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Media Release

Pathology Australia slams Government's hit on consumers

The decision by the Federal Government to remove the bulk billing incentive for pathology providers to support bulk billing has been slammed as short sighted by Pathology Australia (PA).

PA believes bulk billing rates will drop as the sector assesses this change which comes on top of the cuts to pathology the Government made last year and which leaves patients with more out of pocket costs.

Liesel Wett of PA said patients would suffer as they were forced to pay more in Australia for pathology tests.

"Some may even choose not to fill their pathology referrals and thus will not receive essential tests," Ms Wett said

"This is a very poor outcome for patients, and will cost the Government more in the longer term as the diagnosis of disease is deferred as is the opportunity for prevention of disease, meaning patients will become sicker without the positive interventions provided by the correct pathology diagnosis.

"The proposed changes announced today will also make the pathology sector reassess the current arrangement for patient access as they may be forced to close pathology collection centres.

"This is based on the high costs of collection-centre rents that the government has decided not to address."

The CEO of Pathology Australia, Liesel Wett, said the sector also may be forced to close rural and regional laboratories, hospital-based laboratories and collection services, resulting in a further reduction in access to services for patients and creating further delays in what are often critical diagnoses. All of this places patients at greater risk.

"The government is disconnected as regards to the current state of play relating to the delivery of pathology services," Ms Wett said.

"Pathology is an essential medical service in the healthcare system. Some 70% of medical decisions and 100% of cancer diagnosis rely on pathology tests.

"We do not want to see patients prevented from receiving their diagnosis because of cost."

Ms Wett said pathology was essential in the management of most diseases, especially chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, arthritis, hepatitis and HIV.

“In this case, the Government has gone outside of its existing agreed review process, the MBS Review, despite the pathology sector being supportive of a joint approach with government,” Ms Wett said. “We call on the Government to allow the MBS review to properly consider any changes to the Medicare Schedule so that the changes that are required can be made in a balanced and considered way.”

“This makes no sense for patients, or for a sustainable and effective pathology sector.

“The sector believes the Government should overturn the decision announced this afternoon, to the benefit of all Australians.”

Pathology Australia is the peak body representing private pathology in Australia.

For further comment:

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