PRESS RELEASE

(THE INFIRM, THE SICK, THE NEEDY)

By the Member for Wannon, Mr Malcolm Fraser, Federal Minister for Education and Science.

Fear of the financial consequences of long-term and chronic illness is considerably reduced for those patients who insure adequately with a hospital fund.

This results from improvements introduced in the recent Budget in those areas indicated by a Government examination to be most in need of attention.

These advances in the health scheme were directed to aiding the chronically ill, the aged infirm and the handicapped young.

From January 1 next year, a patient suffering from a chronic or long-term illness will be eligible for full hospital insurance benefits regardless of his length of stay in hospital.

Formerly those suffering a pre-existing or chronic ailment who remained in hospital longer than for a period of about three months did not receive full benefits.

They received a total benefit of $5 a day after the three months' ended.

But under the improved scheme, the patient continues to receive benefits covering the normal cost of the type of bed for which he is insured - whether it is public, intermediate or private.

Take a patient in a Victorian intermediate ward. He is in a fund and paying the family rate of $1.20 a week. His combined normal benefit is $14 a day. If he has to stay longer than three months, his benefits fall to $5 a day.

But under the new scheme, his benefit rises up to $13.50 a day - fully covering the daily hospital fee.

The Minister for Health announced that new health measures were the first results of studies by the Government in the social welfare field.

The Commonwealth will also offer the states funds to promote the development of strong, co-ordinated home-care programs.

Under the supplementary nursing-home benefit announced in the Budget, patients in nursing homes needing more intensive care
will receive an additional $3 a day on top of the $2 a day ordinary benefit.

They do not have to insure with funds to qualify for this.

This new step is expected to lead to a further increase in both the capacities and standards of nursing homes in Australia.

The Commonwealth has entered an entirely new field with its Budget decision to pay benefits for physically and mentally handicapped children.

The benefit of $1.50 a day is to be paid for children up to the age of sixteen in a home conducted by a religious or charitable organisation which employs special nursing staff.

The new health measures announced in the Budget will cost an extra $28 million in a full financial year.

It is estimated this financial year that all health benefits will cost the Commonwealth more than $290 million — compared with about $178 million in 1962/63.

Cost to the Commonwealth for drugs supplied under the pharmaceutical benefits scheme is expected to rise to more than $76 million.

Medical benefits will cost more than $48 million, and hospital benefits as well as payments to public hospitals for pensioners nearly $60 million.

One of the measures of an enlightened modern society is the manner in which it cares for its aged and its ill. It is money well spent.
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