

MEDIA RELEASE

House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Health Inquiry into Chronic Disease Prevention and Management in Primary Health Care

Sydney, 23 October 2015 - HCF Managing Director, Shaun Larkin, presented at a public hearing in Sydney today before the *House of Representatives' Standing Committee on Health Inquiry into Chronic Disease Prevention and Management in Primary Health Care*.

A copy of HCF's submission to the Inquiry (#122) can be found at www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Health/Chronic_Disease/Submissions.

The full opening statement made on the day by Mr. Larkin is below.

HCF is the largest not-for-profit private health insurer registered under the Private Health Insurance Act.

However we do more than just provide health insurance, we also care for our members' through an innovative range of health management programs and services. To use the words of the AMA in a recent Senate submission these programs and services are focussed on improving the coordination of patient care, ensuring patient care is provided in the most appropriate clinical setting, and avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions.

I would like to highlight just three of these programs and services to the Committee.

My Health Guardian was launched in 2009 as a \$100 million investment and since then has provided phone-based support from registered nurses to approximately 48,000 HCF members suffering from chronic conditions such as diabetes.

It also provides all of HCF's 1.5 million members with access to a web-based customised health record, health risk assessments and personalised health coaching.

It is the longest-running and largest program of its type in Australia.

Member satisfaction and health outcomes for the program have been positive including a 46% improvement in medication management by participants and significant improvement in lifestyle risk factors such as:

- lower smoking rates;
- increased physical activity; and
- statistically significant decreases in body mass index (BMI) for both obese and overweight participants

Peer-reviewed studies of My Health Guardian published in 2013 in *Population Health Management* and earlier this year in *BMC Health Services Research* found that the program significantly reduced the rate of hospital admissions for participants with cardiovascular disease and diabetes, which together make up the bulk of chronic illness in Australia today.

A key measure we use to monitor the performance of the service provided for us by our contractor - Healthways International - is the level of self-reported GP visits by participants because we consider these an essential component of an effective population health program.

This has been done quite deliberately so as the program is not delivered in isolation of the "usual GP". Unfortunately, in delivering the program, one of the significant challenges we have identified is that many of these people do not have a "usual GP".

In addition to the My Health Guardian program HCF offers members access to an integrated weight management program called **Healthy Weight for Life**.

Weight is both a causative and complicating factor for a wide range of chronic diseases. HCF offers this program to members who are overweight or obese and have diabetes, heart disease or osteoarthritis.

The program is an 18 week course that combines Very Low Calorie meal replacements, graded activity, on-line tracking and follow up by email, SMS and telephone. The program has been scientifically validated by the CSIRO.

We have consistently seen average weight loss of around 7%, sustained over time, through this program. Just under a third of participants achieve a >10% weight loss and we have seen unprecedented program completion rates of 79% which is due to the proactive follow-up that keeps participants on track.

The Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute and HCF have an ongoing partnership focused on heart disease.

'Victor Chang' operates mobile booths on a rotating basis at each of HCF's 55 branches across Australia. Staffed by registered nurses from 'Victor Chang', the booths offer a 10-minute health check focussed on major risk factors for heart disease — elevated blood pressure, cholesterol and blood glucose levels.

Since inception in 2012, more than 20,000 HCF members used the service. Of those tested approximately 30% (or nearly 6,000) of those tested were advised to visit their GP for follow-up due to one or more adverse readings.

These are but three of the 20+ programs and services that HCF offers to care for our members' health. HCF has worked hard over the last 15 years to improve members' health through an ever increasing investment in well designed and targeted programs that in many cases feature quite specific mechanisms to actively involve a HCF member's GP.

HCF appreciates the opportunity to provide this statement to the Committee and would be happy to take any questions.

-Ends-

Issued on behalf of HCF by Sefiani Communications Group. Media inquiries to Karen Dunicliff on ph. (02) 8920 0700, mob. 0435 807 761 or kdunicliff@sefiani.com.au

About HCF

HCF is Australia's largest non-profit health insurer, currently covering more than 1.5 million Australians. To learn more about HCF go to <http://www.hcf.com.au/about-us>.