

OPINION

Time to patch cracks in the system

POLITICIANS are busy outlining their plans for health reform and visiting the sick and elderly in hospitals, most of this a timely opportunity to make some impact in the run-up to what is shaping up as a delicately balanced federal election later this year.

Any pronouncements about improved health care is welcome and certainly never too late for those who find themselves in a hospital.

But there is a group largely forgotten in the process. They suffer debilitating, serious and complicated injuries that require long-term care long after they have left the hospital.

Nobody denies that hospital waiting times and waiting lists are serious issues, but so too is the issue of the enormous cost of ongoing care for people with life-long injuries.

They are deemed to be too well and rehabilitated to stay in a hospital bed, but they are also not independent enough to go back into society without specialised equipment and care.

Too often these people just fall between the cracks of an already imperfect system.

Such is the case of Zane Conroy, who since

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moving from South Africa to Australia in 2006 had been an active and hard-working member of our society. On Australia Day, the 27-year-old became a quadraplegic when he dived headfirst into a sandbank.

When he leaves hospital in a few weeks time he will have to find thousands of dollars for specialised equipment, let alone paying for ongoing care. He is not entitled to government assistance, but even those who are find they and their families are struggling to cover their costs.

These are the costs that health insurance, government welfare and Medicare do not fully cover.

Politicians and policy-makers should remember these people when they work on their health reforms, and just as importantly, their promises to deliver better health services to all members of the community.