



Weekend West
08-Jan-2011
 Page: 3
 General News
 By: Andrew Tillett
 Market: Perth
 Circulation: 333768
 Type: Capital City Daily
 Size: 189.10 sq.cms
 Frequency: -----S-

POLICY TO PAY ALL BILLS

Insurer to cover health gap costs

■ Andrew Tillett

Canberra

Australia's biggest health fund has moved to end one of patients' biggest bugbears, launching what it claims is the first widely available insurance policy that promises members will not face out-of-pocket costs for hospital treatment and extras.

Medibank Private says its Ultra Health Cover policy will meet 100 per cent of the cost of extras such as optical or dental care. Members will not pay any hospital excess and the policy will cover any in-hospital medical gaps, including fees charged by specialists such as anaesthetists.

The catch is you have to use Medibank's preferred providers — doctors, other health professionals, hospitals and clinics that have agreed to charge no more than the fee set by Medibank.

And there are caps on the amount members can claim back for some services. WA singles will face a \$203 a month premium while families will pay \$406 month.

"Customers told us that they didn't want unexpected gaps so with Ultra Health Cover we have done everything possible to give our members a gap-free experience," Medibank's Private Health Insurance chief Bruce Levy said.

Just over a third of complaints to the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman are about surprise out-of-pocket costs and benefits payments, making up the biggest chunk of the watchdog's workload. WA Health Consumers' Council chief Michele Kosky said while Medibank's product sounded good, it disadvantaged members with an established relationship with a doc-

tor who was not a preferred provider because they would still pay the same premium.

She was concerned the policy could lead to over-servicing by some doctors because they knew their patient would not have to pay out-of-pocket costs. WA's biggest fund, HBF, moved last year to satisfy growing demand for no-gap hospital cover, launching its Ultimate policy.

HBF product development manager Leroy Pereira said it was a superior product because it covered more WA doctors and hospitals.

"It's not about affluence," he said about the demand for no-gap policies. "Middle-class folk see this as a way of reducing their gaps significantly for their own peace of mind."