



Press release

RADIOLOGY PATIENTS SUFFER UNDER 10 YEAR REBATE FREEZE

Patients are paying more for Radiology services in the face of the Government’s 10 year freeze on Medicare rebates. It is therefore unlikely that they would agree with Health Minister Tony Abbott’s statement today that “Medicare is a better program now than it was 11 years ago”.

“Medicare rebates for Radiology have been capped for 10 years and have fallen well behind inflation, while the costs of these highly specialised medical services have risen rapidly,” said Dr Ron Shnier, President of the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA).

Dr Shnier’s concerns were echoed by those of Dr Liz Kenny, President of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists. “I am very concerned that capped funding agreements between the College, ADIA and the Government have failed in a key objective, to deliver affordable Radiology services for patients,” she said.

In most cases the Medicare rebate for Radiology services is less today than it was ten years ago. This means that, dollar for dollar, the Government is actually contributing less today for patient rebates than it did ten years ago. When inflation is factored in, the Government is paying up to 36% less.

As a result, patients are inevitably being asked to bear the brunt of increasing costs. Patients are now paying twice as much for Radiology services as they were ten years ago and more than 23% of this increase was over the past four years. The following table demonstrates this.

The real story

Service	Government contribution			Patient contribution	
	1998 Rebate	2007 Rebate	Variation 10 years	Average increase over 4 years	
CT Scan Chest	\$259.30	\$250.75	3% ↓	23% ↑	CT Services
X-Ray Spine	\$50.15	\$46.85	7% ↓	28% ↑	X-Ray Services
MRI Scan Head	\$424.60	\$342.75	19% ↓	26% ↑	MRI Services
Vascular UltraSound	\$147.00	\$144.10	2% ↓	43% ↑	Ultrasound Services

Over this time wages for highly skilled radiologists and other imaging professionals have risen considerably and technology advances have meant that practices have had to invest at levels outstripping income.

“Clearly the current situation is not sustainable from a pure economic stand-point”, Dr Shnier said. “Technology and productivity improvements cannot keep pace with relative loss in revenue and the spiralling costs of rapid changes in technology and clinical practice. Compared to other, more visible areas of medicine, Radiology has become the ‘poor cousin’ over the past ten years and patients are paying the price”, Dr Shnier said.

The Government is proposing that the current totally inadequate level of Medicare rebates will continue. ADIA and RANZCR both believe that this growing gap between rebates and the cost of providing services will stifle the introduction of new state-of-the-art technologies.

According to Dr Kenny, “patients need access to high quality x-rays and scans, particularly in life threatening and chronic conditions. The Government’s failure to adequately fund Medicare rebates means those in the greatest need will have to pay the most and will struggle to access the services they need, especially if they are in rural areas”.

“Specialist medical patient services need to be appropriately funded if the service standards are to be maintained”, Dr Shnier said. “Patient rebates should have been increased on November 1 to keep patient gaps to a minimum”, he said.

Media enquiries:

Pattie Beerens,
Chief Executive Officer,
Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association
Mobile: 0419 810 044
Email: pbeerens@bigpond.net.au

Pamela Taylor
Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
Ph: 02 9268 9704
Mobile: 0411 162 004
Email: ptaylor@ranzcr.edu.au