

Patients to suffer under Budget rebate freeze.

Wednesday 4 May 2016

Health Minister Sussan Ley's Budget decision to continue the current freeze on patient Medicare rebates is a devastating blow for patients who will face greater out-of-pocket costs for health care.

The Australian Society of Ophthalmologists (ASO) says the move shows the Minister is making steady progress in her quest to divest Medicare of its founding role – which is to subsidise healthcare services to patients.

Meantime, she seems to be allowing the private health insurance industry carte blanche on fees.

“The Minister has chosen to continue a freeze on patient rebates just weeks after green lighting a premium rise for private health insurers.” ASO President Dr Michael Steiner said.

“Private health insurers told the Minister they needed to increase premiums to cope with the costs of healthcare and she agreed. Now she is stripping away the core protection that ensures all Australians can access healthcare when they need it. The two decisions are at complete odds,” Dr Steiner said.

The ASO says that as a publicly funded, universal health system operated by government, Medicare must reflect the costs of providing healthcare services.

When it does not reflect these costs patients face greater out-of-pocket expenses.

“Medicare has suffered from under-funding by government for two decades but this rebate freeze sounds the system's death knell (*Attachment 1*),” Dr Steiner said. “Sadly, it is patients who will suffer.”

Attachment 1: ASO 2016, MBS fees: selected consultation items vs price/wage indicators

Ends.

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Attachment 1.

