



**The Hon Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Human Services**

Minister for Financial Services, Superannuation and Corporate Law

C09/3479

**Ms Julia Irwin MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600**

Dear Ms Irwin *Julia*

Thank you for your letter of 9 June 2009 to the former Minister for Human Services, Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig regarding a petition received by the Committee requesting that a Medicare office be established in Pakenham, Victoria. As the new Minister for Human Services, I am pleased to respond to your query.

I acknowledge the efforts of the community of Pakenham in lobbying for a Medicare office in the municipality. The Government receives many requests for Medicare offices. On one level, this is very positive as it indicates that Medicare offices are providing a valued and convenient range of services to the community. It is not possible, however, to meet all requests for Medicare offices and still maintain a cost effective and efficient network of services across all of Australia.

A range of criteria is applied when conducting analysis to establish a new Medicare office. This criteria includes, but is not limited to, claiming patterns or volumes of claims. Other important factors include the population and demographics of the area, the availability of surrounding Medicare offices, the level of bulk billing, establishment costs and the suitability of a site.

Bearing in mind these factors, Medicare Australia has no plans to establish a Medicare office in Pakenham at this time.

The Rudd Government is committed to ensuring that all Australians have ready access to Medicare services. Medicare Australia has developed a range of alternative ways of accessing its services with the aim of providing a more convenient service for the public.

Electronic Claiming

Traditionally, Medicare benefits have been limited to either cash or cheque payments. There has been a significant increase in the service delivery options available to the Australian community through electronic business channels since the inception of the Medicare program. As a result, Medicare Australia has introduced electronic Medicare claiming.

Members of the public can now claim their Medicare rebate when they pay their account at the doctor. The claimant submits their claim electronically and the rebate is paid into their nominated bank account.

Medicare Australia encourages members of the public to consider electronic payment due to the convenience it offers through the choice of claiming options.

Access Points

Medicare Australia Access Points also allow members of the public to pick up a handset and be connected directly to a service operator who will guide them through the claiming process step by step. If paid accounts are lodged at these facilities and the claimant provides the operator with a BSB and account number of their chosen bank account the refund will be deposited into their bank account in around two days. Where an account is unpaid, a cheque made payable to the doctor will be forwarded to the claimant.

The service officer can also assist with enquires about lost Medicare cards, change of addresses and other information on services such as the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, Australian Organ Donor Register and the Medicare Safety Net. Two Medicare Australia Access Points are located in Pakenham in the following locations:

- Rowan Leonard Pakenham Chemmart Pharmacy, Pakenham Place, 69 Main Street
- Priceline Pharmacy, Shop 1, Pakenham Shopping Centre, John Street.

Alternatively, it is also possible to claim the Medicare rebate over the telephone by calling 1300 360 460 for the cost of a local call.

Online Services

Pakenham residents can also access Medicare services online. Medicare Australia's Online Services enable individuals to check and update their details; view their Medicare safety net balance and Medicare tax statement; view their Medicare claims history; or request a replacement or duplicate Medicare card. Full details about registering for online services can be found at Medicare Australia's website at www.medicareaustralia.gov.au.

Thank you once again for writing. I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours ~~sincerely~~

CHRIS BOWEN

18 AUG 2009