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## Labor urged to protect Medicare bulk-billing and oppose any rebate cuts

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association (NSWNMA), Save Medicare Sydney and the Doctors Reform Society have called on the Australian Labor Party to immediately commit to overturning the Abbott Government's 'Plan B' Medicare co-payment plans.

Next Monday (19 January), the Abbott Government's changes to standard GP consultation rebates will come into effect, after they were introduced via regulation without input from health or industry professionals.

The regulatory changes will cut \$20 from the Medicare rebate available to patients and bulk-billing GPs, which is expected to force many GPs to cease bulk-billing and will undermine universal access to healthcare in Australia.

Despite the drastic Medicare rebate changes due to come into effect next week, Acting General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Judith Kiejda, said the Labor Party was yet to reveal its stance on the issue.

"While the Abbott Government continues to take a back-of-the-axe approach to our Medicare system, we are collectively calling on Labor to commit to overturning these Medicare changes when federal Parliament resumes in February," Ms Kiejda.

"As the major political party that fought to establish our universal health insurance scheme, what is Labor going to do to protect it on behalf of hard working Australians?"

The NSWNMA, Save Medicare Sydney and the Doctors Reform Society have urged the Labor Party to publicly outline its position on all three elements of the Medicare changes.

"During 2014, Labor stood with Save Medicare campaigners and we defeated Abbott's 'Plan A' \$7 co-payment," said Jean Parker from Save Medicare Sydney.

"We are calling on them now to reject all three components of Abbott's 'Plan B' attacks on Medicare. The changes that come into effect next week will shift hundreds of millions of dollars in costs onto those who rely on Medicare bulk-billing the most – the poorest in our community.

"Abbott claims the rebate changes will stop 'six-minute medicine', but the real impact will be to make bulk-billing less viable for GPs.

"Next week's regulation changes are the first of three measures that the Abbott Government has designed to bring in an Americanised user-pays system by wiping out Medicare bulk-billing," continued Ms Parker.

The Doctors Reform Society, along with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Australian Medical Association, are deeply opposed to the consultation rebate changes.

“Already, we are hearing from doctors threatening to walk away from Medicare bulk-billing,” said National President of the Doctors Reform Society and GP, Dr Con Costa.

“When doctors stop bulk-billing as a result of these rebate changes, many patients will be around \$60 out of pocket for a common consultation.

“Many of our patients cannot afford these charges and some will simply with go without and could even die as a result.

“It is folly to keep people away from the low-cost end of the health system as Abbott’s changes will,” continued Dr Costa.

The NSWNMA, Save Medicare Sydney and the Doctors Reform Society have called on Labor MPs and Senators to support nurses and doctors throughout NSW and overturn the Abbott Government’s continued attacks on Medicare.

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