

## **Milestone day for 9 million Australian radiology patients**

The wait is finally over for the more than 9 million Australians who rely on radiology services each year, with the 21-year freeze on Medicare rebates to be lifted for around 9 in 10 x-rays and scans from today.

The amounts patients receive back on x-ray, ultrasound, mammography, fluoroscopy, interventional radiology and CT scans will start to be indexed in line with inflation, finally moving the needle on Medicare rebates that have remained static since 1998.

The re-introduction of indexation was announced by the Federal Minister for Health Greg Hunt in March 2019 as part of a \$1.7 billion commitment over 10 years to Australian radiology patients.

Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) President **Dr Julian Adler** said the re-introduction of indexation would ensure that many common radiology services remain within reach of the everyday Australian, allowing out-of-pocket costs to be lower and more services to be bulk billed.

However, he also warned that more work is still needed.

“For more than 20 years, successive governments ignored the cries of millions of Australians who were struggling to afford the radiology services they needed. Prior to today, more than 300,000 patients were forgoing potentially life-saving radiology services each year due to costs,” he said.

“This is a watershed moment for these Australians and credit to the current government and the Federal Minister for Health who brought about the most meaningful structural reform of Medicare rebates for radiology patients in more than two decades.

“And although today’s changes are significant, we cannot forget that rebates for some critical services such as MRI, nuclear medicine and PET scans remains frozen.

“These scans play a key role in the diagnosis of a potentially deadly illnesses such as cancer and heart disease, yet the remain out of reach for many patients who simply cannot afford the out-of-pocket costs.”

At present, many patients needing to access vital MRI, nuclear medicine and PET scans are paying gaps of between \$100 to \$300 for each scan due to the more than two-decade long rebate freeze.

Dr Adler encouraged the Government to finish the job by ending the Medicare freeze for all radiology services in this year's Federal Budget.

"So much good work has been done already and the Government now has the opportunity to cement its support for Australian patients who rely on critical radiology services," he said.

"We urge Minister Hunt to finish the job, and look forward to a productive dialogue over the coming months as we work toward this outcome."

*ADIA represents radiology practices throughout Australia, both in the community and in hospitals. It promotes the ongoing development of quality accreditation standards and appropriate funding settings so that Australians can have affordable access to quality radiology services. This supports radiology's central role in the diagnosis, treatment and management of a broad range of conditions in every branch of medicine.*

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