

Shorten government would end freeze on Medicare rebates

Written by The Conversation USA

A Labor government would restore the indexation of the Medicare Benefits Schedule from January, at a cost of \$2.4 billion over the forward estimates.

The ending of the freeze on rebates would apply to all services provided by GPs, allied health and other health practitioners, and specialists. Over the decade to 2026-27 the cost would be \$12.2 billion.

Big spending education and health plans will form the core of Labor's appeal to voters – these are traditionally strong areas for the ALP.

In this month's budget the government extended the existing freeze – begun by the Labor government and extended by the Abbott one - for another two years to 2020, saving \$925 million over the forward estimates but prompting a campaign by the Australian Medical Association which started at the weekend.

Opposition Leader Bill Shorten and health spokeswoman Catherine King said Malcolm Turnbull and the Liberals "have made no secret they want us all to pay more to see the doctor and the indexation freeze will ensure this happens".

They said doctors had confirmed that "the extension of the GP tax by stealth in Mr Turnbull's budget will be the tipping point to make bulk billing unviable for many practices". Existing co-payments would be increased, they said. "Everyone will pay more and the sickest, the poorest and those in rural areas will be hit hardest."

They said AMA president Brian Fowler estimated that this would likely cost patients up to \$20 more for each GP visit.

The costing of the Labor initiative has been done by the Parliamentary Budget Office. Labor says it would be funded through savings announced including not proceeding with the baby bonus, capping vocational education loans and not going ahead with the tax cut for

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multinational companies.

Labor action on the freeze was flagged by Shorten during last Friday's people's forum.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond the academic appointment above.

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