

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE



The Hon Peter Dutton MP
Federal Member for Dickson
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing

Senator Mathias Cormann
Senator for Western Australia
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration

8 September 2009

Cataract surgery saved

Senior Australians and others with cataracts will not have to pay more for cataract surgery.

Rudd Labor Government attempts to halve Medicare rebates which would have left people hundreds of dollars out of pocket from November 1 will not pass the Senate.

The Coalition, Independent Senator Nick Xenophon and Family First Senator Steve Fielding today announced that they would join forces to disallow regulations that would slash the Medicare rebate.

Disallowance of the regulations means they will not take effect and the Medicare rebates will remain unchanged.

Senior Australians, particularly those in regional and rural areas, had most to lose from the Rudd Government's Budget measures which took the Medicare rebate for cataract surgery from \$623 to \$311.

The Coalition and Senators Xenophon and Fielding all branded Labor's moves as bad public policy.

"The Rudd government proposal to cut in half the Medicare rebate for cataract surgery is yet another ill-considered budget measure in the health portfolio," Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration Mathias Cormann said.

"It would hurt patients – in particular elderly patients and patients across regional Australia. It does nothing to address doctor's fees. All it does is push-up out-of-pocket costs for patients remaining in the private system, while pushing more people into an already overburdened public system."

"This is yet another measure targeting those Australians who choose to access their health care in the private system," he said.

Shadow Health Minister Peter Dutton said the Government's attempt to cut rebates for cataract surgery was yet another bungle in the area of health.

"It would have unintended consequences affecting the health of senior Australians in other ways. If people are unable to afford the surgery their eyesight will gradually decrease – they will suffer more falls, more injuries and their quality of life will be greatly diminished."

Mr Dutton pointed out that according to the *State of our public hospitals: June 2009* report ophthalmology, including mainly cataract surgery, was the surgical speciality with the longest wait times for admission.

"To save \$311 per procedure, the Minister is proposing to push patients from the private into the public system where it will cost State governments \$3,000 per procedure," he said.

"This is bad public policy, this is cost shifting to private patients and to the States, it is an ill-considered budget measure and one which we will seek to stop from going ahead in the Senate" Senator Cormann said.

Media contact: **John Wiseman – (02) 6277 4884 or 0429 983 618**
 Senator Mathias Cormann – (02) 6277 3457 or 0411 874 546