



Media Release

Senator Mathias Cormann

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration

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ELDERLY PATIENTS PAYING FOR LABOR'S RECKLESS SPENDING!

As of today elderly patients in need of life-changing cataract surgery will be forced to pay the price for Labor's reckless spending.

To help the Rudd government save \$98 million, hundreds of thousands mostly elderly patients in need of timely access to cataract surgery will have to pay at least \$286 more per procedure.

Once private health funds have adjusted their rebates as a direct flow-on from the government's changes, additional expenses will be as much as \$600 per procedure.

"This will sadly make access to this procedure unaffordable for many and push thousands into the already overburdened public system," Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Health Administration Mathias Cormann said.

"In the public system, taxpayers will have to pay the whole cost of more than \$3,500 – at least for those lucky enough to get in," he said. "It just doesn't make sense."

"Those who can no longer afford access to the private system and cannot get into the public system will face the entirely preventable threat of going blind. This is an absolute disgrace," he said.

"It is unbelievable that the Rudd Labor government would pursue such ill-considered and short sighted budget cuts in the health portfolio, obviously to fund its reckless spending elsewhere.

"Why would any government be wasting billions of dollars on building and advertising Julia Gillard Memorial Halls, \$2.6 billion for pink bats and yet cut \$98 million from a program which helps fund access to this life-changing surgery for hundreds of thousands of Australians?"

"Cataract surgery is a very effective preventive health measure, helping to prevent falls, fractures, mental distress and isolation. This will end up costing our health system more, much more and not less.

The Senate last week disallowed government plans to cut the rebate for cataract surgery in half and sought to force the government to reinstate the previous rebate through a private members Bill.

"Nicola Roxon didn't take any notice. She clearly does not accept that she is a Minister in a parliamentary democracy and not a Minister in a dictatorship," Senator Cormann said.

"She did not respond to any of the rational arguments against her plan during the debate in the Senate, instead arrogantly pressing ahead making just a trivial change to her original measure.

"The Coalition with the support of Senators Fielding and Xenophon will continue to fight for patients against this cold hearted budget cut when the Senate resumes on 16 November," he said.

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