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Coalition plan for access to affordable diagnostic imaging for all Australians

Coalition Plan For Access To Affordable Diagnostic Imaging For All Australians

A re-elected Turnbull Coalition Government will improve safe and affordable access to frontline diagnostic imaging services helping Australians with the early detection and management of cancer, neurological disorders and other conditions.

Minister for Health Sussan Ley made the announcement as part of a broader package of measures agreed with the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association today to strengthen the industry and ensure taxpayer dollars were targeted where they would help patients the most.

Ms Ley said this included a re-elected Turnbull Coalition Government immediately commissioning an independent evaluation, in consultation with the sector, of the commercial pressures facing diagnostic imaging providers.

Ms Ley said it would also help identify areas where taxpayer investment could be better targeted to help improve patient access to affordable and safe scans and imaging procedures – an investment estimated to be worth as much as \$50 million per year subject to the outcome of the evaluation.

“The Coalition is committed to ensuring access to affordable diagnostic imaging for all Australians,” Ms Ley said.

“Key to this is ensuring we have a strong, healthy and sustainable diagnostic imaging sector and ensuring investment in frontline scans and imaging procedures is targeted where it will help patients the most.

“Diagnostic imaging scans, such as CT, mammograms and ultrasounds, are best practice in the diagnosis of many cancers, neurological disorders and orthopaedic soft tissue injuries. It is regarded as the ‘front line’ tool in the diagnosis of many serious and life threatening conditions, including breast cancer.

“Advancing technology in many areas of the health system creates a much more efficient and automated service, leading to decreased costs. However this is not the case for most diagnostic imaging services which need specialist doctors to supervise the examination and analyse the results, not machines.

“This independent evaluation will ensure we can work together with the diagnostic imaging sector to pinpoint exactly where possible improvements can be made in the broader system and ensure this significant additional investment is targeted where it will have the most benefit for patients.”

Ms Ley said, after many months of constructive consultations with the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association and its members, it was clear there were broader concerns about the unique commercial and regulatory environment within which they operated and how Government investment was being targeted.

Ms Ley said this included an understanding there was a need to align the MBS schedule fees on some items, which may not adequately reflect the actual cost of delivering the service.

“Based on the independent evaluation, the Government will also consider how best to ensure that the Diagnostic Imaging Schedule fees keep pace with costs into the future.”

To ensure that taxpayer investments in diagnostic imaging are targeted as well as they could be for patients, Ms Ley also announced the Australian Diagnostic Imaging Association had accepted the Government’s measure to only maintain the bulk billing incentive for concessional patients and those under 16 for diagnostic imaging, consistent with current incentives paid to GP services. This measure will commence for diagnostic imaging only from 1 January 2017, to allow time for the independent evaluation to be completed and the outcomes to be implemented.

It’s understood from consultations with the diagnostic imaging sector that there may be opportunities to realise further efficiencies worth as much as \$50 million per year by better targeting taxpayer investment.

In addition to the independent evaluation, Ms Ley said the Government’s MBS Taskforce being led by Prof. Bruce Robinson would continue its in-depth work to ensure individual Medicare items for diagnostic imaging are clinically-necessary and evidenced-based.

“This package is another example of the Turnbull Coalition undertaking innovative agreements in health that mutually benefit patients, providers and taxpayers,” Ms Ley said.

“It’s also important to remember a re-elected Turnbull Coalition Government will increase investment in Medicare to \$26 billion per year by 2021.

“This includes a \$4 billion increase in just four years and we must ensure every dollar lands as close to the patient as possible.

“Only a re-elected Coalition can be trusted to deliver a *Healthier Medicare* for all Australians.”

Key details of a re-elected Turnbull Coalition Government's plan for access to affordable diagnostic imaging for all Australians

- The Coalition will immediately commission an independent evaluation, in consultation with the sector, into the broader commercial environment, including cost pressures, of comprehensive diagnostic imaging practices.
- The Coalition's MBS Taskforce being led by Prof. Bruce Robinson will continue its in-depth work to ensure individual Medicare items for diagnostic imaging are clinically-necessary and evidenced-based.
- The proposed measure to remove bulk billing incentives for non-concession card holders and those over 16 will commence on 1 January 2017 to ensure the independent evaluation can be completed and the outcome implemented. The bulk billing incentive will remain for concession card holders and those under 16 as per the original measure.
- The Coalition will introduce a Quality Framework based on the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologist's recommendations, including for CT imaging, to ensure patients are receiving high quality and safe services.
- Consistent with other policy decisions the government has made, the Coalition will not change the Diagnostic Imaging Services Table, excluding those from the MBS Taskforce, for the next three years, without consultation and agreement with the sector.
- The Coalition will also work with the diagnostic imaging sector to deal with broader issues in the sector, including structural reform to address roadblocks to improved efficiency. This is essential to support fiscal sustainability and patient access to quality services in the long-term.
- The Coalition will ensure that diagnostic imaging indexation resumes when the current GP rebate indexation freeze concludes
- The Coalition will continue consultation with the sector during the transition and implementation phase of this policy
- The Coalition's policy will ensure Australians continue to have affordable and safe access to diagnostic imaging services.

