

## **Cost a barrier to healthcare for older Australians**

**9 October 2023**

New research from National Seniors Australia suggests 68% of older people have recently gone without or hesitated to access essential healthcare because of cost.

The report is based on a survey of nearly 6000 people aged 50 and older.

The survey found only 32% of respondents said cost had not affected their access to health care.

Chief Advocate Mr Ian Henschke said, unsurprisingly, older people with limited wealth have greater barriers to accessing health care. For those who missed out because of cost, almost a third said it had negatively affected their health or wellbeing.

“Most Australians expect to receive lifelong universal healthcare, but it is clearly not the case,” he said.

The survey showed differences in the proportion of older people experiencing cost related barriers according to type of health care being accessed:

- Mental health care, dental treatment and dental checkups were the most likely to be forgone, with 20%-26% of respondents unable to afford them on one or more occasion.
- Prescription medication and GP appointments were the least likely to be skipped because of cost, but even they were unaffordable for 5%-7% of older people.
- On top of these numbers, for every form of healthcare the survey enquired about another 21%-33% of people hesitated over the cost.

National Seniors Australia survey respondents reported various health and wellbeing consequences of going without care including untreated problems, undiagnosed conditions, worsening symptoms and mental health impacts.

Some reported having to wait until their conditions were bad enough to require hospitalisation, with an 81-year-old explaining because he can't afford minor medical treatment at a GP, he waits until he can be transported to hospital for other more serious incidents.

The situation is similar among the 832 respondents who had been on an elective surgery public waiting list, 46% of whom could not afford to pay privately to speed things up.

Many suffered continuing pain, immobility, sensory disablement, mental health impacts or worsening symptoms while waiting, sometimes to the point of needing emergency care.

“Timely and affordable access to all types of health care helps prevent disability and promotes quality of life for older Australians,” said Mr Henschke.

The report can be downloaded from [2023-NSA-Healthcare-Affordability-and-Accessibility.pdf \(nationalseniors.com.au\)](https://nationalseniors.com.au/2023-NSA-Healthcare-Affordability-and-Accessibility.pdf)

**Mr Ian Henschke can be contacted for comment on 0488 047 380**

# Older people's experiences of healthcare affordability

National Seniors Australia surveyed 5,419 older Australians about 10 types of healthcare to determine whether cost had either prevented them from accessing care or caused them to hesitate in seeking care recently.

Our research indicates that cost is preventing older Australians from accessing the healthcare they require.

For every type of healthcare, between 5% and 26% of older people did not access it because of cost on at least one occasion, and a further 21%-33% hesitated.

Data drawn from the 11th National Seniors Social Survey, conducted in February 2023 and open to anyone residing in Australia aged 50 or over. For each healthcare type, we asked respondents if they had gone without it or hesitated to access it because of cost on one or more occasions in recent years. Some respondents did not answer for every type of healthcare or indicated that one or more types were not applicable to them. These response types were excluded before calculating percentages. Full report available at [nationalseniors.com.au/research/reports](https://nationalseniors.com.au/research/reports).



Yes, cost prohibited this



Cost made me hesitate



No, cost had no impact



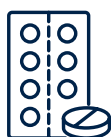
Prescription medication



GP appointment



Medical treatment



Non-prescription medication



Specialist appointment



Allied health appointment



Other healthcare



Dental check up



Dental treatment



Mental health appointment

