



Health funds committed to providing financial relief for members impacted by COVID 19

Australia's health funds are doing everything possible to ease financial pressure on their members and continue to provide essential health services including critical dental care, during the COVID 19 pandemic.

Private Healthcare Australia Chief Executive Dr Rachel David announced today health funds would be introducing measures that provide financial relief to members in light of the crisis.

"Some funds will target financial relief to those most in need because they have lost their jobs, are underemployed or have contracted the virus, and at least one has chosen to waive the April 1 premium increase. Every health fund is going to extraordinary lengths to offer financial relief to their members and the measures being introduced will be at least equivalent to reversing this year's rate increase," said Dr David.

"This is an extremely difficult and stressful time for all Australians. We recognise that Australians are losing their jobs and we have an important role to play in the very difficult and uncertain time ahead. Health funds have given a commitment that any funds resulting from the cancellation of elective surgery and some allied health services will be returned to members.

"Like many industries we are doing everything in our power to support our members and the broader community. Health funds are employing additional staff and scaling up numbers in call centres to manage the increasing number of inquiries from members, and provide telehealth services. It is also critical that businesses, whenever possible, keep staff in employment during this period.

"The environment is changing rapidly and we are committed to responding to the needs of Australians as quickly and as effectively as possible. Healthcare in Australia is highly regulated, and some rules need to bend in the short term while we get through this crisis. We are grateful for the support of the Australian Government in moving quickly to address regulatory issues to make sure we can get through this together and continue to serve our members.

This is the list of measures being considered so far:

- Every single hospital policy – from Basic to Gold – will include full coverage for hospital costs for people affected by COVID-19
- People experiencing financial hardship as a result of the crisis will be able to access relief from premium costs – contact your health fund
- Health funds are covering telehealth services from psychologists from Monday 30 March



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- Health funds will cover telehealth services from other allied health professions where practical and clinically appropriate. Funding for tele-physiotherapy services has already been announced, with more announcements concerning additional professions to be made in the coming days.
- Health funds will continue to provide access to and reimburse emergency dental services and will direct members needing access appropriately.
- We are putting in place special arrangements to allow more hospital in the home services and more remote access services for our members at particular risk [subject to government approval]

“Australian health funds will be regularly reassessing their financial position in coming months to provide as much support as possible to members. Like many businesses, their cash flow is uncertain. Members’ funds are invested in equity markets, and like many Australians’ superannuation, investments have already been severely impacted. We need to maintain the government’s legislated capital adequacy requirements and must also work to remain in good shape so we can fund the backlog of elective surgery that will certainly occur in 6-12 months’ time.

“There is no doubt it is going to be a tough time for all Australians. Our partners – hospitals, nurses, doctors, allied health professionals – are doing an amazing job in trying circumstances. Circumstances will change rapidly, and we will adapt. Health funds will do all we can to support our members and the Australian community,” said Dr David.

Private Healthcare Australia is the peak representative body for Australia’s private health insurance industry. PHA represents 24 Australian health funds with a combined membership of over 13 million Australians, or 97% of the sector on membership.

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