



Press release

Australians are paying more for radiology services this week than they were last week – and that's not because fees have been increased. Rather it's because the Australian Government has a 10-year freeze on Medicare rebates.

To advise patients having diagnostic imaging that they will not be receiving a higher rebate, they are being given a letter explaining that the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR) believe Medicare rebates for radiology services should have been increased on 1 November under their current five-year agreement with the Government.

The letter says: "Your radiologist is a medical specialist who provides advice to your doctor on the images from the x-ray, CT, ultrasound or MRI procedure performed by our highly trained imaging professionals. In the interests of your family's health and helping us to maintain our state-of-the-art facility we would appreciate it if you could raise this issue with your local election candidates."

"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 (RANZCR). "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 10 years ago. This means that, dollar for dollar, the Government is actually contributing less today for patient rebates than it did 10 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.

Over the last 10 years there have been vast improvements in imaging technology and techniques. Patients are much more aware of these advances in technology and they expect to have access to them. Maintaining state of the art facilities for patients requires a high rate of reinvestment in diagnostic imaging equipment.

In October, the Government announced that it would allow GPs to order certain MRI scans for patients and these scans would be eligible for a Medicare rebate.

AMA President Dr Rosanna Capolingua welcomed this change, which meant that patients would have timely GP referral for specialist treatment.

She said: "To maximise the effect of the announcement, there needs to be an immediate review of the arrangements between the Commonwealth and radiologists to ensure that all radiology and imaging services remain affordable and accessible for all Australians."