

## PRESS RELEASE

# Better technology should be made accessible to reduce breast cancer deaths

On Pink Ribbon Day, the Federal Government is being urged to let better technology prevent more deaths from breast cancer.

"While the mammograms which are central to Australia's breast screening program do a great job, a mammogram is not the only - or even the best - technology to detect breast cancer," said Dr Sue Ulreich, President of the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA).

"As we all know, breast cancer is a mammoth health issue for 50% of the population, so the current health system needs to be changed to bring the best technology to bear.

"For example, studies have provided strong evidence to show Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is a more sensitive test and can provide more accurate results than mammography - but the current funding system heavily restricts MRI use.

"This means cancers can go undetected for longer, significantly reducing survival chances."

Each day in Australia, seven women will die from breast cancer and around 50 women are diagnosed with breast or a gynaecological cancer.

Pink Ribbon Day - Monday 28 October 2013 - aims to raise the community's awareness of these cancers in females, and highlight the work still needed to reduce the toll and support sufferers.

### THE PROBLEM IS MONEY

"If you are fighting breast cancer or you're in remission, diagnostic imaging is vital to your chances of a successful outcome. But the current Medicare settings mean too many women - generally women on low incomes and/or those with multiple health issues - are financially locked out of the best options," Dr Ulreich said.

For example, women under 50 with a prior history of breast cancer cannot claim MRI examinations on Medicare - despite the fact they are at high risk of developing subsequent cancer.

More generally, a definitive diagnosis of breast cancer requires a biopsy or aspiration guided by mammography or ultrasound. Computed Tomography (CT), Positron Emission Tomography (PET) and Nuclear Medicine also play important roles in treating patients with breast cancer, tracking the disease process or monitoring their response to treatment.

"The national breast screening program really started in 1990, almost a quarter of a century ago, and as you'd expect technology has moved on since then," Dr Ulreich said.

"But too many of these newer procedures simply cannot be claimed through Medicare, and those that can are often just too expensive because the 'gap payment' has grown so wide."

"This is what Medicare was created to prevent - but it's been allowed to fail."

### BACKGROUND

Medicare rebates for medical imaging have not been indexed since 1998.

Therefore, the gap patients have to pay has been steadily growing over the past 15 years and is now increasing at approximately 10% per annum which is simply unsustainable.

Indexing ensures the Medicare payment for a service increases with the cost of living.

At the moment acupuncture, IVF and podiatry services are indexed but diagnostic imaging - which is absolutely central to modern health care - is not.

Many ADIA member practices bulk-bill and/or provide subsidised imaging for people in need, but unfortunately that's not enough.

Under Medicare as it stands, many imaging services cannot be bulk-billed as the cost of providing the service is much higher than the Medicare fee.

### MEDIA

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To find out more about the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) visit [www.adia.asn.au](http://www.adia.asn.au).