

National Healthcare Alliance

Breaking down the barriers to information exchange, and promoting
a positive environment for health systems reform in Australia

1 December 2003

The Hon Peter Costello MP
Treasurer
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Treasurer

When you released the Intergenerational Report, you indicated that its main purpose was to trigger constructive reconsideration of how Australia would cope with demographic ageing, in particular the health and economic aspects of that challenge. In response, the National Healthcare Alliance was established, with the aim of engaging constructively with that challenge.

Whilst disagreeing strongly with the approach to the IGR, and believing that a cost rather than investment orientation is a recipe for failure in meeting that challenge, we decided that to criticise without constructive suggestions was of limited value to Australia.

Accordingly we embarked on an extensive process of constructive engagement with the issues, including many interviews and discussion groups, the conduct of a national symposium using Value Management techniques, and the commissioning of a model that would articulate the understanding of our member organisations and other stakeholders. Our aim was to provide a solid basis for constructive discussion of how to thrive as a society with an ageing demographic. We sought to frame our views in the language of policy makers, rather than in the language of health professionals, to assist in this dialogue.

We have, Mr Costello, taken up your invitation to deal constructively and creatively with the issues, and to find ways that will allow Australians to continue to enjoy a high standard of living with an older workforce.

We would like to move into the constructive dialogue that you invited, and the attached Budget Strategy submission is intended to form the basis for this. We are seeking:

a . an opportunity for representatives of the National Healthcare Alliance to meet with you in February, to agree a process for progressing these issues in the positive spirit that you have invited, and that the Alliance is keen to maintain;

b . an investment focus to be applied to the consideration of the health budget submissions that have been made by Alliance participants, in line with the arguments in this submission;

c . adequate resources to be allocated to allow the establishment of a Joint Working Party to pursue the Health Reform Agenda in a collaborative manner that constructively blends the understanding of government, and the understanding of health service providers and consumers, of the health system and the needs of Australians.

Whilst everyone appreciates the need for short term fixes to problems as they emerge, it is the view of the National Healthcare Alliance that a series of such fixes will not be effective in meeting the dual economic and social challenges highlighted by the Intergenerational Report. Health is a complex system, and can only be managed effectively by an integrated approach to strategy formulation and service delivery. We are keen to work with the government to achieve this, for it is in interests of us all to have a healthy and robust economy, made possible by a healthy and robust community.

Yours Faithfully

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National Healthcare Alliance Members

- Association of Independent Retirees
- Australian Association of Pathology Practices
- Diagnostic Imaging Association
- Pharmacy Guild of Australia
- Australian Division of General Practice
- Australian Healthcare Association
- Australian Medical Association
- Australian Nursing Federation
- Australian Physiotherapy Association
- Carers Australia
- Catholic Health Australia
- National Rural Health Alliance
- Optometrists Association Australia
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- Rural Doctors Association