

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

28 NOVEMBER 2017

BENNELONG BY-ELECTION: MEDICARE “WAIT TIMES”? PATIENTS HAVE BEEN WAITING 19 YEARS!



Australian radiologists have hit out at the major parties contesting the Bennelong by-election for failing to address the real Medicare issues affecting healthcare in the electorate.

Over the past 24 hours, ALP candidate Kristina Keneally and Federal Health Minister Greg Hunt have been involved in a spat about average wait times at a local Medicare office.

Ms Keneally said she'd been told she would have to wait an hour, while Mr Hunt argued that official figures showed average waiting times at the centre were 13 minutes.

“I think this kind of petty politics is insulting for the people of Bennelong when there are critical issues facing Medicare that are being ignored,” said **Dr Siavash Es'haghi**, President of the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA).

“Nine million Australians need access to vital radiology every year, and yet Medicare rebates for those services have been frozen in time since 1998. Average gaps are now a staggering \$100 and more than 80,000 people in NSW each year delay or miss out on being diagnosed altogether because they can't afford to pay.

“Both the Coalition and Labor used last year's Federal election to promise they would fix Medicare – and then they both broke their promises.

“Patients have been waiting 19 years - and today we’re arguing about wait times of 13 minutes?
Patients deserve better from our politicians.

“Health has been identified as the most important issue to the voters in Bennelong and the candidates need to lift their game and tell the people of Bennelong what they’re going to do to make sure that they deliver on their promises on Medicare – so that all Australians can afford life-saving x-rays and scans, not just those who can afford it.”

Notes:

- \$100 average out of pocket costs for radiology patients: Medicare statistics published by Department of Health
- Coalition promise: <https://www.liberal.org.au/latest-news/2016/06/05/coalition-plan-access-affordable-diagnostic-imaging-all-australians>
- Labor promise: http://www.billshorten.com.au/labor_will_always_fight_for_medicare

ADIA represents radiology practices throughout Australia, both in the community and in hospitals. It promotes the ongoing development of quality accreditation standards and appropriate funding settings so that Australians can have affordable access to quality radiology services. This supports radiology’s central role in the diagnosis, treatment and management of a broad range of conditions in every branch of medicine.

Media: Phil Martin, Michels Warren on 0418 817 876