



# INVESTING IN MEDICARE LOWERING OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS

*The Greens' plan for funding Medicare to keep bulk-billing rates high*

Our universal health care system is under pressure as rising out-of-pocket costs become a barrier to patients. This is leading Australia towards a two-tier American-style health system where some people get second rate care. The Greens will invest an extra \$660m in Medicare to keep costs down and ensure everyone can get the health care they need.

There is nothing more important than our health and the Australian Greens are committed to maintaining Australia's healthcare system. While the old parties are willing to make cuts to essential services like Medicare, the Greens are committing to increased spending on health.

## > FUNDING MEDICARE PROPERLY

The Greens will invest **\$664m in extra funding for Medicare** over the forward estimates. This money is a sorely-needed top-up to the health system that reverses cuts to Medicare made by Labor in the last budget and supported by the Coalition.

Our position is supported by the medical community including the Australian Medical Association. AMA President Steve Hambleton warned that "Families will have to pay more each time they visit their family doctor. The value of the Medicare rebate is dropping, making it harder for doctors to provide care and essentially hitting the hip pocket of patients."<sup>i</sup>

The Greens will shore up funding for Medicare so that doctors are adequately compensated and don't have to ask patients for a contribution.

## > RISING OUT-OF-POCKET COSTS

Medicare was designed as a universal, publicly funded system. That means everybody should have access to medical treatment no matter their means or situation.

A central pillar of Medicare is "bulk billing", where doctors treat patients in exchange for the rebate provided by the Government under Medicare, without charging extra to patients. For bulk billing to remain widely available to the

Australian public, Medicare must be funded at a level that allows doctors to operate their practices without extra income. Labor's cuts could push many doctors over the edge and lead them to start charging their patients a co-payment.

Health care costs are already rising in Australia and we have an obligation to keep our public health system accessible. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 19.3% of healthcare costs are now coming straight from the hip pocket of consumers.<sup>ii</sup> This is an average of \$1075 per person.<sup>iii</sup>

We know that cost deters people from seeking medical treatment.<sup>iv</sup> We need to invest in Medicare before this problem gets any worse.

## > MAKING HEALTH A PRIORITY

There is nothing more important than our health. The Greens' election platform, *Standing Up for What Matters*, lays out the Greens vision for a caring and prosperous Australia. A caring society means a greater investment in our health system.

The Greens' election platform will be fully costed by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office, and all spending will be balanced by revenue measures.

<sup>i</sup> <https://ama.com.au/media/ama-calls-proper-indexation-medicare-patient-rebates>

<sup>ii</sup> AIHW Health Expenditure 2010-2011

<sup>iii</sup> AIHW

<sup>iv</sup> ABS figures, cited by COAG Reform Council, 2012