

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ADIA calls Labor's failure to index diagnostic imaging a broken promise on Medicare

MELBOURNE: The Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) has described Labor's failure to include scans and x-rays in its indexation commitment for medical services as an insult to radiologists and nine million patients.

In May, Bill Shorten pledged that a Labor government would restore indexation on 1 January 2017 to all services provided by GPs, allied health and other health practitioners and medical specialists.

ADIA has discovered that Medicare rebates for medical services provided by radiologists (specialist doctors) are not covered. This means that scans, including those to diagnose cancer, are not included in Labor's health budget plans.

Labor's pledge reinstates indexation on rebates that have been frozen for four years but ignores the eighteen-year funding freeze on diagnostic imaging. Chronic underfunding has led to average patient gap payments of almost \$100 charged on more than 5.5 million services in 2014-15.

Labor is campaigning strongly on a platform of protecting Medicare, yet their failure to commit to indexing rebates on ultrasounds, x-rays, CTs and MRIs will increase out of pocket costs for patients and decrease bulk billing, even for concession patients.

Vice President of ADIA, Dr Sue Ulreich said: "It is essential that diagnosis is affordable for all Australians and that patients who leave their GPs with a referral for a scan are not put off by the cost."

Patient gaps doubled in the last decade, the current gap for a CT scan is approximately \$145 and \$173 for an MRI. ADIA expects gap fees will double again in the next decade if indexation is not restored.

"Labor is being disingenuous by campaigning on a policy platform that they won't commit to", said ADIA CEO Pattie Beerens.

"They are presenting themselves as the party to save Medicare and should make their policies reflect this by immediately implementing indexation for scans and x-rays. Since January the Opposition Leader has appeared at many radiology practices, including several of our members' practices, and promised to protect patients from higher out-of-pocket costs. We are holding Labor to honour its commitments".

"Labor has said it will index all medical specialists from 1st January 2017, but has left out diagnostic imaging – a medical specialist service relied upon to detect and treat many health conditions including cancer".

Access to some scans is already an issue in many areas, particularly in lower socio economic areas. Services for diagnosing cancer such as mammography and biopsies will become even harder to access, including for concession patients.

Press release



Parramatta based radiologist Dr Joseph Sanki hosted Bill Shorten at his Superscan radiology practice on 15 April and is nervous about what this means for patients:

“Under a Labor Government we won’t be able to afford to continue operating because due to the absence of indexation practice margins have become very thin. Patients can’t afford to pay the gaps on medical imaging but bulk billing is becoming impossible. Cancer patients need these scans on a recurrent basis. So for those patients in poorer suburbs around Australia to front up and be asked to pay thousands of dollars - common sense would say it won’t happen”.

ADIA says that a policy to retain the freeze is a funding cut every day and contrary to statements from the Opposition leader, a Shorten Government will increase the costs of X-rays, MRIs, and PET scans.

‘That’s why a Shorten Labor Government will restore indexation of the Medicare Benefits Schedule from 1 January 2017. This will apply to all services provided by GPs, allied health and other health practitioners and medical specialists’.

Bill Shorten, 19 May 2016 http://www.billshorten.com.au/labor_will_always_fight_for_medicare

Labor has agreed to end the 4-year freeze on rebates for GPs and yet are content with continuing the crippling 18-year funding freeze on diagnostic imaging.

Without access to the scans needed for diagnosis and effective treatment, Labor’s promise to keep Medicare accessible to all Australians is a broken promise.

Media enquiries: Annette Stenhouse 0416 861 732