



australian diagnostic imaging association

PRESS RELEASE

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Radiology industry welcomes better access to MRIs - but says more must be done

Access to potentially life-saving Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) services has just become easier - but the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) says many patients are still missing out.

As of 1 November, GPs will be able to request a limited number of Medicare-eligible MRI services for items including scans of the head, spine and knees for patients aged 16 years and older.

This will mean faster diagnosis and earlier detection of some conditions for patients who would otherwise have to be referred to a specialist or consultant physician in order to access a Medicare-funded MRI.

But this additional access still leaves Australia well behind the OECD average in the use of MRI diagnostic imaging.

ADIA President-Elect Dr Chris Wriedt said the Department of Health's announcement was "a good start" but that many more common conditions were still not covered.

"MRIs offer a very precise picture and therefore enable a much more exact diagnosis, and that's exactly what you want in delivering a good health care outcome for the patient," Dr Wriedt said.

"However, for the vast majority of conditions, the Medicare rebate still only covers CT scans, ultrasound, nuclear medicine and plain X-rays. MRIs provide unique information about disease processes that these other modalities cannot.

"This increased access is a good start. But there are many more common conditions - particularly around diseases such as arthritis and other musculoskeletal complaints - which are still not eligible for Medicare-rebatable MRIs after this announcement and we would encourage the Federal Government to look at these as a matter of urgency."

Dr Ron Shnier represented ADIA on the Government's working group.

"We commend the Federal Government for this announcement and for the consultative approach that has been taken toward this issue," Dr Shnier said.

"However, it is absolutely essential that the Government listens when we say that this should be viewed as the first step. We are lagging behind many other western medical systems in this regard.

"Medicare needs to fund MRI services for a much broader range of clinical indications because Australian patients deserve better than they're currently getting."

To find out more about the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) visit www.adia.asn.au.

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