

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Daffodil Day: Medical imaging critical for cancer – but the growing ‘gap’ means many miss out

Imagine trying to beat cancer without using medical imaging such as MRI and CT scans.

It sounds ludicrous, but that is what too many Australians are trying to do because they just can't afford the imaging their doctors require.

As millions of Australians today support the **Cancer Council's Daffodil Day** fundraiser, **Dr Sue Ulreich**, President of the **Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA)**, is calling on the Federal Government to find the money to close the payment gap for medical imaging.

"When you are fighting a life threatening condition like cancer, medical imaging is vital to enable radiologists to properly diagnose and aid the treatment and monitoring of your health," Dr Ulreich said.

"But the sad fact is that more and more cancer patients are having to get by without this critical service because they simply can't afford the gap payments."

At the heart of the problem is Medicare rebates for medical imaging have not been indexed since 1998.

"The gaps patients have to pay have been steadily growing for 15 years, and they're now increasing at about 10% per annum. Who can afford to keep up with that? We need indexation back in place," Dr Ulreich said.

"The situation is not just financially unsustainable for patients; it's simply unfair."

While diagnostic imaging – which is absolutely central to health care – is not indexed to match rising costs, virtually everything else covered by Medicare is, including items like acupuncture, IVF and podiatry.

"The more you look at the situation, the worse it gets. Given that the early detection of cancer can lead to much better patient outcomes, access to affordable Medical Imaging services must be a priority," Dr Ulreich said.

"Not only are the gap payments too large and growing, many of the procedures needed to treat cancer are needed on a regular basis to monitor patients' response to treatment. Many of these aren't even covered by Medicare meaning patients have to pay 100% of the cost. This is not how Medicare is supposed to work."

The growing gap impacts tens-of-thousands of cancer patients every week – like **Jillian Hocking**, from Paradise Point in Queensland.

"As a person that has had cancer, imaging is so important and it must to be affordable," Jillian said.

Press release



“People don’t get diagnosed because they don’t get imaging.”

Dr Katherine Shanley, from the Brisbane suburb of Bellbowrie, has also dealt with the issue personally and in her work.

“I am a GP. I see people every day for whom affording imaging is a real problem. Increasing the rebate, especially for ultrasound, is vital and we should introduce more rebates for MRI.”

The vast majority of imaging providers either bulk-bill and/or provide subsidised imaging for people in need, but Government action is needed to bring fairness and accessibility back into the system.

ADIA wants to work with the Commonwealth Government to develop a sustainable solution that will improve Medicare rebates for all patients,

BACKGROUND

Medical imaging plays an important role in both the prevention and diagnosis of most cancers, as well as playing an integral role in treatment of patients who have cancer.

Through monitoring tumours, medical imaging is used to assess disease progression and response to treatment (usually following chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy).

While all imaging modalities have a role to play depending on the type of cancer, most commonly Computed Tomography (CT) and Positron Emission Tomography (PET) are used as staging tools post diagnosis to assist in measuring patient prognosis.

However, other modalities such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) are now emerging as important procedures in cancers requiring greater tissue differentiation and characterisation of change, such as the cervix, breast and prostate.

With technological advancement in cross-sectional imaging, techniques such as whole-body Diffusion Weighted Imaging (DWI) in MRI or Dual Energy Imaging in CT are adding greater diagnostic confidence in the evaluation of a patient’s response to therapy and surgical intervention.

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

To find out more about Daffodil Day visit <http://www.cancer.org.au/about> or your state Cancer Council.

MEDIA

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