



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER THE HON P.J KEATING MP,
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** PLEASE CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY **

Let me begin with a brief, real life story.

A little girl called Emily was born with a heart condition.

She had her first serious operation when she was only five weeks old. She recently had a second.

She's had the best of care. A top cardiologist, surgeon, and the best of nursing, medication twice a day.

Emily's parents were frightened - not only about Emily's welfare - but about how much her treatment would cost. They feared they would have to sell their home.

Had they lived in the United States possibly they would have.

Emily's parents knew that in the United States families are frequently crippled by medical expenses.

So, what did all of Emily's treatment cost? Apart from the heartache - nothing. Medicare paid for everything.

Emily's parents now know that Medicare has given Emily a life she might not have had.

They say Medicare is a life saver.

Every Australian can take comfort and pride in this.

There is no better system of health care in the world. It is fair as health care should be. Like illness and accident it does not discriminate between rich and poor. It shares the risk among us all. And it delivers health care of the highest quality.

Australia has one of the best public hospital systems in the world. And you won't find more dedicated GPs and community health workers anywhere.

Medicare is simple and fair. Every Australian has their own health insurance pre-paid under Medicare - it's the care you're entitled to.

Under Medicare, every Australian is entitled to access to hospital and GP services, and necessary medicines.

Under Medicare, Australians make 88 million visits to the GP every year. Seventy per cent are bulk billed.

There are nearly three million admissions to public hospitals.

And over 160 million prescriptions are delivered by our community pharmacists.

Medicare delivers high quality health care public and private.

Public hospitals like Monash Medical Centre in Melbourne, Westmead in Sydney, Royal Perth, Royal Adelaide - so many.

Under Medicare, some of our greatest hospitals - St Vincent's here in Sydney, the Mater and Wesley in Brisbane, the Mercy and Epworth in Melbourne, are private not-for-profit hospitals.

They are run by people concerned about the quality of health care.

Labor will continue to support our great hospitals - public and private. But we reject the American approach of handing over our health care to profiteers.

That's because Medicare is an acknowledgement that basic health care is something every Australian is entitled to.

Today we are here to celebrate Medicare's ninth birthday. It is the achievement of one of Labor's most cherished goals - fair and quality health care for all.

Because of Medicare, Australia has stability and security in health care.

These nine year old Australians helping us celebrate today have never known the uncertainty that Dr Hewson is threatening.

Most of you have probably forgotten, and these nine year olds have never known, that before Medicare, one of the most common reasons for being jailed for non-payment of debts was unpaid health bills.

Under Liberal governments in 1971 and 1981, two million Australians had no health insurance at all because they could not afford it.

In the United States, 37 million Americans have no health insurance and cannot gain access to health services.

Dr Hewson wants to take Australia back to the days of a two class health system - private care for those who can pay and public care for the rest.

It is ironic that Dr Hewson is proposing a US-style health system at a time when the US is looking to Australia and Medicare as a way of ending the US health nightmare.

Dr Hewson's health policy contains the same elements that are wreaking havoc in the US. He would replace public facilities with private services, have health charges dictated by doctors, and introduce tax rebates for health insurance.

It is no wonder the AMA is campaigning for Dr Hewson.

The AMA is looking forward to a billion dollar pay rise for about 40,000 doctors - courtesy of the Liberal's health policy.

All of this would drive up the cost of health care for each Australian and for the country as a whole.

The US spends twice as much per person on health care as we do in Australia - for less care.

Even cheap health insurance policies cost more than \$5,000.

Dr Hewson believes that health care should be subjected to market forces, as if ill-health and accident obeyed the same economic laws as the price of fish or tomatoes.

But there is clear evidence both here and overseas that the market does not work for health care.

Health is not like other goods. We never know what illness is going to cost or when an emergency or illness will strike.

We need to band together to share the risk. That is what Medicare enables us to do.

Dr Hewson will make you take out private health insurance - if the private insurer will accept you.

One little noticed area of concern in the Fightback health policy is that private insurance does not always cover people for pre-existing serious conditions - such as Multiple Sclerosis or cancer.

Under Dr Hewson such people would be penalised - through much higher medical charges, through tax penalties, and through refusal of insurance coverage.

Fightback could seriously penalise the chronically sick.

It is a case of your money or your health.

Dr Hewson will cut \$1.4 billion out of public hospitals.

This will force the States to close more than 10,000 public beds. 450,000 fewer people will be treated.

Dr Hewson will take that \$1.4 billion from public hospitals and hand it to doctors and private profit-making companies.

He will place profit before the interests of patients.

Under Dr Hewson, Australian families will pay \$20 a week more for health care.

The main reason some people are confused about the costs of hospital care is because private insurance funds, the AMA and private profit hospitals have generated uncertainty and fear.

They want people to be fearful - they have a vested interest.

They attack the Government for rewarding States which improve access to hospital services for public patients.

The Government has a duty to look after the well-being of the entire community; to maintain quality services for everyone.

These vested interests are looking after their profits.

Australians have every reason to feel proud and confident about Medicare.

Dr Hewson does not believe in Medicare.

He is going to make sure you can't afford to go to your GP. He is going to price sick people out of the market. That is his policy.

He will abolish bulk billing for all but cardholders. He will make you pay your bill upfront.

Dr Hewson wants to rip the heart out of our quality health care system.

Labor fought to introduce Medicare and we must protect it.

Through Medicare, we are committed to building on the strengths of our health system.

Labor recognises that the health needs of Australians are changing. Our population is ageing.

Hospital admissions will increase and there will be greater use of high technology procedures.

We want to ensure that our hospitals are equipped to cope with these changes.

That's why Labor is spending an additional \$1.6 billion to strengthen Medicare and its guarantee to every Australian of fair access to hospital services.

Dr Hewson will sacrifice the certainty and security of Medicare for the cost and uncertainty of a privately-run system.

He will dismantle Medicare. He will make every Australian pay more for their health care.

As Emily's parents now know, Medicare provides quality care and pays all your costs.

I want the people of Australian to know what they are entitled to under Medicare. As long as it exists no one should be fearful.

Thank you.