

Australian Medical Association Limited

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Transcript: AMA President Dr Michael Gannon, Doorstop, Parliament House, Tuesday 9 May 2017

Subjects: Federal Budget

MICHAEL GANNON: Tonight the Government has claimed back a lot of the goodwill it lost with its disastrous 2014 Budget. The centrepiece is a plan to re-index patient rebates in a staggered fashion, starting on 1 July 2017. What we'll see is the neediest patients have bulk billing incentives restored soon; in 12 months' time, rebates indexed for patients seeing GPs and all specialists, with another 12-month delay until specialist consultations are indexed and specialist procedures are indexed.

This is not everything that we would've liked to have seen. We would've liked to have seen full indexation from 1 July this year. But what it does show is a Minister who has recognised previous faults, who indicated a willingness to engage, be constructive, and we welcome the fact that we now have the clear air to try and negotiate on other important areas of health reform.

What I want to see now is the conversation switch to certain, sustainable public hospital funding. We need to see more investment in prevention. But what we see in this Budget is some certainty for patients around Australia. The Australian people told the Government what they thought of their health at the last election: they said they're prepared to pay more, but they want the Government to look after their health.

So what we see here is the neediest patients provided support when they go and see GPs and other specialists. We see the Government listening to the AMA's calls to invest in Indigenous health through the Rheumatic Heart Disease Strategy. We see support for further expansion of the increased numbers of vaccinations that will come from No Jab, No Pay; and we're happy to support the Government in their shared vision for increased investment in Australia's health system. Happy to take any questions.

JOURNALIST: What'll it mean for patients and people that use the doctors?

MICHAEL GANNON: Well, what it will mean is for the neediest patients, that as of 1 July this year those GPs or specialists who bulk bill them, those patients will see they are more likely to be bulk billed by those doctors. What we will see with full indexation of all consultations across the MBS in 12 months' time is less pressure put on those doctors who choose to bulk bill all of their patients, or a majority of their patients.

This means that we will not see patients thinking twice before visiting doctors, and we will see tremendous value that comes from these modest investments that the Government's making. So many health problems can be fixed by GPs, other specialists, preventing hospital admissions. There are some smart investments in this increased spending.

JOURNALIST: Sorry, just in terms of dollars though as well for patients?

MICHAEL GANNON: So what we are seeing here is \$1 billion extra over the forward estimates going to the MBS, in addition to the Government walking away from nearly \$2.5 billion of poorly thought-out changes to the Medicare Safety Net and to bulk-billing incentives

for pathology and diagnostic imaging. The changes to the safety nets are good for pregnant women, they're good for patients with chronic mental health problems, they're good for patients with cancer who will need a lot of visits in a short period of time.

The changes to bulk-billing incentives for pathology and diagnostic imaging recognise the importance of tests to the decisions that clinicians make every day in GP surgeries in specialists rooms around Australia. Thank you.

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