

## Election 2022: some health reform inroads, but not enough

**MEDIA RELEASE: MONDAY 16 MAY 2022**

The major parties could do more to improve access to health care for all Australians with an ambitious, forward-looking overall plan for health reform, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

In the Consumers Health Forum's [Scorecard on the major Parties'](#) health policies, *Community health and wellness in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* - none of the three Parties have presented an overarching vision for the health system of the future, nor a plan for the structural changes needed.

CEO Ms Leanne Wells said that health consistently rates among the top issues in people's minds as we head into the Election.

"Overall, the pledges in health have been piecemeal and do not lay down a long-term plan for how our health system needs to adapt to 21<sup>st</sup> century needs," said Ms Wells.

"The exception is Labor's announcement of funding pledges to strengthen team-based primary care through general practice. This is a start to the major investment needed to implement all elements of the 10 Year Primary Health Care Plan launched by the Coalition in March.

"Health is more than hospitals - the welcome investment in community-based integrated care will yield happier patients and better outcomes, at lower cost," said Ms Wells.

"Providing enhanced coordinated care through a single location like a general practice is valued by consumers and will help meet the goal of keeping people well and out of hospital".

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Labor's 50 urgent care centres are a step in the right direction, but they need to integrate with other primary care reform implementation and existing services.

Labor has also shown interest in discussions about forming an Australian Health Consumer Leadership Academy – an important measure if we are to improve the way consumer advice and insights are systematically incorporated into policy and program development.

"As cost of living pressures bite, it has been encouraging to see both the Coalition and Labor commit to making prescription medicines cheaper for many Australians by cutting the PBS co-payment. Too many people are already missing out on medications because they are prioritising food and rent," said Ms Wells.

"The increases to income test limits for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card pledged by the Coalition and Labor will give more people access to prescription medicines and other health care services at concessional levels, but will not help those who most need it."

"COVID highlighted the critical workforce pressures in health care. All three major parties have made statements on workforce, but none have committed to a national health workforce agenda" she said.

"A burnt out and maldistributed health workforce presents risks to patient safety and quality, as well as health system sustainability."

"COVID also highlighted the importance of health system readiness for events such as pandemics. Labor and The Greens have supported establishing a National Centre for Disease Control and Prevention."

Measured against our Election platform, the Coalition produced a primary health care reform blueprint but failed to fund it, but fell behind in support for preventive health, developing consumer participation and addressing inequity.

Labor also shows strong support for primary care --- going one step further by pledging funding for down payments, and has some positive preventive health

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measures but scored less satisfactorily in our Platform 'asks' of consumer participation support, and addressing inequity and access.

The Greens fail to get across the issues in primary health, but they perform much better in their support for preventive health. They have fully backed making dental care more accessible with policy that reflects the staged inclusion of dental care under Medicare.

~ ENDS

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