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MEDICARE IGNORING THE FIVE BIGGEST CANCER KILLERS

A new report from the Commonwealth Government confirms that patients needing expert radiology services for the most common cancers have been ignored for nearly two decades.

The Commonwealth Government's Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's *Burden of cancer in Australia: Australian Burden of Disease Study 2011* found that lung, bowel, breast, prostate and pancreatic cancers accounted for almost half of Australia's cancer burden*.

And yet, the Medicare rebates for the essential radiology services required to diagnose, monitor and treat these cancers have remained frozen since 1998.

"It's ironic that the Federal Government's own report recognises the burden of these killer cancers, yet it is doing nothing through Medicare to alleviate the financial pressures on the patients dealing with them," said ADIA President **Dr Christian Wriedt**.

"The radiology services required by patients to diagnose, treat and manage their conditions are critical to their health and to the Australian cancer burden.

"However, instead of properly funding radiology through Medicare, the Government broke its promise to fix Medicare for radiology patients and is going to index just 7% of all radiology services – and, even then, not until 2020.

"We had a commitment from this Government that they would guarantee to fix Medicare but it is far from guaranteed for these patients, and far from fixed."

Dr Wriedt said ABS figures showed 300,000 Australians are deciding to forgo vital diagnosis every year because they believe radiology is too expensive.

"There's little point in identifying the top cancer killers if you're not going to help patients afford the services they need to diagnose and fight them," Dr Wriedt said.

"Our practices are dealing with patients who are becoming increasingly angry and frustrated because Medicare is letting them down."

The Government will only be unfreezing 59 of the 891 Medicare radiology services in 2020.

The following is a short list of just some of the critical radiology services needed to diagnose, treat and manage the top five cancers named in the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's report.

Lung cancer	X-ray – chest (not being indexed) CT – chest and upper abdomen with contrast (not being indexed until 2020) PET – lung cancer staging (not being indexed) CT-guided fine needle aspiration (not being indexed until 2020) X-ray – chest (not being indexed) MRI – brain (not being indexed)
Bowel cancer	Multiple CT scans – (not being indexed until 2020) Nuclear medicine bone scan (not being indexed) MRI of pelvis (not being indexed)
Breast cancer	Diagnostic mammography (not being indexed until 2020) Ultrasound – breast (not being indexed) Ultrasound-guided biopsy or fine needle aspiration (not being indexed until 2020)
Prostate cancer	MRI of the prostate and MR-guided prostate biopsy (neither is funded by Medicare).
Pancreatic cancer	CT chest abdomen and pelvis (not being indexed until 2020) MRI pancreas and liver (not being indexed) PET (not funded by Medicare)

*The burden is calculated in terms of years of life lost due to early death from cancer, as well as the years of healthy life lost due to living with the disease. To read the full report, visit <http://aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129559772>.

The Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association ([ADIA](#)) represents the 500 radiology practices around the country providing the scans and services essential to patient care. For media, please call Phil Martin, Michels Warren PR on 0418 817 876