

Out-of-pocket costs for medical services

Xenia Dolja-Gore¹, Julie Byles¹, Richard Hockey²

¹University of Newcastle, ²University of Queensland

Professor Julie Byles is Director of the Research Centre for Gender, Health and Ageing, a Priority Research Centre at the University of Newcastle, and co-Director of the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health. As a clinical epidemiologist, Professor Byles has interests in risk assessment, and measurement of health outcomes. As a gerontologist and Fellow of the Australian Association of Gerontology, Professor Byles' research interests in ageing include the role of health services and preventive activities in maintaining quality of life for older people, and in determining physical, psychological and social factors associated with optimal physical and mental health of men and women as they age.

Access to bulk billed medical services has been an important mechanism for improving equity in access to health care for people in Australia. This paper examines trends in bulk billing for general practitioner services from 2002 to 2008 and particularly following the introduction of new Medicare item numbers which allowed medical practitioners in rural and remote areas to claim an additional Medicare rebate for bulk billed services provided to Commonwealth concession card holders or children aged under 16. We assess the impact of these items on bulk billing, and particularly whether they have reduced the inequity in access to bulk billing in regional and remote areas.