

Victorian Medicare Action Group

Bulletin #3

www.vmag.org.au

May 2003

BULK BILLING WHO HAS THE ANSWER - LABOR OR LIBERAL

In the last Bulletin of the Victorian Medicare Action Group we spent sometime analysing the Federal Liberal/National Government's proposal in respect of Medicare. The coalition parties' policy for access to GP services is one of user pays, with a safety net system for the health care card holding 'disadvantaged'. The goal of this policy is for those without health care cards to pay the upfront fee the GP charges. We concluded that it would clearly lead us down a two tiered U.S. style health care system.

The Labor Party's proposal announced this month by Federal Opposition Leader, Simon Crean provides a clear alternative. It is a proposal to dramatically increase rates of bulk billing. The Labor Party policy is that tax payer funded health care should be provided with no cost at the point of delivery of the services for all Australians regardless of where they live or their level of income. The community now clearly has a choice between two quite contrasting policies that point to fundamental issues of our beliefs and values.

NEW BEGINNING FOR MEDICARE!

In comparing the two positions one of the most positive aspects of the Labor Party's proposal is that it sends a signal to GP's that if they increase their bulk billing rates they will have strong support from the government. This is very much in line with the policy position of the Victorian Medicare Action Group.

The key aspects of the Labor party package are that the Medicare rebate for each GP consultation will be increased by an average of \$3.35 in year 1. This will be increased to \$4.40 and then \$5.00 in the following two years.

The Labor policy then builds on this by setting targets for bulk billing rates throughout Australia.

GP's in a Capital City who reach the bulk billing target of 80% will receive a bonus of \$7,500, in the outer suburbs the target will be 75% for a bonus of \$15,000 and in a rural or remote area the target will be 80% for a bonus of \$22,500. This extra payment will mean GP's will receive potentially an extra \$26,000 per year in the city, an extra \$32,500 in the suburbs, and an extra \$39,000 in the country.

Labor policy is in contrast to the Liberal part's package which would see remote area doctors receive a \$6.30 incentive, rural doctor's \$5.30 incentive, outer metro doctor's \$2.95 incentive and city doctors a \$1 incentive per client bulk billed. But those who are bulk billed would be principally pensioners and health card holders. This would create a welfare health system for the very poor and unaffordable health system for the large group of people in the middle, those who do not have access to the welfare system by virtue of not having a health care card. The cost to this group would continue to increase as the cost of running a practise failed to keep pace with the increase in the basic rebate.

On the other hand the Labor party has presented a policy which means that the tax payer would 'foot the bill' for the vast majority of GP consultations resulting in improved access to basic GP services for all Australians.

PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE?

VMAG continues to express concern about the \$2.5 billion the current government is spending subsidising private hospital insurance through the 30% rebate and their new policy to extend this bad policy to GP services. Labor has been silent on this to date.



INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- Consumer Stories
- Bulk Billing Rates by Electorates
- VMAG Website
- Public Meetings
- Senate & Victorian Medicare Inquiries

SENATE & VICTORIAN GOVTS INQUIRIES INTO MEDICARE

Federal Government Senate and the Victorian State Government have announced inquiries into Medicare. VMAG plans to make submissions to both these inquiries. The Senate is currently receiving submissions. It would be useful to hear from Members on any issues that you believe should be covered in our submission. VMAG would also encourage all Members to make their own submissions to the inquiry. These submissions do not have to be long and it would be good for the Senate to hear the voice of consumers through this process. We would therefore encourage all Members to send their submissions to medicare.sen@aph.gov.au with a copy to the VMAG. Submissions are the Committee's documents and are made public only after a decision by the Committee. Following consideration of the Submissions the Senate Committee will hold public hearings. The Committee will look at all Submissions and may invite individuals and organisations to give evidence at the Public Hearings.

THE COMMITTEE CAN BE
LOCATED ON THE INTERNET AT :
<http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/wit>

We will let you know about the Victorian Government Review when we have the information.

WHERE TO FOR VMAG

The Victorian Medicare Action Group will be continuing to involve itself in its three key strategic areas of community awareness, local community development and advocacy. This will mean that we will be taking every opportunity to inform consumers about the pros and cons of both the Coalition and Labor packages in an attempt to have an informed community debate about the options that are being proposed. The Victorian Medicare Action Group will continue to provide material to its growing number of Members. We hope you will distribute this more broadly within your community and that you will be able to use it to both educate those within your own networks and advocate in relation to these issues.

NEW VMAG WEB SITE

www.vmag.org.au

The VMAG website was put together at no cost by a Member. Thanks.

CONSUMERS STORIES

VMAG has been receiving many stories from Members and other interested people. Many of these have come from country Victoria. Some of the stories include the following: Tell us your consumer story. Email mmurray@iechs.org.au

A mother with three children in a large country town in Victoria can not afford to access a GP for herself and three children when they all have the flu. The total cost would be \$160 plus pharmaceuticals.

A person attending a GP practice in a country town owes the GP money and is scared to re attend the GP. Welfare agency intervenes to assist the person get a GP service.

Parents with a child with a severe mental illness require a GP visit in the middle of the night. Locum is unable to attend for several hours and if they do attend will cost \$140. Only alternative is to visit the emergency department of a hospital.

A daughter desperately tries to arrange a GP to visit her father in an outer urban aged care facility. After ringing 25 GP's one finally agrees to visit at a cost of \$160.

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS OF HOSPITALS FLOODED WITH G.P. PATIENTS

Recent figures from the State Government indicate that emergency departments of hospitals are being flooded with patients who could have been seen in GP practices.

This has occurred despite the State Government pouring millions of dollars into hospital demand management strategies. VMAG recently met with the Minister of Health Bronwyn Pike who reiterated her concern at the dramatic increase in the number of patients now being seen in the emergency departments of hospitals who could have been seen in a GP practices or in other primary health care settings. The Minister in the recent budget announced \$5m for the development of GP practises within hospitals.



Bulk-billing Declines Further

The most recent data available for March indicates a further decline in Bulk Billing rates to 68.5% across Australia. This is a decline of 1.1% points and a decline of 12% in the last 8 years. VMAG will make the Breakdown of these figures available by Electorate as soon as the Health Insurance Commission releases them. (Source Health Insurance Commission)

Victorian Liberal Party Electorates

Electorate	Bulk Billing Rates		Out of Pocket Expenses		Member
	Sept 02	Dec 02	Sept 02	Dec 02	
Indi	30.93%	29.70%	\$10.32	\$10.50	Sophie Panopoulos - Wangaratta
Casey	67.0%	63.90%	\$13.88	\$13.85	Tony Smith – Croydon
Murray	32.30%	30.90%	\$13.02	\$13.16	Dr Sharman Stone – Shepparton
Menzies	73.92%	72.20%	\$15.54	\$15.05	Kevin Andrews – Doncaster
McEwen	65.80%	63.20%	\$12.04	\$12.01	Fran Bailey – Healesville
Deakin	73.28%	68%	\$14.79	\$14.08	Phillip Barresi – Mitcham
Dunkley	48.69%	49%	\$12.17	\$12.45	Bruce Billson – Frankston
La Trobe	65.31%	63%	\$14.18	\$14.81	Bob Charles – Boronia
Higgins	63.65%	63.40%	\$17.29	\$17.37	Peter Costello – Armadale
Kooyong	61.56%	61.70%	\$17.23	\$17.25	Petro Georgiou – Camberwell
Wannon	50.62%	46.20%	\$10.69	\$10.44	David Hawker – Hamilton
Flinders	50.38%	47.80%	\$10.84	\$11.22	Greg Hunt – Hastings
Goldstein	60.71%	58%	\$16.09	\$16.20	David Kemp – Bentleigh
Corangamite	42.89%	42.20%	\$11.97	\$12.16	Stewart McArthur – Belmont
Aston	77.27%	74.30%	\$14.48	\$14.50	Chris Pearce – Wantirna

SAVE MEDICARE CAMPAIGN BADGES / MEDICARE STICKERS

Many groups are now developing promotional material some of this can be obtained by contacting:

Stephanie Neumann
Email: sneumann@actu.asn.au
Tel: 9664 7321

MEDICARE PUBLIC MEETINGS

Wednesday 11th June 6.30pm
Lecture Theatre Old Chemistry Building
SMB Lydiard Street, Sth Ballarat

Wednesday 11th June 7.00pm
Supper Room 7pm Geelong West Town Hall

Friday 20th June 7.00pm
Darebin City Council, City Hall, 274 Gower St
Preston

Victorian Federal Labor Party Electorates

Electorate	Bulk Billing Rates		Out of Pocket Expenses		Member
	Sept 02	Dec 02	Sept 02	Dec 02	
Ballarat	57.10%	52.80%	\$11.10	\$11.11	Catherine King – Ballarat
Batman	86.21%	85%	\$12.49	\$12.52	Martin Ferguson – Preston
Bendigo	47.97%	48.90%	\$10.16	\$10.49	Stephen Gibbons – Bendigo
Bruce	77.15%	76.70%	\$14.22	\$14.42	Alan Griffin – Mulgrave
Burke	67.18%	59.80%	\$12.65	\$13.07	Brendan O'Connor – Kyneton
Calwell	85.64%	84.50%	\$13.60	\$12.94	Maria Vamvakinou – Broadmeadows
Chisholm	76.75%	75.40%	\$14.96	\$15.02	Anna Burke – Box Hill
Corio	59.34%	58.50%	\$11.22	\$11.31	Gavan O'Connor – Geelong
Gellibrand	88.20%	87.40%	\$12.82	\$12.90	Nicola Roxon – Footscray
Holt	77.00%	76.20%	\$11.44	\$11.65	Anthony Byrne – Dandenong
Hotham	79.96%	79.60%	\$12.23	\$12.36	Simon Crean – Clayton
Isaacs	70.20%	67.60%	\$11.68	\$11.77	Ann Corcoran – Cranbourne
Jagajaga	71.98%	71.50%	\$13.52	\$13.72	Jenny Macklin – Heidelberg
Lalor	82.04%	81%	\$11.02	\$11.83	Julia Gillard – Werribee
Maribyrnong	86.82%	66.70%	\$12.20	\$12.12	Bob Sercombe – East Keilor
McMillan	65.86%	85%	\$10.05	\$10.46	Christian Zahra – Moe
Melbourne	83.36%	81.90%	\$17.16	\$17.17	Lindsay Tanner – Carlton
Melbourne Ports	72.61%	72.20%	\$16.86	\$17.18	Michael Danby – St Kilda
Scullin	86.91%	87.30%	\$11.75	\$12.34	Harry Jenkins – Bundoora
Wills	83.51%	82.40%	\$12.35	\$12.26	Kelvin Thomson – Coburg

Source: Health Insurance Commission

HOW TO BECOME INVOLVED:

The Victorian Medicare Action group is a non-incorporated body that is open to anyone to join. You can register your interest and support by filling in the membership below and send to VMAG, 283 Church Street Richmond, or email mmurray@iechs.org.au or phone (03) 9429 1855

Becoming a Member of the VMAG will ensure you are provided with information about forthcoming meetings and action that is being planned. We encourage you to forward this information on to friends and colleagues.

VMAG – KEY MESSAGE

Effective health services are fundamental to the wellbeing and development of the community. We support a universal health care system that is funded from taxation revenue. We believe public health policy should be driven by what is in the public interest, not by private profit or political ideology. It is wrong to make the quality of healthcare services dependent on what you can pay. Medicare should guarantee access to essential health services, via hospitals and GP's for all Australians regardless of how much we earn or where we live.

VICTORIAN MEDICARE ACTION GROUP

Organisation/Individual.....

Donations To The VMAG

Postal Address.....

Can be Made By
Contacting: M Murray on
9429 1855

Phone:.....

Fax:.....

Email:.....