



Australian Society of Ophthalmologists

# MEDIA RELEASE

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Australian Society of Ophthalmologists Incorporated ABN 29 454 001 424

*Tuesday 10 August 2010*

## **REBATE CUTS ARE HURTING PATIENTS AND THEY'RE READY TO VOTE WITH THEIR FEET: ASO**

The Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) is calling for a commitment to end Medicare rebate cuts from both major political parties before the Federal Election on 21 August.

The ASO says patients and doctors alike are fed up with a Medicare system that is increasingly failing in its job of making essential health care fair and equitable for all Australians.

Out-of-pocket costs for patients accessing Medicare have jumped 30 per cent in the past three years alone and a Galaxy poll of more than 1,000 voters taken at the weekend shows more than three in four Australians want a guarantee that neither Labor or The Coalition will cut rebates once in office.

"Out of pocket costs are the elephant in the room and need to be urgently addressed," ASO President Dr Bradley Horsburgh said.

"Patients are making it loud and clear that this is a critical election issue," he said.

"The ASO, along with other doctor groups such as the AMA have been lobbying government exhaustively to have equity re-injected into the MBS.

"The impact of lagging Medicare rebates are evident throughout our health system. In every state we have overblown and unmanageable public hospital waiting lists, vital medical services such as paediatric ophthalmology are in dangerous decline, and doctors are being pushed out of public health care," Dr Horsburgh said.

The ASO said while health care costs are rising rapidly, Medicare rebates for patients are either receiving minimal increases, remaining stagnant, or being cut.

There is the obvious example of last year's implemented cut to the rebate for cataract surgery – a decision that was going to put cataract surgery out of reach for thousands of Australians. It was only after a long and exhaustive campaign by the ASO that government was forced to reverse its decision. However there are countless more rebates on the schedule that are so low patients are missing out on vital care.

"The dismantling of Medicare we are currently witnessing is flawed health policy on the part of government. Our health system is crumbling as a result," Dr Horsburgh said.

**All correspondence:** PO Box 1300 Spring Hill Qld 4004

**President:** Dr Brad Horsburgh Ph: 07 3831 3004 / Fax: 07 3831 4005

**Secretary / Treasurer:** Dr John Kennedy Ph: 02 8382 6030 / Fax: 02 8382 6031



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“We need a commitment that the health of Australians is a priority for our ego-driven politicians. This campaign needs to start being about more than soap opera style party politics. It needs to be about where we are heading as a nation.

“Are we going to be a nation that delivers top quality health care to all or one that only looks after those who can pay?” he said.

The ASO said Australians deserve a commitment from both parties that the Medicare Benefits Schedule will undergo proper review with an outlook of no cuts and appropriate increases across the board to ensure essential services are accessible and affordable to all.

Ends.

**Contact:** *ASO President Dr Bradley Horsburgh on 0417 790 313*

*ASO Media Advisor Sarah Todman on 0425 883 304*

Source: Sydney Morning Herald, “No more Medicare cuts, say voters”, Mark Metherell, 10 August 2010.

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