

# **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*

**27 October 2009**

## **Disallowance of Cataract Rebate change**

The Coalition and crossbench Senators Nick Xenophon and Steve Fielding today began processes in the Senate to prevent the Rudd Government halving Medicare rebates for cataract treatments.

It means Australians needing life-changing cataract surgery will not have to pay hundreds of dollars more for their treatment or be forced into lengthy public hospital queues.

Notice was given that tomorrow both crossbench Senators and the Coalition will move to disallow changes to four Medicare items relating to cataract surgery.

Disallowance will prevent the Rudd Labor Government's moves to slam cataract sufferers with additional costs that could make the life-changing surgery unaffordable.

One hundred and twenty thousand Australians undergo cataract surgery every year – most of them are senior Australians.

“Cataract surgery is a very cost effective preventative health measure, helping to prevent falls, fractures and mental stress,” Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing Peter Dutton said today.

“The treatment can mean maintaining an independent life – continuing to live at home, continuing to drive a car, continuing to remain active.”

“As an important preventative health measure cataract surgery saves the health system far more than the \$153 million savings expected over four years from the Budget cuts of which cataract treatments form part,” Mr Dutton said.

“In any event, the Minister is proposing to save \$313 per cataract surgery in the private system to shift them into the public system where the procedure costs

taxpayers more than \$3,500 to perform,” Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Mathias Cormann said.

The Coalition and Senators Xenophon and Fielding gave the Government clear notice more than six weeks ago that if it proceeded with its hard-hearted cuts to rebates for cataract treatment they would move to disallow the government’s actions.

“The Rudd Government and Health Minister Nicola Roxon have had plenty of time to re-consider, but have so far refused to do so,” Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing Peter Dutton said today.

“We call on them again to re-think this change that will impact harshly on tens of thousands of Australians.”

Mr Dutton said in recent weeks Health Minister Roxon had sought to run a scare campaign frightening people into believing that the rebate would disappear completely if the Senate disallowed her changes.

“The Minister is completely out of step with the senior official in charge of the Medicare Benefits Schedule in her own department, who told a Senate Estimates Committee last week that the item would revert back to the previous rebate level if the new lower rebate was disallowed,” Senator Cormann said.

However to put the issue beyond doubt the Coalition and Senators Xenophon and Fielding will be moving an amendment to the Health Insurance Act.

That amendment will make it absolutely clear that if an MBS item is disallowed by the Senate, then the item reverts back to the previous rebate level.

“That is exactly the outcome senior Australians and other cataract sufferers need,” Mr Dutton said.

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## **NOTES**

*The Disallowance Motion will affect Medicare items 42698, 42701, 42702 and 42718 all relating to cataract surgery.*

*Medicare item 42718 is the new item introduced by the Minister for so-called “complex” surgery.*

*Ophthalmologists say it becomes redundant if the rebate cut to the other three items is disallowed.*

## **Attached**

1. *The Notice to Disallow.*
2. *Hansard Extracts from last week’s Senate Estimates hearing where Health Department official Ms Samantha Robertson (Assistant Secretary, Medical Benefits Branch) said disallowed rebates would revert to their pre-disallowance level.*
3. *Budget measure imposing the cut.*