

Victorian Medicare Action Group

Press Release: (6th May, '04)

No gifts for sick Mother's on Mother's Day

Mother's Day is no better than any other day for mothers across Victoria who will try in vain to access health care services for themselves and their children this weekend, as affordable after-hours GP services continue to decline.

"Mother's Day, as with any other Sunday across Victoria, will see fewer GPs practicing," says Marilyn Beaumont, Executive Director of Women's Health Victoria and member of the Victorian Medicare Action Group*. "Of those GPs who will open their practices on Mother's Day, very few will offer affordable, bulk-billed services."

"For mothers who are in need of health care services for themselves or their families, the continuing decline of bulk-billing GP services will leave hundreds of mothers with no other alternative than to visit public hospital Emergency Departments," Ms Beaumont says.

"The Victorian Medicare Action Group has documented numerous reports from mothers who have been unable to afford GP services in their local areas, and have either had to go without, or search for care elsewhere. Many mothers often have to travel great distances in order to receive care".

Below are just three examples of mothers in these situations;

- Isobel is a mother suffering from severe, chronic illness. She receives a disability pension, and can no longer afford her local GP of many years because he charges a \$36 up-front fee. Now she must attend a GP in another town, which she can only do if she can find a neighbour to drive her.
- Kate was forced to take her sick baby daughter to a public hospital for a fever because there were no GPs available in her area on a Sunday. After waiting for many hours in the Emergency Department, her daughter was seen, but she was told that in future they would not see her daughter unless the condition was more serious.
- Tracey is a single mother of three children, each with considerable health care needs. Her family GP of 12 years has started charging a gap fee whenever she or her children attend. Due to the regularity of her family's GP attendances, Tracey has been forced to seek another GP practice which bulk-bills. This is almost 30 minutes drive away, and she and her children often must see a different GP with each visit.

"The Victorian Medicare Action Group views the lack of availability of affordable health care for mothers as a disgrace, be it on Mother's Day, or any other day of the year!" says Ms Beaumont. "I call on the Federal Government to fund bulk billing services for mothers immediately, in recognition of the invaluable contribution they make to Australia's future generations, every day."

For further information, or to speak to some of the Mothers whose stories appear above, please contact;

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* The Victorian Medicare Action Group comprises over 300 members from community groups, community health centres, local government, public health policy institutions and religious and welfare organisations throughout Victoria.