



Sharon Grierson MP
Federal Member for Newcastle

15 February 2005

BEHIND THE BULK BILLING FIGURES: GOVERNMENT FAILING PATIENTS

Sharon Grierson, Member for Newcastle, has today warned that the bulk billing figures released last week are masking an ongoing crisis in health care funding by the Howard Government.

While the bulk billing rate in Newcastle increased 3.9% between 2003 and 2004, this is only a tiny increase compared to the overall drop in bulk billing of 18.9% between 2000 and 2004.

"The Howard Government has not made any long-term structural investment in Medicare," Ms Grierson said. "The small increase we have seen has flowed from the short-term election year patch-up job introduced last year."

Indeed, bulk billing nationwide is still lower than it was in 1996 when the Howard Government came to office and Australians had a national bulk billing rate of over 80 per cent. On the latest figures, the national bulk billing rate is currently languishing at 70.9%.

For those who are still missing out on being bulk billed, the cost of going to the doctor is continuing to soar. The new figures show a 5.2% increase in out of pocket costs in 2004. Since 1996, out of pocket costs have increased by 60.5% from \$8.89 to \$14.27 in 2004.

"Another area of concern, particularly in Newcastle, is the Howard Government's refusal to invest in the development of an adequate medical workforce," Ms Grierson said. "Yet another bulk billing surgery in Newcastle is being forced to shut its doors this week, and patients will again struggle to find a GP who is taking on new patients, let alone one who bulk bills."

"The Howard Government must end its policy of quick fix solutions and instead focus on real and long terms solutions to health funding and delivery in Newcastle and around Australia.

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