**An open letter to the Minister for Health**

10/1/15

Minister:

In the 40 years since the creation of *Medibank,* the precursor of *Medicare,* there have been amazing advances in medical technology, in pharmaceuticals, in diagnostics, and in the capabilities of health care professionals. But there has not been a comparable development in the efficiency or efficacy of the systems responsible for the delivery of these services.

Worse, we have seen little sustained political interest in doing so in any coherent fashion. Health care policy during this time has been dominated by a combination of discredited ideology and expediency.

Consider the history of the ‘GP copayment’ (or, more accurately, the GP rebate reduction) of the past months. It remains unclear as to what this is expected to achieve in terms of health outcomes or even why it is being put forward. Initially it was said that the rebate cut was necessary to help balance the budget, but then no, actually all savings made would be directed to a medical research fund, and that the real reason was to put a “price signal” on GP visits (ie: to discourage people from attending GPs). Most recently the Prime Minister is reported as saying that it’s all about putting an end to ‘6 minute consultations’, as if this was ever a problem.

The Australian people deserve better than this.

Where are the political debates and the policy discussions about how best to eliminate the differences in health outcomes between the richest and the poorest in Australia, or those between urban and rural communities?

Where are the political debates and policy discussions about the viability of *Medicare* and of the future of general medical practice?

Australian governments of both political persuasions have acknowledged the overwhelming international evidence that the best health outcomes are achieved in societies with strong primary health care systems with GPs at their centre. General practice needs your support.