



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**TONY WINDSOR MP**  
**INDEPENDENT**  
**FEDERAL MEMBER FOR NEW ENGLAND**

Shop 5  
259 Peel Street  
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

**All Mail:** PO Box 963  
TAMWORTH NSW 2340

**Ph:** (02) 6761 3080  
**Toll Free:** 1300 301 839  
**Fax:** (02) 6761 3380  
**e-mail:** [Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au](mailto:Tony.Windsor.MP@aph.gov.au)  
**Web Page:** [www.tonywindsor.com.au](http://www.tonywindsor.com.au)

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

18 November 2003

### **Independents And Minor Parties Negotiate \$1.5 Billion Dollar Change In Medicare Package**

The Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor MP, has given a cautious welcome to today's movement in the Government's position on the Medicare package seeing the \$1.5 billion increase as a huge improvement on the original \$917 million offering.

Mr Windsor said, "It is heartening to see the Government accepting the validity of the criticisms offered both within Parliament and in negotiations held with the Independents and Minor Parties over reaching the best method to halt the decline in bulkbilling in regional areas."

"It is an unfortunate fact that disposable incomes are lower in regional electorates than in city electorates, causing bulk billing to be a crucial factor in allowing many regional families access to medical services. Declines in bulk billing represent a decline in services for low disposable income families many of whom are paying off houses and educating children, and the decline in bulkbilling is the issue that must be addressed".

Bulkbilling in the New England electorate has declined from 62.8% in 1996 to 52.4% in June 2003, a decline of over 10% in that period of time. This decline has been caused by the disparity between the cost of a consultation to a GP and the amount reimbursed by the government to a GP.

"The positives in today's package are an additional \$1.5 billion dollars, increased numbers of Nurse Practitioners and Doctors. This must provide a platform for a better service by restoring the availability of medical practitioners to previous levels, however their willingness to offer bulk billing is another issue."

"Clearly GP's will avoid bulk billing if they have to subsidise each bulk billed consultation with general consultation work. The new Medicare Package has provided an additional \$5 to the current rebate, meaning on a forty dollar consultation the gap has been reduced from \$15 to \$10 on each consultation, however a gap is still a gap".

"The Government has stated that the \$7.5 billion dollar surplus announced recently has been used to reduce Commonwealth debt and will not be used to restore bulkbilling levels by paying doctors the full price of a consultation. In effect we are seeing this reduction in Commonwealth debt being paid for by incomplete payments to GP's and lower services to patients."

Mr Windsor said, "The substantial increase in \$1.5 billion funding for this latest package has vindicated my opposition to the original package and I feel we have seen a first hand example of the benefits of Government having to negotiate with Parliament, instead of simply using Parliament as a rubber stamp."

---

***For further information contact Tony Windsor, Ph (02) 6761 3080***