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PRESS RELEASE

A budget of opportunity

The 2018-2019 budget provides consumers with an opportunity to improve their quality of life.

Allocations to innovative health schemes, first home owners, pensioners and an unprecedented \$1billion allocation to the education sector mean more consumers have something to look forward to in the coming fiscal year.

The \$3.5million subsidy for Kidney Dialysis to stay alive is highly appreciated. The Council established that a kidney patient in Viti Levu needed a minimum of \$39,000 a year to survive whereas a patient in Vanua Levu needed \$23,400.

Therefore, the subsidy comes as a relief which will greatly reduce dialysis costs for families in need of the treatments. People with household incomes over \$30,000 will be offered dialysis for \$150 a treatment. Families under the \$30,000 threshold will be able to attain the same service for \$75 a treatment.

The Council has been continuously lobbying for the costs of dialysis treatments offered by the Kidney Foundation of Fiji in Suva to be reduced and commends Government for introducing this life-saving subsidy.

In addition, the Council is pleased to see the inclusion of other injuries that will be handled by the Accident Compensation Commission of Fiji. Including most vulnerable members such as school children is an excellent move to protect their future if an injury occurs in the school.


Another good news is imposing fines on telecommunication companies in the event they fail to deliver the services as expected and paid for. Telecommunications companies now have further incentive to ensure their promised network coverage is maintained and consumers are given opportunity to access the full service they are paying for.

The Council also welcomes the removal of all EFTPOS fees from Debit and Credit cards. It has been noted that the banks have been double dipping by charging fees to both merchants and consumers for the use of such cards. The findings reveals that only one bank charged the EFTPOS fees to merchants who passed this same charge on to consumers. Hence, the waiver of the EFTPOS fees will ensure adequate consumer protection, as we move towards a cashless economy.

The Council also notes the increase of the plastic bag levy to \$0.20 and looks forward to the enforcement of the new provisions for traders who are not entitled to charge ECAL/ STT and VAT. Recently (21 June 2018) the Council had referred a case to the FRCS where a trader had wrongly charged consumers ten cents for ECAL and a further five cents for plastic bag levy.

The case resulted in a warning for the trader, however, the Council had queried as to what further action was available to be taken against this sort of behaviour. These new provisions are a welcome answer, and provide an avenue for consumer protection.

The Council encourages consumers to take advantage of the opportunities provided in the new budget.



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Ms. Premila Kumar
Chief Executive Officer
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