

# Australian Medical Association Limited

ABN 37 008 426 793

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604  
Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499  
Website: <http://www.ama.com.au/>



**Transcript:** AMA President Professor Brian Owler, ABC News 24, 19 May 2016

**Subject:** Labor's Medicare Freeze policy, #nomedicarefreeze

---

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Let's get more now on Labor's promise to lift the controversial freeze on Medicare rebates. For reaction from the nation's doctors we're joined in Sydney by Australian Medical Association President, Brian Owler. Brian Owler, good morning.

**BRIAN OWLER:** Good morning.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** So are you pleased to learn this this morning?

**BRIAN OWLER:** Very pleased. It's something that the AMA has been lobbying for to the Coalition and the Labor Party over the past few years. And the recent extension of the freeze under the last Budget really reignited anger amongst, particularly general practitioners, and amongst patients. So to hear Labor's commitment to indexing the patients' Medicare rebate over the next 10 years is, I think, a very good thing for Australia's health care system.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Does it mean that patients will now see a cut to their bill?

**BRIAN OWLER:** Well, the bulk-billing rates have remained high, but what we saw was with the announcement, there was a tipping point that was clearly reached, because we were being approached by many GPs around the country, asking us for assistance as an AMA to help transition their practices to actually start to allow them to charge a fee. And so what we now see is a policy, if it was a Labor Government, that would allow GPs to continue to bulk-bill and exercise discretion, particularly in those areas where there are low incomes, where there are a lot of children, or patients with a large burden of chronic disease.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** But the point that Josh Frydenberg was making this morning from the government was that as the bulk-billing rate continues to rise and expand, that is a big hit to the Federal Budget when it comes to the sustainability of the health care system, don't we at some point to have take account of that?

**BRIAN OWLER:** Well, actually, out of the Bureau of Health Information today we've seen information come out that Australia has one of the most efficient health care systems in the world. And everyone knows that investing in primary care in general practice, keeping people well and keeping them out of hospital care, is one of the most important things you can do in a developed nation if you want to support your health care system. Now what the government fails to realise is that they can't continue to talk about general practice and how important it is while they continue to rip billions of dollars out of it. And that's what we saw under the last Budget. So I think a commitment to making sure that patients can go and see their GP, particularly those people with multiple children, on lower incomes, those people that are managing multiple chronic diseases, they can go to their GP and their GP can exercise discretion to bulk-bill them. That's what actually is one of the most important foundations of our health care system. The freeze is undermining our health care system, particularly in primary care and general practice. So it's very important that the freeze is lifted for the benefit of Australia's patients.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Not arguing the fact that the health care system here is widely admired as you say, but are you suggesting then this morning that Australians, that all sides of politics, simply have to accept that that national health care bill continues to rise, and that's just a cost that any Federal Budget is going to have to carry?

**BRIAN OWLER:** Well, it is going to continue to rise, but as we live longer, as our life expectancy increases, we have to put a greater value on health, because as we do so, we live with more chronic diseases. So if you want to keep people well and in the community, you've got to particularly invest in general practice. Otherwise people end up sicker and in emergency departments and more expensive hospital care. So it's actually a good investment and I think we need to start to look at our expenditure in health care as an investment in the future of all Australians, rather than an annoying cost, which is the way that health expenditure has been portrayed in recent times.

**VIRGINIA TRIOLI:** Alright Brian Owler, good to talk to you this morning. Thanks so much.

**BRIAN OWLER:** It's a pleasure.

---

19 May 2016

CONTACT: John Flannery  
Kirsty Waterford

02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761  
02 6270 5464 / 0427 209 753