

PRESS RELEASE
Tuesday 13 May 2014

Health costs already stopping treatment

Even before the possible introduction of a Medicare co-payment, too many ill Australians are declining or delaying critical diagnostic imaging services – such as MRIs, ultrasounds and x-rays – because patient costs are spiralling beyond their ability to pay.

That hard truth is at the heart of the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association's (ADIA) submission to the Senate Inquiry into Out-of-pocket Costs in Australian Healthcare.

“Out-of-pocket costs for patients increasing by 44% in six years is simply too much. The average gap payment – the average – for diagnostic imaging is now \$88 but for an MRI is \$157!” said ADIA President, Dr. Christian Wriedt.

“And for many people – the elderly, the chronically ill, the badly injured – they need imaging regularly to monitor their treatment. So we have more and more people simply opting out of imaging because they just can't afford it.”

As ADIA states in its submission, opting out of diagnostic imaging only increases costs in other areas of the health system. Diagnostic imaging speeds up diagnosis and allows for better treatment so without it people get sicker and stay sicker longer.

The main driver behind the skyrocketing gap payments is the Government's decision in 1998 to stop indexing Medicare rebates on diagnostic imaging services. This has meant that for patients, gaps have increased every year while Medicare payments have remained the same.

Providers have absorbed as much of the cost increases as they can, and have worked to ensure the disadvantaged can still access the services they need, but some has had to be passed on to patients. They also play a significant role in. To stop the gap situation getting even worse, ADIA's submission makes four clear recommendations:

Recommendation 1:

The Government should reinstate indexation of patient rebates for diagnostic imaging services.

Recommendation 2:

The Government should implement a Quality Framework in diagnostic imaging as soon as possible to ensure that all services meet minimum standards.

Recommendation 3:

Those diagnostic services which are currently funded at less than 50% of what they cost to deliver should have their rebates increased immediately.

Recommendation 4:

The Government should list all clinically-necessary MRI services on the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

Taking into account the Government's drive to limit spending, ADIA has developed a detailed plan of how to spend taxpayers funds more efficiently.

“There's no choice. The Government has to act positively because the current situation isn't sustainable – for patients or the health system,” Dr. Wriedt said. “Tomorrow night's Budget will show whether they have put the health of Australians ahead of savings.”

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