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Rebate freeze debate ignores radiology as patient gaps hit \$100

Radiologists have accused both sides of politics of ignoring a looming health emergency, with patient gaps for scans such as X-rays, Ultrasounds, CTs and MRIs now averaging \$100.

While election debates focus on rebates for GP visits and pathology tests, the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association (ADIA) says vital diagnostic imaging services are becoming more unaffordable for everyday Australians.

“We’ve hit a regrettable milestone in Australia, with gap payments for diagnostic imaging services now averaging \$100,” said ADIA CEO Pattie Beerens.

“People are rightly upset about the three year freeze on Medicare payments to GPs, but no-one is discussing the fact that patient rebates for diagnostic imaging have been frozen since 1998.

“Bill Shorten is now on record saying that the Liberals’ plan will jeopardise Medicare, bulk billing and the ability for people not to have to pay up front fees when they need a mammogram or x-ray - and that Labor will put people first.

“That is encouraging in theory, but in practice neither side of politics has made a commitment that addresses the enormous squeeze on millions of patients needing scans.”

Ms Beerens said practices across Australia remained extremely concerned that the freeze on patient rebates for diagnostic imaging – which have been stagnant for 18 years and are scheduled to continue past 2020 – will continue to drive more patients away from essential diagnosis and treatment.

“The fact is that most radiology practices are local businesses operating on thin margins. This squeeze has been going on for two decades, and it has to end,” Ms Beerens said.

“Patients don’t just decide to have a scan, they have to be referred, but governments have cut so much money from the system that average Australians are being priced out of health care.

“Sick people will avoid getting diagnosed, and that will create huge long-term problems for our health system.”

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