

Victorian Medicare Action Group

Press Release: (20th April, '04)

Consumers call for Government Action on Health Care Reform

Health Care Leaders throughout Australia are angry over Federal Government inaction

Health service consumers and leading public health policy advisors will take their frustration and anger to Canberra tomorrow for the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance Summit.

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, said that health service consumers are becoming increasingly disillusioned regarding their right to access high quality health care under Medicare, and are disappointed at the Federal Government's inaction in restoring affordable health care to all Australians.

"Since the last Australian Health Care Reform Summit in August, 2003, the Federal Government has done nothing to address the recommendations made, and as a result we continue to see a plethora of resources wasted by multiple Government bureaucracies," Mr Wilson said.

"Australian health service consumers will no longer stand for wasted health care dollars while they are unable to access GPs when they need them," Mr Wilson said. "The Victorian Medicare Action Group demands urgent action from the Federal Government to respond to the recommendations made by the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance, and to address the wasteful public health funding mechanisms which rely on both Federal and State Government commitment."

"Failure to address public health funding inadequacies will, this winter, see more and more children flooding hospital emergency departments, greater numbers of older persons unable to have a GP visit them in Nursing Homes, and increasing reports of low income earners unable to access adequate, timely health care services," adds Mr Wilson.

"The Victorian Medicare Action Group once again calls for the Federal Government, and in particular the Minister for Health and Ageing, Hon. Mr Tony Abbott, to meet with health service consumers to hear their concerns, and to discuss how the Government is attempting to meet their health care needs."

For more information, please contact;

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The Hon. Anthony Abbott,
Minister for Health and Ageing,
PO Box 450
Manly
NSW 2095

20th April, 2004.

Dear Mr. Abbott,

I am writing on behalf of The Victorian Medicare Action Group, which is a coalition of over three hundred health service consumers, community groups, church and welfare organisations, health care providers and local governments. Our organisation includes representation from the Health Issues Centre, the Victorian Council of Social Services, Women's Health Victoria, and the Doctors' Reform Society.

The Victorian Medicare Action Group again requests a meeting with you in order to express to you the concerns of health service consumers regarding their ability to access affordable, high quality health care.

The Victorian Medicare Action Group remains disappointed at your continued refusal to meet with us and to listen to the concerns of our members. Many health service consumers remain unconvinced that the Federal Government's *MedicarePlus* package will assist them to meet their health care needs, and express anger and frustration at the Federal Government's inaction regarding the recommendations of the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance Summit in August, 2003.

The current health care financing demarcation issues between the Commonwealth and State Governments result in unnecessary duplication of effort and resources through the maintenance of multiple bureaucracies. This system is economically irrational and irresponsible. The Federal Government must lead change in this area to prevent further wastage of public health dollars.

The Victorian Medicare Action Group therefore, for a fifth time, offers an opportunity for you to meet with us to discuss some of the concerns of our membership with a view to developing health policy reform that is acceptable to health service consumers.

Could you please indicate when you may be available to meet with us. We will contact your office directly to organise this.

Yours faithfully,

Rod Wilson
Convenor