



# PRIME MINISTER

## MACQUARIE NETWORK WEEKLY BROADCAST

By the Prime Minister, The Rt Hon.

William McMahon, CH, MP.

### NATIONAL HEALTH

19 JULY, 1972.

Q. Prime Minister, you are critical of the Labor Party's National Health Scheme. Why?

PM. I can explain it fairly easily. Last week the Labor Party released an expensively produced pamphlet. It contained its own version of a National Health Scheme, and I believe it's a very revealing and cynical document. I make this accusation because this is an official Labor Party document and it is based on satire. It's main headline is borrowed from the title of a well-known satirical theatrical revue and it seems clear to me that the Opposition wants to treat this serious and vital question of national health as nothing more than a joke. Many Australians already know this flippant, unthinking approach is typical of the serious deficiencies of Labor's plan for health nationalisation. They know its policy is so shot through with contradictions that it amounts to deception. That's my view.

Q. Well Sir, that only deals with the pamphlet itself. Why do you criticise the Labor Party policy on national health?

PM. Well for a start, the Leader of the Opposition and his health expert can't agree. His own health expert has had to correct his Leader in public and to do so more than once. The Leader of the Opposition announced that families with a taxable income of less than \$1,700 a year would get free health insurance. Mr. Hayden announced his Leader's figures were out of date. That was nearly two months ago. The latest Labor pamphlet is still talking about free health insurance for those earning less than \$1,700 a year. Which one of them speaks for the Labor Party?

Q. That may be so Prime Minister, but where does the Government stand on free health insurance?

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- PM. Well, we already provide free health insurance to families with an income of less than \$2,578 a year. That means that under Labor's so-called plan to help the needy, a family at present receiving free insurance could immediately have to pay at least \$26 a year, and it would not be tax deductible.
- Q. Hasn't the Labor Party announced how it's paying for its Nationalised Health Scheme?
- PM. Yes, but you find the same chopping and changing here. At first it was a compulsory tax of 1.25 per cent of everybody's income. Last July it was lifted to 1.3 per cent. Now it is to be 1.35 per cent. No-one can be confident it will stop there.
- Q. What about hospital treatment?
- PM. Well the Leader of the Opposition tries to pretend his scheme will cover you in all hospital wards. His health expert had to contradict him again on this. Under Labor, the patient would be forced to pay all additional costs over and above public ward treatment, and the taxpayer will pay at least \$168 million more each year for the privilege. The present voluntary scheme allows you to insure in full for all hospital wards, intermediate and private as well.
- Q. Sir, there's frequent criticism that there are too many benefit organisations. How do you answer that?
- PM. That is another great Labor fallacy. They want to wipe out overnight 82 medical and 92 hospital organisations and they want to replace them with one big centralised government-run show. This idea was totally rejected by the experts we appointed to examine health insurance. It would cost millions to duplicate facilities all operating now at no cost to the taxpayer. Labor wants a complete takeover of all hospitals. Such a plan, I believe, and my experts believe, will inevitably collapse.
- Q. Would it be right to say then that the voluntary health insurance scheme is perfect?
- PM. No. The Liberal Party does not say the voluntary health insurance scheme is perfect. We do think it is the best that's available, because our policy is to put the interests of the patients first. The individual is of paramount importance to us, and we want to treat the patient as an individual human-being -- not a cog in a medical care machine. We believe Australians want a scheme which reflects their feelings, which treats them as people, not as computerised episodes of illness. We also believe the patient must be personally identified with a health scheme and have some personal responsibility.

We have attempted to do this by establishing the common fee system which provides for:

- . Eighty cents for a surgery visit;
- . One dollar twenty for a home visit;
- . and five dollars for any operation or specialist procedure.

We are now trying to improve this system. This year, Mr. Justice Mason recommended increases in the common fee in New South Wales and we accepted them for all states. The increases will not be paid by the patient but by the Government. We have a practical, working scheme. It's a pretty good one and we will improve it. Labor's policy, as you know, must destroy it!

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