



THE SALVATION ARMY AUSTRALIA

Access to Healthcare

The Issue

Good health is fundamental to the quality of life all people deserve. Accessing quality health care early is critical to preventing a minor health problem becoming a serious chronic condition, which can have significant economic and lifestyle implications.

Unfortunately, many Australians cannot access suitable health care for a variety of reasons, including cost, availability of professionals and/or the capacity to take time away from other responsibilities. Certain groups of people in Australia are more likely to experience barriers to accessing quality health care. These include rural and remote communities, lower income areas, people experiencing financial hardship, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of quality health care for all people. The pandemic also exposed, and even made worse, many gaps and shortfalls in Australia's health care system, including staffing shortages and insufficient hospital beds. The impacts of this were disproportionately felt by people who were already experiencing disadvantage.

Some people are more likely to receive poor-quality care or have negative experiences with health services. For example, two-thirds of women surveyed report experiencing gender bias or discrimination when accessing health care.¹ Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds receive care that is not culturally safe, from language barriers to discrimination and racism.² Some

¹ National Women's Health Advisory Council. (2024). #EndGenderBias Survey Summary Report. Department of Health and Aged Care. [Link](#).

² Khatri, R. & Assefa, Y. (2022). Access to health services among culturally and linguistically diverse populations in the Australian universal health care system: issues and challenges. *BMC Public Health*. 22,880. [Link](#).



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people report deciding not to access a health service due to fear or embarrassment.³

Issues with availability, affordability, accessibility and quality of health care often lead to health conditions going unmonitored, unmanaged and becoming more difficult to treat. An untreated health condition can impact other areas of life, including relationships with others, and housing or employment security.

Inequitable access to health care has negative consequences for individuals, the community and our economy.

How can I get involved?

- We can [take care of ourselves](#) health-wise, and encourage our friends and family to seek medical care when they need it.
- [Call on our government representatives](#) to increase funding and flexibility in primary health care to encourage more bulk billed GP visits and to provide more clinicians in primary care, such as nurses and allied health professionals.⁴
- [Call on our government representatives](#) to explore funding models that allow rural and remote communities to design innovative and sustainable models of primary care that address the needs of local communities.⁵
- Make an intentional effort to [learn](#) about the impacts of inequality of access to health care across Australia.

For more information...

- [Goal 3 - United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)
- [The Salvation Army Australia's Social Justice Stocktake](#)

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: summary report March 2024. [Link](#).

⁴ Breadon, P., Romanes, D., Fox, L., Bolton, J., & Richardson, L. (2022). A new Medicare: Strengthening general practice. Grattan Institute. [Link](#).

⁵ Australian Government. (2022). Strengthening Medicare Taskforce Report. [Link](#).