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SENATE INQUIRY: RADIOLOGISTS CALL FOR END TO SYSTEMIC MEDICARE UNDERFUNDING

Australian radiologists have called for an end to the “systemic underfunding” that is crippling patient access to affordable radiology services under Medicare.

In its submission to the Senate Inquiry on *Availability and Accessibility of Diagnostic Imaging equipment around Australia*, the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) has argued that patient costs can only be reduced and patient access to life-saving radiology services improved by increasing government funding.

Critically, ADIA has called on the Federal Government to honour its election promise to index radiology rebates when the GP freeze ends in July 2018.

“The most important issue facing Australia’s nine million radiology patients is out of pocket costs, caused by the freeze on Medicare rebates that has been dragging on for 19 years,” said ADIA President **Dr Christian Wriedt**.

“Out of pocket costs are steadily increasing every year to cover the rising cost of providing radiology, and now average almost \$100. These are the highest out of pocket costs among the primary care services, and cause almost 300,000 patients every year to miss out on being diagnosed.”

Upfront costs, gaps and bulk billing rates for primary care services, 2015-16

	Radiology	General practice	Pathology
Average upfront cost	\$217	\$78	\$50
Average gap	\$97	\$33	\$25
Bulk billing rate	77%	84%	88%

Source: ADIA analysis of 2015-16 Medicare statistics

ADIA’s other recommendations to the Inquiry include:

- Immediate implementation of the first phase of the Quality Framework to ensure patients are protected by quality standards;
- A review of barriers to attracting radiologists to regional, rural and remote areas;
- A review of MSAC’s processes and criteria used to determine its recommendations for radiology services; and
- Development of a robust and transparent process for granting of MRI licences.

“Radiology is a key part of primary care because it enables early diagnosis of patient conditions. Early diagnosis means that patients can be treated more effectively and less expensively – for themselves and our health system,” Dr Wriedt said.

“That’s why affordable access is so critical because it reduces the burden on our public hospitals by preventing hospital admissions which occur when patients need more complex treatment.

“We were pleased that the underfunding of radiology was recognised by both the AMA and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists in their submissions to the Inquiry and we look forward to contributing further to the Inquiry at a public hearing.”

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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