

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TUESDAY 9TH MAY 2017

‘GUARANTEEING MEDICARE’: GOVERNMENT OVER-PROMISES AND UNDER- DELIVERS FOR MILLIONS OF PATIENTS

CANBERRA: **Scott Morrison’s Budget presentation spruiked the Government’s health announcements as ‘*Guaranteeing Medicare*’ – and yet it has fallen well short of guaranteeing anything for millions of Australian patients, with no realistic relief from almost 20 years of failure to invest in patient rebates for vital radiology services.**

[Despite publicly committing](#) prior to the last election to unfreeze Medicare rebates specifically to reduce patient costs for MRIs, x-rays, CT scans and ultrasounds – an increase of just 1.5% a year in Medicare rebates for radiology – the Government has broken its promise.

Instead, it has only budgeted to index 13% of all radiology services listed on Medicare – leaving 87% of services frozen (indexation of just 117 eligible items out of a total of 891).

In tonight’s budget, the Government also announced that it would not go ahead with previously announced cuts to bulk billing incentives – and headlined this as “re-investing”.

ADIA President **Dr Christian Wriedt** said:

“The Government’s announcement that it is not going ahead with cuts to bulk billing incentives is not an investment in health and it’s disingenuous to pretend otherwise.

“It’s just confirmation that they’re not going ahead with what was widely viewed as flawed policy.

“As for what could only be described as a very ‘partial thaw’ of Medicare rebates that have been frozen solid since 1998, this will be very cold comfort indeed to millions of Australian patients relying on vital radiology services.

“Too bad if you are pregnant and need an ultrasound, have a brain tumour and need an MRI or require a PET scan to assess the extent of your cancer – or any one of hundreds of other vital radiology services. There’s no relief.

“Radiology saves lives – it’s critical in diagnosing and treating every one of the top 35 cancers in Australia – but the average gap for radiology patients is already \$100 and around 300,000 Australians are deciding to forgo vital diagnosis every year because they think it’s too expensive. And this is a real issue that affects millions of people. Almost 40% of Australians access radiology services every year.

“Greg Hunt is very clearly a dedicated Health Minister – but he has to honour all agreements made by his Government, not just the ones he makes.”

Before the election, the Government promised to unfreeze Medicare for MRIs, x-rays, CT scans and Ultrasounds:

“The Coalition will ensure that diagnostic imaging indexation resumes when the current GP rebate indexation freeze concludes.” The Turnbull Coalition Team’ Media Release, 5 June 2016: <https://www.liberal.org.au/latestnews/2016/06/05/coalition-plan-access-affordable-diagnostic-imaging-all-australians>)

In the same pre-election promise, the Government had also committed to adopting recommendations around developing a quality framework to ensure patients are receiving high quality and safe services. However, there was no mention of this in tonight’s Budget.

The Parliamentary Budget Office noted the Government’s commitment to indexation:

The Coalition election commitment Plan for access to affordable diagnostic imaging for all Australians is estimated to reduce the underlying cash and fiscal balances by \$53 million in 2016–17 and is not expected to have an impact on the budget balances over the remainder of the forward estimates period. However, the measure introduces indexation of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) benefits for diagnostic imaging services from 2020–21 which will have an ongoing cost to the budget that is projected to rise to \$0.6 billion in 2026–27.

(PBO August 2016 Post-election report of election commitments: 2016 general election, page 3: http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Budget_Office/General_elections/2016_post-election_report)

For more information and supporting facts, please visit the [ADIA web site](#).

The Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) represents the 500 radiology practices around the country providing the scans and services essential to patient care.

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Interviews are available on request with:

- **ADIA:** Dr Christian Wriedt, President
- **Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists:** Dr Greg Slater, President
- **Radiologists/Practice Managers**