



POSITIVE POLICY

Strengthening Medicare: Pathology and Diagnostic Imaging Fact Sheet

Only Labor will fight to protect and strengthen Medicare, to make sure all Australians have access to affordable and universal healthcare.

Pathology and diagnostic imaging are integral parts of our health system.

More than 20 million diagnostic imaging procedures are performed each year in Australia, including X-rays, MRIs, CT scans, ultrasounds, mammograms and PET Scans, to diagnose or treat conditions ranging from bone fractures to cancer, stroke and heart disease.

These tests and scans are essential to diagnosing and treating disease, and it's vital that these services remain affordable for all Australians.

Yet Malcolm Turnbull wants to drive up the cost of these important tests by cutting the Medicare bulk-billing incentives.

A Shorten Labor Government will reverse the Liberals' cuts to Medicare bulk-billing for pathology and diagnostic imaging, ensuring that bulk billing can continue and that these essential tests remain affordable for all Australians.

Labor does not want Australia's health care system to go down the same road as America, where access to quality health care is available only to the wealthy few.

Labor believes your health care should always depend on your Medicare card, not your credit card.

The Liberals' cuts

In Malcolm Turnbull's first economic statement - the 2015-16 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook - he cut \$650 million from Medicare bulk billing incentives for pathology and diagnostic imaging.

Labor had introduced these incentive payments in government in order to maintain and support high rates of bulk billing.

Mr Turnbull's cut came in spite of the evidence that Labor's incentives are achieving their aim of maintaining or increasing bulk billing. In diagnostic imaging, for example, bulk billing rates rose 10 points in just six years thanks to Labor's measure.^[1]

These changes could mean that patients will need to pay more for vital tests and scans.

These costs could be difficult for many patients to meet, particularly people on low incomes and those with high health costs. Of most concern is that some patients may not be able to afford to have the tests they need. People may put off important tests leading to disease going undiagnosed and becoming advanced and, in the worst case, untreatable.

This means worse outcomes for patients and greater costs for our health system, as conditions that could have been picked up and treated early are not, leading to increased hospital admission and the need for more extensive treatments.

It is vitally important that barriers are not created to people accessing primary care.

The Liberals have made it clear that they want us all to pay more for our health care. After Labor thwarted the Government's three attempts to push a GP co-payment through Parliament, the Liberals introduced a GP Tax by stealth by freezing the indexation of the rebates paid to doctors. Doctors have confirmed this is likely to cost patients \$20 more for each visit to the doctor.

The Liberals will also increase the price of medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme - by \$5 per script for general patients and 80 cents for concessional patients.

Together these changes will cost an average family with two children more than \$400 a year in GP visits and medicines. An Age Pensioner couple will likely pay around \$500 more per year for their basic health care.

Medicare is a scheme for all Australians not just a safety net for the less well-off.

Australia has one of the most efficient health systems in the world. Australia invests around 9 per cent of GDP in health care. The US, one of the only industrialised countries not to provide universal health, spends around 18 per cent of their GDP on

health care.

Despite spending almost double what Australia spends, the US is flagging dramatically when it comes to life expectancy and overall wellness.

Labor does not want to see Australia go down the path of America, where healthcare is out of reach for many Americans.

That is why we have fought this cut, and it is why we will reverse it in government.

Labor will ensure tests and scans remain affordable

A Shorten Labor Government will reverse the Turnbull Government's cuts to bulk billing incentives for pathology and imaging.

Labor's measure gives pathologists and radiologists a specific incentive to bulk bill. Without it, bulk billing will fall, co-payments will rise, and patients will be forced to pay more for tests and scans - or skip them altogether. This measure will protect bulk billing and ensure that tests and scans remain affordable for all Australians.

This builds on our already announced policies to protect Medicare, including ending the Liberals' GP Tax by stealth which will cost you \$20 every time you see the doctor, stopping the Liberals' increases to the price of medicines and cuts to the Medicare Safety Nets.

Labor is also investing \$2 billion more than the Liberals in our hospital system, to drive down wait times for elective surgery and in emergency departments.

Together, these measures will ensure that Australia's world-class health care system remains affordable and accessible for every single Australian - now and into the future.

Financial Implications (\$ million)

2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Total (m)[2]
-197.4	-217.9	-228.5	-240.5	-884.2

Labor's policy has been costed independently by the Parliamentary Budget Office and will have an impact of \$884.2 million over the forward estimates to 2019-20, and \$2.9 billion over the decade to 2026-27.

[1] Medicare Statistics, 2014-15, http://medicarestatistics.humanservices.gov.au/statistics/mbs_item.jsp

[2] Totals may not sum due to rounding



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These policies (including where relevant their costings from the independent Parliamentary Budget Office) were accurate at the time they were announced. Labor will publish the updated final cost of all policies and their combined impact on the Budget prior to election day.

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