

# Aboriginal health groups protest

SYDNEY: Medical services serving about 100,000 Aborigines throughout Australia have protested to the Federal Government over proposed changes to national health insurances.

A deputation from the Aboriginal Health Services told the Minister for Health, Mr Hunt, on Tuesday that abolition of bulk billing, reduction of the benefit rate from 85 to 75 per cent of scheduled fees and increased charges for medicines would have serious effects on Aboriginal health and operation of the services.

The bulk billing and benefit decisions were likely to cost the Redfern service most of the \$100,000 it had expected to raise from medical fees in 1978-79, its administrator, Naomi Mayers, said yesterday.

Only 10 to 15 per cent of the service's

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patients were pensioners or their dependants, for whom bulk billing would still be permitted after July 1. Ten to 20 per cent were employed people or their dependants and the rest were on social service benefits or had no income.

Giving these people a bill was against the service's constitution because treatment was meant to be free.

If income from medical fees dropped, the service would have to turn to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs, which was providing \$400,000 of its \$500,000 budget for 1978-79.

The Perth Medical Service reported that its instructions from the department were to reduce staff wages to offset the loss in fee revenue, which was totally unacceptable to the services.

At Tuesday's meeting, Mr Hunt had said bulk billing for Aboriginal and other community health services would not be withdrawn until the complaints were investigated.

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