

## Out-of-pocket costs for medical services

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Access to bulk billed medical services has been an important mechanism for improving equity in access to health care for people in Australia. This paper examines trends in bulk billing for general practitioner services from 2002 to 2008 and particularly following the introduction of new Medicare item numbers which allowed medical practitioners in rural and remote areas to claim an additional Medicare rebate for bulk billed services provided to Commonwealth concession card holders or children aged under 16. We assess the impact of these items on bulk billing, and particularly whether they have reduced the inequity in access to bulk billing in regional and remote areas.