**For immediate release**

3 June 2014

**Medicare co-payment defies universal health coverage says Australian College of Nursing**

While global efforts are being made to encourage nations to develop universal health coverage (UHC), the introduction of the proposed co-payment for a GP visit announced in the recent Federal Budget shows that Australia is undermining widespread access to health care; something which has the potential to adversely affect many Australians.

Adjunct Professor Debra Thoms, CEO of the Australian College of Nursing (ACN), recently attended the Fifth Triad Meeting in Geneva, Switzerland. Hosted by the International Council of Nurses, the International Confederation of Midwives and the World Health Organization, the meeting focused on strengthening the nursing and midwifery workforce to support the introduction of UHC as an international aim for health care.

“Rather than the need for medical care solely determining access to adequate care, a person’s ability to pay now comes into play.

“Nurses are deeply concerned that the co-payment may make necessary medical care unaffordable for some. Particularly concession card holders and low wage earners with chronic health conditions, who need to see doctors regularly, may find that they are unable to afford the care they need,” said Adjunct Professor Thoms.

An Australian study of the prevalence of chronic conditions showed that nearly two thirds of patients visiting a GP, and half the Australian population, have a chronic condition. The three most common chronic conditions were cardiovascular problems, metabolic diseases - such as diabetes, and musculoskeletal problems. These conditions tend to require regular GP care.

“The principle of universal access to health care should not be undermined. A healthy community is essential to a nation’s wellbeing, happiness and productive capacity,” explained Adjunct Professor Thoms.

-ends-

For interviews with Adjunct Professor Debra Thoms, please contact Diana Abeleven or Felicity Zadro on 0409 580 254 or diana@zadrocommunications.com.au.