to drive their ideological agenda.

We encourage people across the country to form Defend and Extend Medicare groups in each Federal electorate. We encourage you to participate in the debate. We encourage you to organise your own meetings, rallies and marches to keep this topic fresh in the public's mind. We encourage you to attend the next Defend and Extend Medicare rally at midday on Saturday the 13th December outside the State Library of Victoria (Corner Swanston and Latrobe Streets, Melbourne). If you're not willing to organise and fight to ensure access to health care, is a right, not a charity, or a luxury you will find that Australians will soon be saddled by a two tier American style health care system where the rich will have access to the best health care money can buy while the rest will have to make do with second best.

Together we can overcome any attack. The Howard government has run out of ideas, it's health care policies are bankrupt, it continually lies to Australians. Abbott is not up to the demands of the health care portfolio, his appointment by Howard has done incalculable damage to the health care delivery system in this country. He must resign today.

POST SCRIPT

The Herald Sun claims that it allowed the activists attacked in the articles on the 5th and 6th of December the opportunity to respond to these attacks in an article published on the 8th of December.

This is a lie, the material that was used about the Joint National Convenors, Dr. Joseph Toscano and Mr. Brendon Bride was obtained from interviews that were conducted four weeks ago. Defend and Extend Medicare – Australia has never been given the opportunity to respond to the articles that were published on the 5th and 6th of December.

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SUBMISSION E

ADVOCATING UNIVERSAL HEALTH CARE NOW A CRIME

The Federal government is so concerned about the influence that Defend and Extend Medicare – Australia is having on the health care debate, it's launched an investigation into its membership and office holders. After spending hundreds of thousands of dollars investigating the group and setting the countries intelligence agencies on the group, it has come up with virtually nothing. Abbott's office passed on files on group members and supporters to the Herald Sun. It also organized for the Herald Sun to have direct access to intelligence officers who conducted the investigation and continue to monitor the group's activity.

What has occurred has extraordinary implications for civil liberties in this country. The Howard government is directly using the conservative media in this country to criminalize legitimate legal protest activity. It is now a crime in Australia to advocate access to universal health care. Abbott's decision to release dossiers on Australian citizens and give the Herald Sun access to intelligence officers is also possibly illegal. The ramifications this has for anybody involved in legitimate political protest are enormous.

Considering the amount of time, money and effort Abbott's office spent and continues to spend monitoring the group, the amount of information they have gleaned is pathetic. Of the fourteen Federal electorate based groups that have been currently established, they have found that the delegate for Isaac Stephen Reghenzani is an anarchist. Two members of the Melbourne group, Stephen Jolly and Jason Hallaidis are members of the Socialist Party and one of the three joint national convenors, Dr. Joseph Toscano is Spokesperson for the Anarchist Media Institute.

They found no evidence of any illegal or violent behaviour by the group. Considering the Herald Sun's "shock horror" reaction to Dr. Joseph Toscano's participation in the group, it's ironic that he has had over thirty letters published in the Herald Sun letters page over the past three to four years, as spokesperson for the Anarchist Media Institute – so much for their mock "shock horror".

The Defend and Extend Medicare – Australia federal electorate based groups are full of hundreds of community activists, the political and the apolitical as well as radicals and conservatives. This is a genuine broad coalition of people who are concerned about the Howard government's attempts to murder Medicare. Abbott and Howard have good reason to fear Defend and Extend Medicare – Australia, that's why they are attempting to destroy the organisation. We call on all Australians who are concerned about the fate of Medicare to establish and join Federal electorate based Defend and Extend Medicare groups around the country.

Join us at our 4th rally to protest about the Howard government's attempts to kill off this countries universal health care system. Join us for a picnic/rally at midday on Saturday the 13th of December outside the State Library of Victoria at the corner of Swanston and LaTrobe St, Melbourne.

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