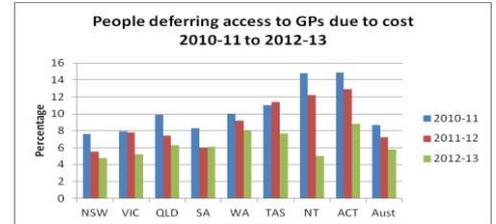




### Health Price Hikes reduce trips to Doctor

The fourth NT *Cost of Living Report*, released today by the Northern Territory Council of Social Service highlights the fact that far too many Territorians cannot afford to go to see a GP when they are unwell. In recent years, as many as 14.8 % of Territorians, on occasion, were unable to afford to see a GP (2010-11).



“This is an alarming finding, which should be cause for much concern. With the Federal Government proposing changes that will see a whole range of people on income support payments and low income households being much worse off financially, and plans for introducing a \$7 co-payment for doctor's visits and other services – we could see even more people deferring trips to the GP in the near future”, according to Ms Wendy Morton, Executive Director, NTCOSS.

The Cost of Living Report also revealed that health costs for Darwin households have risen higher than the national average over the past year, and have risen 21.9% over the last 4 years (since December 2009). Darwin households are now paying over \$80 per week on health expenditure, similar to what households pay in most of other capital cities, while the average expenditure across the Territory is \$76.

There are also other ‘hidden’ costs of healthcare, such as transport and electricity, where expenditure in the Territory is the highest in the country, meaning that overall cost of accessing health care is much higher than what the health expenditure figures alone might suggest.

The Report also highlights that across the country, lower income earners, particularly those who receive income support payments, pay a larger proportion of their weekly income on health costs. Age Pensioners, for example, pay twice as much on health and medical costs, as a proportion of their income, than do other households. People on the Disability Support Pension and Carers also pay a high rate. “With health prices rising, it is the poor who feel it more”, stated Ms Morton.

In the past year alone, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for health costs in Darwin has risen by 6.1%, while the rise nationally has been 4.0%. Over the last 15 years, health prices in Darwin have risen by 94.5%, while the general CPI has risen by 55.9%.

“The cost of living in the NT is already high, and we know that households in the lowest income quintiles spend more on health costs than those in the highest quintiles. Any further increases to health costs will hit those with the least ability to pay, hardest. Further increases would be disastrous for the individuals concerned, and for the health system, with deferral of treatment resulting in a greater cost burden on the health system in years to come”, stated Ms Morton.

**For media comment, contact: Wendy Morton – Executive Director, NTCOSS 0418 482 660**

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*‘Growing the NT fairly’*



***Report Recommendations:***

**That the NT Government**

- 1. Work with the Federal Government to find alternatives to its proposed budget measure which will see increases in user charges for essential health services, including GP payments, medicines and tests**
- 2. Work with the Federal Government in relation to increasing Newstart Payments by \$50 per week**
- 3. Make further amendments to the Patient Assistance Travel Scheme to improve access to health services, including the coverage of dental services**
- 4. Increase health funding towards preventative and early intervention measures to reduce the high costs borne by the medical and health system**

**ACOSS National Conference Resolution on the May 2014 Federal Budget**

NTCOSS endorses the ACOSS National Conference Resolution on the May 2014 Federal Budget which calls on the Federal Parliament of Australia to reject divisive and unfair budget proposals that severely impact on the most vulnerable people in our community.

The resolution reads:

“We call on the Australian Government to work with us in designing policy that is sustainable, inclusive and fair. The Government and the Parliament should abandon the following divisive and unfair proposed budget measures that severely impact on the most vulnerable people in our community:

- Removal of the income support safety net for many young job seekers;
- Measures that erode the value of income support for people at risk of poverty;
- Reductions in family tax benefits for low and moderate income earners;
- Increases in user charges for essential health services, including GP payments, medicines and tests;
- Withdrawal of federal funding to essential social services;
- Silencing of advocacy organisations working to ensure that the voices of disadvantaged and marginalised groups are heard.”

ACOSS Conference, June 2014

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