

Patient Alert : Government Announces cut to Medicare Reimbursement for Cataract Surgery by 50%

In the 2009 Federal Budget, the Federal Government announced that it would reduce the Medicare reimbursement to patients for cataract surgery by half (from about \$623 to \$312). This will come into effect from 1 January 2010.

Untreated cataracts are a leading cause of visual impairment and blindness. Poor vision causes a greatly increased risk of falls and fractures, depression, social isolation and loss of independence. Cataract surgery is one of the most effective of all surgical procedures. Technological advances have resulted in much quicker and safer surgery with greatly improved patient outcomes, but the procedure is technically demanding and requires the surgeon to have considerable skill .

At Broadmeadows Eye and Ear Specialists, we are very concerned about the effect this cut in funding will have on our patients. Many patients opt to have cataract surgery performed privately, regardless of whether they have private health insurance. The cut in funding will have a significant impact on patients' access to cataract surgery. Many will now be forced to have their surgery performed in the public system, which is already significantly overloaded. This will result in a lengthening of waiting lists and further delays for patients, putting them at risk of injury and other negative effects on their health. It is also highly probable that private health funds will follow suit and reduce the cover they provide for this procedure.

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, the Australian Society of Ophthalmologists, the AMA and the Independent Ophthalmic Network are all lobbying relevant government ministers and bodies to reverse this decision, but we feel it is important that our patient and community are aware of the proposed changes. Please feel free to discuss this further with your doctor.

What can you do?

- Tell your friends and family about the proposed changes so that the community is made aware of the fact that the government proposes to cut access to health care
- Contact your local community groups to raise awareness
- Contact your local and federal Member of Parliament and express your concerns in writing
- Contact your local media (newspaper and radio station)
- Ask your health fund to clarify in writing their position on this matter

If you can think of any other way we can help reverse this drastic proposal, please let us know. Medicare is there to provide universal health care for Australians. This proposal threatens the well-being of the most vulnerable members of our community and should not be allowed to proceed.