



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Doctors urge Government not to prevent teenagers from obtaining their own Medicare cards**

Dr George Cerchez, Chair of the National Divisions Youth Alliance (NDYA), today urged the Government not to prevent teenagers under 16 years from obtaining their own Medicare card.

“In an ideal world, young people would be able to discuss sensitive issues concerning their physical, emotional and sexual health with parents,” Dr Cerchez said.

“However, the reality is that many young people are not comfortable having an open and honest discussion with a health care provider in front of parents and may not even want their parents to know that they are seeing a doctor about sensitive health and emotional issues.

“For these young people, GPs are a vital source of accessible, comprehensive primary health care services and the first point of call in the identification, treatment and referral of their health and emotional concerns.

“More often than not, GPs encourage young people to seek emotional support for health-related issues from parents and supportive adults, or split appointments with accompanying parents so that they see the young person alone for part of the consultation.

“Preventing access to Medicare cards could be particularly damaging to young people with mental health problems who typically seek help from a GP before any other health professional. It is vital that as a community we work together to remove barriers preventing young people with the symptoms of depression and other mental illnesses from seeking medical advice and treatment.

“I have no doubt that GPs will continue to treat young people who come to them for help, even when they are unable to pay for services. However, if young people lose access to their Medicare care cards they may be reluctant to go to the doctor and thus miss out on vital medical care. This could result in health problems, such as mental illnesses, going untreated and becoming more serious.

“An ongoing positive relationship with a GP can provide a ‘protective’ factor in a young person’s life and increase their resiliency, develop their health management skills early in life and increase long term health outcomes. Access to a Medicare card is essential for many young people to develop this relationship.

“I urge the Government not to prevent teenagers from obtaining their own Medicare card and add to the complex medico-legal issues facing GPs caring for young people.

“Given the decline in bulk-billing rates and a young people’s reduced capacity to pay for services, I also encourage the Government to look at other systemic barriers preventing young people from accessing health care and alternative models of GP financing that support GPs providing accessible and affordable services to young people,” Dr Cerchez said.

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