

Thursday 4 August 2010

Opposition On the Right Rebate Track, but What About Patients who Can't Afford to Access Early Diagnosis? Asks Radiology Providers

Soon, Australia's wealthy patients can afford to access early diagnosis for potentially deadly or chronic diseases - the rest will be forced to queue and patients are looking to both major parties to step in and make a difference.

Australia's radiology providers today praised the Opposition for committing to increase rebates for patients who need after hours GP care, but say both major parties should guarantee voters can access affordable early and accurate diagnosis for cancer or any other serious but potentially treatable disease regardless of where they live or what they earn.

The Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) today called on the Government and the Opposition to commit to introducing indexation for all patient rebates and increasing funding for patients.

The President of ADIA, Dr Ron Shnier said that thousands of Australians seek to have their conditions diagnosed and their health checked via diagnostic imaging (DI). But now access and affordability is at risk due to chronic underfunding.

"In most cases the Medicare rebate for radiology services is less today than it was twelve years ago," Dr Shnier said. When inflation is factored in, the overall impact has seen radiology benefits per service fall, in real terms, between 20% and 40% over this period.

As a result, patients are forced to bear the brunt of increasing costs. Patients are now paying twice as much for radiology services as they were 12 years ago. Indeed patient gap payments have increased by an average of 40% just between 2005 and 2009.

"Early and accurate diagnosis saves lives. It saves the taxpayers money and it saves the already overwhelmed public hospital system from being swamped by patients suffering chronic diseases that could easily have been prevented with early detection and treatment," Dr Shnier said.

"If the major parties want to deliver on promises to support preventable health measures, and they want to rein in the health spend and ensure people do not end up with expensive chronic diseases when they didn't have to, then they need to commit to ensuring all radiology services are indexed and rebates increased."

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