



MEDIA RELEASE

29 March 2010

REPORT OF PRIVATE HEALTH FUND SERVICE AND PERFORMANCE

The Private Health Insurance Ombudsman today published its annual *State of the Health Funds Report*, providing information on the comparative performance and service delivery of private health insurance funds in Australia.

Private Health Insurance Ombudsman, Samantha Gavel, said the main aim of publishing the Report is to give consumers extra information to assist them with making decisions about private health insurance.

“The Report will be of assistance to consumers who already have private health insurance or are returning to private health cover, as well as those who are considering private health insurance for the very first time.

“Too often we find that for many people private health insurance is “out of sight out of mind” until they get sick. I cannot stress enough how important it is for consumers to be diligent on their own behalf when it comes to private health insurance, both in terms of assessing the level of cover they need and the level of cover they actually have,” Ms Gavel said.

The Report, which covers the period from 1 July 2008 – 30 June 2009, focuses on general performance and service delivery by health funds and reveals an increase in private health insurance membership of 2.2% at 30 June 2009 and customer retention rates of between 84.5% and 97.7%, depending on the health fund.

Ms Gavel noted that while the overall number of complaints made to the Ombudsman increased by 5% in the recent reporting period, the number of high level complaints requiring detailed investigation by the Ombudsman decreased by more than 2%.

“The decrease in the number of complex, high level complaints is good news for consumers as it shows that consumers are being more successful at resolving their disputes with their fund directly.”

Ms Gavel also acknowledged the continual need for funds to effectively communicate to consumers any changes to their products, particularly in light of a significant spike in the number of complaints made relating to restrictions or exclusions on policies.

Ms Gavel said she was gratified to note that the work her office subsequently undertook with funds to better communicate these changes to consumers had seen the number of complaints relating to restrictions/exclusions return to normal levels.

More detailed information about individual health insurance policies is available from the consumer website www.privatehealth.gov.au.

Consumers can use the website to view standard information about their own health insurance policy, as well as compare their policy with other policies available for sale.

The State of the Health Fund Report can be viewed on the Ombudsman's website at www.phio.org.au and copies of the Report or individual fund summary reports can be requested by contacting the Ombudsman's office on 1800 640 695. The report is available free of charge to consumers.

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