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AMA WELCOMES LABOR’S PROMISE TO REVERSE BULK BILLING CUTS FOR PATHOLOGY AND DIAGNOSTIC IMAGING

The AMA welcomes Labor’s commitment to reverse planned Federal Government cuts to bulk billing incentive payments for pathology and diagnostic imaging.

AMA President Dr Michael Gannon said the announcement by Labor leader Bill Shorten today that a Labor Government would continue the incentive payments was an important measure to ensure some of the most vulnerable in the community continued to have access to vital health services.

“Pathology and diagnostic imaging services are critical to providing high quality care,” Dr Gannon said.

“Every day, thousands of patients have blood tests, x-rays, MRIs, CT scans and other tests that are essential to accurately diagnosing their health problems and, in the case of patients with serious and chronic illnesses such as cancer and diabetes, monitoring their health.

“At a time when Medicare rebates for pathology and diagnostic imaging services have been frozen for more than a decade, the bulk billing incentives have been vital in ensuring that all patients can have ready access to these services, regardless of their financial circumstances.”

The Coalition Government last year announced that it would save \$650 million over four years by axing the bulk billing incentive for pathology services, and reducing it for diagnostic imaging services.

The AMA has been lobbying for the decision to be reversed, warning it will hit the poorest and sickest the hardest, and will push up health costs in the long-term.

Dr Gannon said the evidence showed that many patients, particularly the sickest and most vulnerable, often deferred seeking treatment because of cost, exacerbating their pain and suffering and ultimately adding to the nation’s health bill.

“Timely health services save money,” he said. “The last thing we should be doing is putting cost barriers in the way of people who need pathology and diagnostic imaging services.

“When people put off having a vital test, there is much greater risk that they will end up in hospital requiring much more expensive medical treatment.

“For the sake of patients and the health budget, the AMA urges the Coalition to match Labor’s commitment and dump its plans to axe and reduce bulk billing incentives for pathology and diagnostic imaging.”

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