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## Aussies continue to value private hospital care

While private health insurance membership falls, Australians continue to value access to high quality health care from private hospitals – with episodes of care in the private sector increasing, the latest data shows.

The Australian Prudential Regulation Authority (APRA) data on private health insurance released today shows private health insurance participation has dropped, with only 44.2 percent of the population holding insurance (about 11 million Australians).

Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) CEO Michael Roff said while the trend away from Australians investing in private health insurance was a concern, the value of private hospitals remained high.

“Episodes of care in the private hospital sector increased by seven percent this quarter. Australians still want access to the choice offered in private hospitals – choice of doctor, choice of surgery timing and high quality services,” he said.

Mr Roff said private health insurers still had a job to do convincing Australians the products they offer are value for money.

“We know Australians value hospitals, but we understand that when they are buying Basic products – junk policies – that offer them little more than access to public hospitals, Australians feel they are not getting much bang for their buck.

“On top of that, we are seeing continued growth in policies that exclude services – which now make up almost 60 percent of the market - so Australians may be buying products that don’t meet their needs.

“I encourage all Australians to go over their health insurance policies with a fine tooth comb every year to make sure they are covered for the services they need. If not, change policy, change insurer,” Mr Roff said.

APHA has already begun discussions with the Government on the next wave of reforms to improve the value and affordability of health insurance, he said.

“Although there has been a slight reduction in private patients being treated in public hospitals, this practice is still costing health funds \$1.2 billion per year, driving up the cost of premiums. The practice of public hospitals forcing some insured patients to use their insurance, and allowing others to jump the queue in front of public patients, must be addressed in the next health funding agreement between the Commonwealth and the States,” Mr Roff said.

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The Australian Private Hospitals Association (APHA) is the peak industry body representing the private hospital and day surgery sector. The private hospital sector treats 3.69 million patients a year, including treatment of more than a third of chemotherapy, 60 percent of all surgery, 74 percent of all elective musculoskeletal surgery and 79 percent of rehabilitation.