

HANDS OFF MEDICARE!

We get sick & we vote!

FACT SHEET 2

Why is Medicare important?

Medicare is important because it is a strong expression of Australia's commitment to a "fair go" for all. It represents solidarity among Australians—between the well and the sick and between the well-off and poor. No one need to fear financial ruin because of ill health: we guarantee that to each other through Medicare. We all pay according to our ability to pay through our progressive taxation system.

In 1973 in South Australia, before Medicare's predecessor Medibank was introduced, the most common reason for imprisonment for debt was failure to pay medical bills. The less well off were often forced to seek charity from doctors, a humiliating experience that reinforced the power imbalance that already exists between doctor and patient. Hospitalisation could mean financial ruin for those who could not afford private health insurance. Only Queensland had established a free public hospital system.

Health and wealth are bound together. The wealthy are healthier than the poor. If you do not have good health your ability to work and to improve your financial status is compromised. A universal health system enables us all to maximise our health so we can be engaged in paid employment as well as meet our family, social and community responsibilities. Health is an enabler – it provides us all with opportunities.

With the rapid decline in bulk billing and significant increases in out of pocket health expense Australia is fast becoming a US "user pays" style health system. In the USA 30% of their citizens are either uninsured or under-insured. Over 43 million Americans who have no access to health cover and 8 out of 10 of these are workers and their dependents. Is this the sort of health system we want?

The maintenance and extension of a universal health system is a "core value" of the Australian society. Australians reject a US style health system as the "fend for yourself" approach does not sit well with our commitment to a fair go. Medicare is more than a universal health insurance scheme: it symbolises the type of society we want Australia to be. It is a concrete demonstration of mutual support and concern for fellow citizens when they are at their most vulnerable – when they are sick.



Speak out for the good of your health. Tell your friends how much Medicare means to you.



Let your Federal MP know how much you care! Visit www.aph.gov.au to find out your MP's contact details. Write a letter to your local newspaper.



For further information and campaign materials go to the QNU website (<http://www.qnu.org.au>) or contact the QNU on 07 3840 1444.



Join your union or community group to participate in the Hands Off Medicare campaign. To find out which union or community group you can join, visit www.qnu.org.au.



Produced by the Public Hospitals Health and Medicare Alliance of Queensland, c/- Queensland Nurses' Union (QNU) GPO Box 1289 Brisbane Q 4001. *PHHAMAQ* is a coalition of consumers, trade unions, community organisations and health service providers raising community awareness, encouraging debate and campaigning for quality public health services for all Australians. Authorised: G Hawksworth, 56 Boundary St, West End. June 2004.