

New PM's focus on chronic illness an encouraging start

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The new Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has named chronic illness as one of his policy priorities in a notable comment welcomed by the Consumers Health Forum of Australia.

And it is good to see that the Morrison Government is keeping Greg Hunt as Health Minister to maintain continuity on health initiatives including reviews of the Medicare Benefits Schedule, reforms to primary care and out of pocket costs, and embedding My Health Record as a key feature of a modern health care system.

CHF looks forward to continuing to work with Mr Hunt to ensure that a strong consumer contribution is made as he shapes his thinking on policy development about issues that really matter to the community including primary health care, preventative health, future hospital funding and health insurance.

"Mr Morrison is to be congratulated for putting his finger on one of Australia's significant but often overlooked health issues," the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

"At his first media conference after winning the leadership, Mr Morrison, when asked about his priorities, said inter alia: "In healthcare, I am distressed by the challenge of chronic illness in this country, and those who suffer from it." He also mentioned affordable medicines, aged care, and Medicare as priorities.

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“There are grounds for thinking that this is more than a passing comment by Mr Morrison.

“Last October, as Treasurer, Mr Morrison cited the highly valid points made in the Productivity Commission report about the fragmented health system and poor communication between different parts of the system.

“As he said then this “veil of ignorance” where a doctor may not even be aware of significant health issues of their patient, can slow care, put the patient at risk and result in unnecessary procedures and costs leading to inadequate care and/or expensive unjustified treatments.

“A dramatic indication of the benefits of reform and the scale of the current inadequacies was the Commission estimate that the economic benefits from a health system reboot could be worth up to \$200 billion over the next 20 years.

“As Mr Morrison said then ‘healthy and happy people are naturally more productive people. They are far more likely to be out looking for a job, more likely to be free of welfare dependency and more likely to be earning high wages’.

“The Consumers Health Forum has long argued that health is an investment not a cost. What we need to focus on is shifting our investment to preventative health and integrated primary health care services in the community. It is about different not necessarily more and spending in wisely initiating the right mix of health services.

“The challenge of chronic illness Mr Morrison refers to can be more effectively countered by more comprehensive and coordinated services in the community provide close to home.

“We urge Mr Morrison and Mr Hunt to ensure the government builds on its Health Care Homes Programme and Primary Health Networks. These are Coalition-initiated schemes in need of more financial support and commitment from the Federal Government,” Ms Wells said.

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