



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**BILLS**

**National Health Amendment  
(Pharmaceutical Benefits) Bill 2014**

**Consideration in Detail**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 16 July 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 16 July 2014  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Zappia, Tony, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr ZAPPIA** (Makin) (17:13): The government can come into the chamber and gag the debate but it cannot hide what the National Health Amendment (Pharmaceutical Benefits) Bill does and it cannot hide from the Australian people, who know exactly what is going on. What is going on is that the government wants to increase the cost of health care across the country, and this bill is only one measure that goes towards increasing the costs of health care for people in Australia. The University of Sydney has done some modelling on all of this, and it will cost the average Australian family an additional \$200 a year as a result of the collective changes that this government is making to health expenditure. It is not just a matter of increasing the cost of medicines by \$5 for the average person and 80c for concession card holders—it is all the other changes that collectively make a difference.

If it were in isolation, you could perhaps argue a case where you needed to increase the fees—but this is not in isolation. I want to go to some of the other measures that the government is bringing in in order to change the cost of health care in this country and move us away from the universal healthcare system that we have to one where the user pays. Regrettably, the people who will pay the most will be Indigenous people, the elderly, the unemployed and low-income earners; the people who are struggling the most already. They will be hit not only by the additional health costs but also by a range of other measures, relating to social welfare payments, that the government also wants to impose on them. The additional pharmaceutical costs will come on top of the \$7 GP payment that families and individuals will incur every time they go to a doctor. And every time they go to the doctor, there is every chance they will come out with a prescription. There is every chance they will come out with an X-ray notice or a pathology notice—which means another \$7, on top of another \$7, and then \$5 for the medicine on top of that. And if you have a family, then you multiply that over and over again.

Then we have an additional cut of \$600-odd million to the nation's dental programs by this government. When you cut dental costs, again, you indirectly affect the health of individuals. And that, in turn, means that there are other costs which inevitably arise from the poor health associated with people not looking after their teeth because they simply cannot afford to. Ultimately, it becomes another example of a false saving: you save a few dollars up-front, but you pay for it in the long run.

I want to go to an additional matter relating to the cuts which this government is making in respect of health support around Australia—that is, the \$16-a-day supplementary payment made to residential homes for the patients that live in those homes. If someone within a residential care facility has dementia, and is currently getting \$16 a day, and they have that \$16 cut, it is not just \$16 a day—it amounts to \$5,800 a year of additional costs that that family is now expected to fork out. I can assure members of this House that this is a real cost. A member of my community whose wife is in a residential care facility came to see me. He said: "The \$16-per-day payment has been cut—where am I going to find, as a pensioner, another \$6,000 a year, on top of all the other costs that I am being asked to look for, in order to take care of my wife and myself?"

Members opposite—and I note that they did not particularly come in to support this legislation—know in their hearts that the changes and the cuts being made by this government to the health services of this country are going to cost families dearly. They know that the cuts are unwarranted. They also know that there was no announcement of these cuts in the election campaign in September last year. They also know—even though they come into the chamber and deny it—that families are hurting, and that families are very angry about the changes that the government wants to impose with respect to health costs around the country.

This is part of an overall strategy of a government which wants to change the system from the one we currently have—where we have universal health care—to one where individual families pay for it. Australian families are awake to that. No amount of running away from the debate on this bill in this chamber and no amount of members opposite not wanting to talk about it—and no amount of the minister saying that this is about trying to have a sustainable health system—will take away the truth that this is nothing more than an attack on the vulnerable people of Australia.