

MyMedicare and Why You Should Register?

In the 2023 Federal Budget, the government announced some changes to Medicare to be rolled out from October 1st this year and over the next few years. The reasons for the changes were triggered by a crisis in the provision of general practice services in Australia that has left patients struggling to access the care they need.

What crisis and why ?

During the past 2 decades the Medicare rebate that the Federal Government provides patients for their primary health care in General Practice has not kept pace with inflation and the changing nature of health provision in our modern society. Health care advances have meant general practices have had to do more with less. For years practices have absorbed these costs to avoid placing the burden on patients, but it has reached a point where it is no longer viable due to:

- 7 years of Medicare rebate freezing
- The remainder the last 2 decades, the Medicare rebate has been indexed at half CPI.
- The same rebate in the last 25 years has had to fund newly introduced computerisation of practices and accreditation requirements which were never factored into the original Medicare formula.
- 185 Medical practices around Australia have closed just since the beginning of this year (including Mountain Medical) due to non-viability.
- As a result of this crisis in the financial viability of general practice, most Medical Graduates are avoiding a career in General Practice and choosing other specialties instead. To sustain the health system, Australia needs about 45% of Medical Graduates to choose General Practice. This is currently down to 13% with a projected shortfall of 10,000 GPs by 2030. As a result, it is going to be increasingly difficult to find doctors' appointments and there will be even longer queues at emergency departments and higher pressure on hospital beds.

My Medicare is a small step to try and improve this situation, though it is going to take a lot more on the part of governments to undo 25 years of neglect.

What are the first changes?

1/ Bulk Billing Incentive - From November 1st the bulk billing incentive to doctors will triple, but only for certain consultations and not for other services. Currently GPs receive a small fee of about \$6.50 if they bulk bill healthcare card holder, pensioners and children aged 15 and under - this will triple. While this on its own is not enough to sustain practices, it may halt the plummeting rates of bulk billing for concession card holders.

2/ Voluntary patient registration – From October 1st, patients may choose to register with their usual practice and doctor. This does not mean that they cannot see another practice if they choose to, or if travelling, but it means that they will then gain access to the option of longer telephone consultations and triple bulk billing incentive payments for longer video consultations.

In time the government is likely to link access to more services and funding to patient registration.

Why should patients register?

- To access a wider range of telehealth services
- To keep the doors of your local practice open so they don't become another casualty of the crisis.

- Because continuity of care is good for your health. Seeing the same doctor over years has been shown to reduce the need for hospital admission by up to 30%.

Ways to register for MyMedicare:

Online:

Via MyGov

<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/register-for-mymedicare>

[MyMedicare Registration form](#)

In Person: At your medical practice.

Dr Leeann Carr-Brown

