

A Fair Australia

Health

Policy

ACTU CONGRESS 2003

A Better Health System

1. The Federal Government has overseen a reduction in the level and quality of health services provided to Australians and has placed Medicare and the public health system under strain. The subsidisation of private health insurance by taxpayers has failed to meet basic health goals.

Medicare and Health Funding

2. Medicare is a key component of the social wage. It is an efficient and equitable system of health delivery.
3. The ACTU will:
 - (a) oppose changes to Medicare which undermine universal access to health care services and campaign for continued support and expansion of Medicare to ensure that universality of the scheme is maintained and funded via the taxation system;
 - (b) campaign to ensure that bulk billing for general practitioner services is maintained and is available to all in our community;
 - (c) work towards the abolition of the 30% private health insurance rebate and the redirection of funds saved into the public health system;
 - (d) campaign for increased funding to public hospitals and public health services including the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme;
 - (e) recognise that the private sector is complementary to the public sector without diverting resources away from the public sector;

- (f) oppose the imposition of fees and charges for publicly funded health services at the point of service delivery;
- (g) campaign for the continuation of health services as a Government funded community responsibility and oppose user pays, co-payments; and
- (h) campaign for an expansion of the coverage of the Medicare scheme to include dental and other core health services.

A Healthier Community

- 4. A healthier community requires the provision of accessible, affordable and high quality health services that recognises those with special needs, and the barriers faced by indigenous Australians, individuals with cultural or language barriers, and people who live in rural and remote areas.
- 5. The ACTU will:
 - (a) support increased resources being applied to health promotion and prevention activities;
 - (b) campaign for the provision of equitable and accessible health services to rural and remote regions, indigenous Australians and those with cultural and language barriers;
 - (c) support Indigenous peoples rights to access culturally appropriate health services; and
 - (d) support properly resourced initiatives that encourage care in the community.

Mental Health

- 6. The World Health Organisation identifies mental health as the world's largest health issue. Those suffering from mental illness are some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable members of our community and should therefore be treated with the highest priority.
- 7. Research is now showing that one in five Australians will be affected by mental illness during their life time, it is also widely accepted that untreated mental illness is a leading contributor to Australia's increasing rate of suicide.

8. The ACTU notes that Australia's mental health system is in crisis and a 'Fair Australia' must seek to address this problem in society as a high priority.
9. The ACTU will advocate for:
 - (a) expanding Australia's mental health budget to comparable levels with Canada, the UK and New Zealand, by increasing it to at least 11% of the total health budget compared to Australia's current commitment of 6.5%;
 - (b) a responsive mental health service provided by an appropriate trained, skilled and qualified mental health workforce as a basic right;
 - (c) primary community support systems to complement clinical services;
 - (d) properly resourced support systems for carers; and
 - (e) community awareness and health promotion strategies to reduce stigma towards the mentally ill.

Health Workforce

10. Unions will seek to ensure equitable wages and fair working conditions for workers in the health care sector by:
 - (a) pursuing adequate funding and staffing of public hospitals by both Federal and State Governments;
 - (b) campaigning for minimum staffing levels, which are regulated and maintained to guarantee the safe provision of care;
 - (c) lobbying political parties and campaigning for a recruitment and retention plan that will address the serious staffing shortages;
 - (d) opposing the further privatisation, outsourcing or contracting out of public health services;
 - (e) pursuing parity in pay and working conditions for all workers within all sectors of the health industry within Australia;
 - (f) pursuing reasonable workloads to ensure the safe delivery of care;

- (g) pursuing reasonable hours of work and proper rostering systems to ensure that all workers in the health sector can fulfil their personal, family and professional objectives;
- (h) promoting industrially and through the Commission, a stable workforce of permanent full-time and part-time employees and to ensure that where casual labour is required, such workers receive wages and working conditions commensurate with permanent workers, plus a loading which acknowledges the casual nature of their employment;
- (i) continuing union involvement in education and training of workers in the health sector;
- (j) taking all possible action to improve workplace health and safety standards for all health workers;
- (k) campaigning for adequate funding for university and VET sector places to address the chronic shortage of workers in the health sector; and
- (l) campaigning to overturn the legislative restrictions to provider numbers, which unfairly restrict the ability of doctors to provide health services, and oppose the Federal Government policies which seek to unfairly conscript young doctors to geographical locations via bonded university scholarships.