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## **Four Corners reaction: Breast cancer patients big losers in gap debate**

Last night's Four Corners program (*Mind the Gap*) has thrown more light on one of the most pressing issues facing Australian breast cancer patients – spiralling out-of-pocket costs.

One of the patients profiled in the program was Queensland mother Madonna Buitter, whose out-of-pocket costs for her breast cancer treatment totalled almost \$16,000.

**Yet, despite being the most common cancer affecting women in Australia, breast cancer patients still do not have access to potentially life-saving MRI under Medicare.**

“An MRI can be critical to newly-diagnosed breast cancer patients because MRI provides additional diagnostic information that can inform important decisions about a patient's treatment,” said **Dr Slavash Es'haghi**, President of the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA).

“However, despite our repeated lobbying, this service is still not funded by Medicare.

“If they can afford it, patients pay around \$600 for an MRI, and private health insurance won't fund it because it's not on Medicare and is usually an out-of-hospital service.

“Breast cancer patients are being discriminated against by Medicare, and their out-of-pocket costs are spiralling as a result.

“In the case of Madonna, her out-of-pocket costs were exacerbated by the fact Medicare rebates for radiology services have been frozen solid since 1998, not even rising to keep pace with inflation.

“And this is not a problem that's unique to her. In fact, nine million Australians need affordable access to x-rays and scans every year, and they're not getting it because of government inaction on rebates.”

Australians diagnosed with breast cancer encounter many different diagnostic imaging services – mammography, diagnostic ultrasound, ultrasound-guided biopsy or fine needle aspiration, MRI and localising procedures.

“Many of these are outpatient services before or after the patient goes to hospital for treatment – so they're not covered by private health insurance,” said Dr Es'haghi.

“These services have low bulk billing rates and high average gaps because the rebates do not cover costs.

“It’s more evidence of the need for the Turnbull Government to honour its commitment to end the 20-year freeze on Medicare rebates – a promise that it made to Australian patients before the last election.”

Approximately 16,000 women and 150 men are expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer this year and more than 3,000 will die. With a 1 in 8 lifetime risk of developing the disease, breast cancer is now the most common cancer affecting Australian women - [Statement Of Principles: Breast Cancer Imaging In Australia](#)

*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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