

The Hon Sussan Ley MP  
Minister for Health  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Ley

**Medicare Safety Net (MSN) changes - Further concerns for cancer patients**

Cancer Voices Australia writes to again express our concern about the large out of pocket expense increases that cancer patients receiving private radiotherapy treatment will face as a result of the new arrangement proposed by *The Health Insurance Amendment (Medicare Safety Net) Bill* introduced into Federal Parliament recently.

We have been advised that changes to the MSN will see an average of 200% increase in out of pocket expenses for radiotherapy patients compared to the current situation. This is due to the proposal that reimbursement be capped at 150% of the MBS item number. Many will face much higher increases which will make their ability to afford this effective and cost efficient treatment very difficult, if not impossible

Patients, especially those in rural and regional areas which are not serviced by public facilities, may be forced to choose other options – more surgery in some cases and/or more medical oncology (both more expensive but with higher rebates), or forgo treatment at all. If they are able to get to public hospitals with radiotherapy facilities, this will put a great deal of pressure on those services.

We know the Minister and her Department know about the economic and clinical outcome arguments in favour of maintaining a viable private radiotherapy service for as many Australians as possible. Our purpose as Australia's only generic cancer consumer organisation with wide networks of people affected by cancer, is to draw attention to the fall-out of the Bill's changes for people who can least afford it – at least half those using private services.

We understand that about 50% of cancer patients treated in private centres are treated at bulk bill or heavily discounted through cross-subsidisation with full fee paying patients. The current MSN changes will make this arrangement unsustainable.

Another area of high adverse impact is that of stereotactic radiosurgery (SRS). The main problem here is the underfunding of MBS Item No 15600, set in 1997 and not reviewed since. This has major implications for access to new technology like the GammaKnife and CyberKnife. Our associate group, and fellow member of the Australian Cancer Consumer Network, the Brain Tumour Alliance Australia has written to you specifically on this matter.

Other ways towards resolution could be to review the MBS item numbers for radiation therapy (20 years old and significantly underfunded) as well as for SRS; and/ or to make an exemption for private health insurance (PHI) to cover some, or all of the gap. Cancer Voices will raise this at the PHI Review consultations, but with not much confidence about any will by government to change the current exclusion of outpatient radiotherapy from coverage.

Cancer Voices recognises that this is a complex, and perhaps unintended adverse scenario as it applies to radiation oncology treatment. However, we remain hopeful that the present proposals can be adjusted during the Bill's consideration in Parliament.

Yours sincerely



**Sally Crossing AM**

Convenor

4 November 2015

Cancer Voices Australia is the independent, 100% volunteer voice of people affected by cancer, working to improve the cancer experience for Australians, their families and friends. We are active in the areas around diagnosis, information, treatment, research, support, care, survivorship and policy. To achieve this we work with decision-makers, ensuring the patient perspective is heard.

Cancer Voices facilitates the **Australian Cancer Consumer Network** of 30 consumer related groups, and has led the cancer consumer movement in Australia since 2000.

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