

Victorian Medicare Action Group

Press Release: (19th April, '04)

Hospital Emergency Departments to be swamped this Winter.

“As bulk billing rates begin to plummet across Victoria this winter, the number of people attending hospital emergency departments for winter-related ailments such as influenza and colds will escalate to a record high,” a Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry heard today.

The inquiry into the *Impact on the Victorian Community and Public Hospitals on the diminishing access to after hours and bulk billing General Practitioners* heard today that as bulk billing rates continue to decline throughout Victoria, and the number of GPs providing after hours services likewise, the extra demand upon them, which usually occurs with the onset of winter, will be felt in Victoria’s already strained public hospital system.

Mr Rod Wilson, the Convenor of the Victorian Medicare Action Group, which comprises over 300 members from community groups, community health centres, local government, public health policy institutions and religious and welfare organisations throughout Victoria, informed the Parliamentary Inquiry that in some urban areas less than half of GP consultations are bulk billed.

“People in country areas, such as Ballarat and Wangaratta, are even further disadvantaged,” Mr Wilson said.

“As people all over Victoria find themselves increasingly unable to afford rising up-front fees to see their GP, they are being forced to seek medical care in public hospital emergency departments. This limits the capacity of these institutions to deliver the necessary emergency care to which their limited resources are intended.”

Mr Wilson went on to inform the Parliamentary Inquiry that the Federal Government’s *MedicarePlus* package will not improve matters for most Victorians, who will still be out-of-pocket with each visit to the doctor, and who will find themselves more and more disempowered as the weather gets steadily cooler, and their health care needs increase.

The Victorian Medicare Action Group has urged the Parliamentary Inquiry to partition the Federal Government to reinstate Universal bulk billing through Medicare, so as to ensure that Victorian public hospitals have enough resources to respond to real, medical emergencies this winter, and to enable Victorians to access GPs in close proximity to where they live, when they need them.

For more information, please contact;

Rod Wilson.
Convenor,
Victorian Medicare Action Group.
Ph: 9429 1855
Mobile: 0419 313 239

