

# MEDIA RELEASE



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## Carers adversely affected by Taskforce recommendations on after-hours home doctor services

“Carers Australia is very disappointed to learn of the recommendations of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Taskforce on *Urgent after-hours primary care services* which we believe are likely to seriously reduce access to home visits,” said Ara Cresswell, CEO of Carers Australia.

“Not only are family and friend carers frequently caring for someone who is seriously ill and/or has a disability, but a great many are housebound. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that more than a third of Australia’s 860,000 primary carers of people who are aged, chronically ill, disabled, or are dying, frequently spend 40 or more hours a week caring, often over 24 hour cycles. Indeed, over 20 percent of these carers care for more than one person.

“The challenge of getting the person they care for to an ER – where they may have to wait for hours – or having to find someone to replace them at home while they themselves seek medical attention can be overwhelming.

“It is all very well for the Taskforce to say that full MBS rebates will be available for after-hours services, however now restricted to general practitioners working predominantly within usual business hours, but how many people these days can access regular GPs who are actually willing to provide home services?

“It is also the case that the average median weekly income of a primary carer is \$520, or 46 percent below the income of non-carers, and that 43 percent of primary carers are dependent on a government pension or allowance to subsist. They are hardly in a position to splash out on costly after-hours medical services attracting low rebates if they can’t get a regular GP to provide after-hours services.

“If there are concerns about the quality of dedicated after-hours services, then there are a number of ways to address those concerns other than a cost cutting exercise which restricts access to a service valued by consumers, particularly those who are vulnerable.”

**For media enquiries please contact Anna Judith on 0408 956 578**