



THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
Minister for Health and Ageing

MEDIA RELEASE

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Support for People Living With Cancer

From today, people living with cancer will be better able to access a range of treatments, medicines and support.

Rudd Government initiatives that come into effect from today recognise the challenges cancer patients face and help them get the medicines and treatment they need.

MRI rebate

A new Medicare rebate is available from today for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans used for the initial staging of rectal cancer.

This use of MRI helps the treating doctors to decide on the best treatment to recommend to the patient. Radiotherapy, chemotherapy and surgery, alone or in combination, are used to treat rectal cancer. MRI before treatment starts will assist patients with rectal cancer to choose treatments that will help and avoid side effects of unnecessary therapy.

More than 5,000 Australians are newly diagnosed with rectal cancer every year.

The new Medicare rebate will be based on a schedule fee of \$403.20. This means that the rebate for outpatients will be \$342.75 and for inpatients will be \$302.40.

There are currently 120 Medicare-eligible MRI units in Australia, an increase of seven units in the past year.

Avastin

From today, Australians living with cancer will have access to the drug bevacizumab (Avastin®) through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). The drug is used for the treatment of colorectal cancer, also known as bowel cancer, and has been shown to prolong life and control symptoms.

The Rudd Government's decision to list this drug on the PBS will make a real difference to the lives of many Australians suffering from bowel cancer.

Around 1,710 additional people will begin using Avastin® for the treatment of colorectal cancer in the first full financial year of PBS listing.

Bowel cancer accounts for approximately 14 per cent of all cancer registrations and is the second most common cancer in Australia.

The listing will cost around \$310.7 million between 2009-10 and 2012-13.

PET services

Positron Emission Tomography (PET) is a relatively new form of medical imaging, used mainly to inform clinical decisions on how or whether to treat previously diagnosed cancer.

The Government is providing \$6.8 million over four years to enable patients accessing PET services at Royal North Shore Hospital, Westmead Hospital and Austin Health to claim Medicare benefits for eligible services provided at these facilities. Access to Medicare funding begins today.

Westmead and Austin Health already have PET facilities. The Government has committed \$3.5 million to buy a PET machine and associated radiopharmaceuticals at Royal North Shore Hospital, which is a major oncology centre for more than one million people. The hospital will be able to access Medicare benefits once the PET facility is established and operating.

Radiation oncology training

From today, the Government is providing \$6 million over three years to support the training of radiation oncology medical physicist registrars. Medical physics is a specialised field and these professionals are responsible for the setup, maintenance and calibration of linear accelerators – the machines used to provide radiation treatment for cancer patients.

Funding will be provided for four key activities:

- public and private radiation oncology centres to employ 14 medical physicist registrars to undertake their training;
- the employment of clinical supervisors to assist new medical physicist registrars in training;
- to enable the Australasian College of Physical Scientists and Engineers in Medicine (ACPSEM) to provide oncology centres with education resources and conduct extra accreditation examinations; and
- support for the development of a local undergraduate medical physics training course in Western Australia.

These initiatives aim to address a workforce shortage and ensure that trained professionals are available to assist with the delivery of cancer treatment.

Medical physicists are one of the key professional groups involved in the delivery of radiation oncology treatment. The program is aimed at ensuring trained professionals are available to assist with the delivery of cancer treatments. It will enable ACPSEM to support an increased number of registrars to undertake their training and obtain their qualifications in this specialised field.

For all media inquiries, please contact the Minister's Office on 02 6277 7220.