



Better MRI Access: A Good Outcome in a Strapped Health Budget

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Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) is pleased with the measures announced for diagnostic imaging in this year's Federal Budget. Notwithstanding that this was a particularly tough Budget, diagnostic imaging was the number three listed health priority funded. The Treasurer in his post-Budget National Press Club speech told the tale of Ministers bringing excellent funding proposals to Cabinet, only to leave with their documents still tucked under their arms.

In the lead up to the budget, ADIA, with the support of over 30,000 patients, Cancer Voices Australia, Cancer Council Australia, The Warwick Foundation, Private Cancer Physicians of Australia (PCPA), The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists (RANZCR), Australian Sonographers Association (ASA), Australasian Society for Ultrasound in Medicine (ASUM), Australian and New Zealand Association of Physicians in Nuclear Medicine (ANZAPNM) and the Rural Alliance in Nuclear Scintigraphy (RAINS), called for the indexation of Medicare rebates and more affordable access by patients to diagnostic imaging services.

In response, Minister Roxon met with ADIA prior to the Budget to outline the budget measures. She asked the sector to recognise that, notwithstanding a compelling case had been made for indexation, the commitment of the \$420 million required was not available in the current fiscal environment.

We are very pleased that, with the assistance of cancer advocacy groups, we were able to demonstrate that patients need improved access to CT services rather than cuts.

We reflect on where the Review of the past two years started: "The review will consider whether current fee relativities should be changed to better reflect costs, both between and within different modalities of imaging". This was code for reducing the rebates for CT to increase the rebates for X-ray and ultrasound.

ADIA has congratulated the Minister and the Government on finding additional funding for the sector against the odds. It is important that the sector continues to retain the goodwill and the level of understanding that has been built up with her office and within the Department of Health and that we participate effectively in the implementation of these Budget measures.

The measures in summary:

- **From July 2011, CTCA** is to be Medicare funded (\$700 rebate).
- **From July 2011, PET items** previously only available to seven facilities will be moved to the Diagnostic Imaging Services Table and three new items will be added.
- **From May 2012, all current MRI arrangements will be standardised**, which means that bulk billing and hours of operation conditions will be removed.
- **From May 2012, the bulk billing incentive funding** for MRI services will increase from 95 per cent to 100 per cent of the scheduled fee for Medicare eligible MRI services.
- **From November 2012, all currently unfunded regional MRI units** will be granted full Medicare eligibility subject to these machines meeting minimum standards.
- **From November 2012, GPs will be able to refer patients under 16 years** of age for MRI examinations for clinically appropriate conditions.
- **From November 2012, all currently unfunded MRI units in metropolitan areas** will be granted partial Medicare eligibility if they meet specified minimum standards. Partial eligibility means that patients will be eligible for Medicare rebates for a limited sub-set of MRI services performed on these machines, including new GP referred services, plus some current services for specified cancers.
- **From November 2013, GPs will be able to refer all patients** for Medicare eligible MRI examinations for a list of clinically appropriate conditions to be determined.
- **From November 2012**, practices will be able to apply for full Medicare funding for a limited number of new MRI machines (12 over four years). These will be granted where there is an established patient need.

At the time of writing, ADIA is analysing the final report of the Review of Funding of Diagnostic Imaging and the terms of reference for a further five years of Government review and transition arrangements for the sector.

ADIA represents private diagnostic imaging practices in Australia. They diagnose and treat 50,000 patients every day and operate 80 per cent of the comprehensive practices providing services to patients in rural and regional Australia. ADIA members are both for-profit and charitable and operate practices in the community and in public and private hospitals in Australia.