



## Press Release

30 April 2018

### Health funds back evidence-based approach to improving the MBS by reducing low-value care

Private Healthcare Australia CEO, Dr Rachel David, said the Government's response to the latest MBS Review Taskforce recommendations was an endorsement of evidence-based healthcare in Australia and would lead to better health outcomes and value for consumers.

"The PHI industry has long supported this clinician-led review which makes recommendations to the Government on how the MBS can be modernised to improve patient outcomes, safety and reduce waste," said Dr David.

"Health funds want to ensure their members are getting value for money and to reassure them their premiums are not being spent on low value treatment.

"The more low-value tests and treatments are eliminated, the easier it will be to keep downward pressure on premiums, and invest members' funds in procedures which really work.

"Under legislation health funds are obliged to pay for medical treatments covered by the MBS. This Review will not only highlight the importance of clinical best practice and improve patient care, but importantly reduce waste across the health system.

"Health funds will work with Government to ensure there is compliance with the MBS schedule. It is an excellent focus on evidence-based healthcare and will be supported across the health sector," she said.

Dr David said the latest recommendations which included changes to the MBS items for spinal surgery to reflect contemporary surgical practice would ensure patients will receive rebates for spinal surgery services that are clinically appropriate and reflect modern clinical practice.

Other accepted recommendations include:

- Limiting the ability of GPs to request knee MRIs for patients over 50 years and to align the number of services that can be requested by GPs with specialists. Specialists will still be able to request knee MRIs for all patients. These changes will reduce unnecessary MRIs and help ensure patients are receiving the right test, at the right place, at the right time;
- Amendments to ensure patients aren't undergoing painful procedures to have skin lesions removed when it isn't clinically necessary.

Dr David said the recommendations accepted by the Government which included 38 in full and two in part, would continue modernise the MBS system and deliver an improved health system for all Australians.

*Private Healthcare Australia is the peak representative body for Australia's private health insurance industry. PHA represents 20 Australian health funds with a combined membership of 12.9 million Australians, or 96% of the sector on membership. Promoting the value of private health insurance to consumers in the Australian economy and keeping premiums affordable for our members is the number one priority of PHA members.*

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# **MBS REVIEW TASKFORCE MEDIA STATEMENT**

**Professor Bruce Robinson  
Chair of the MBS Review Taskforce**

29 April 2018

## **Latest recommendations accepted by Government**

The work of updating the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) to ensure a contemporary, evidence-based schedule continues to progress, with the Australian Government's response to the latest package of recommendations from the MBS Review Taskforce.

As Chair of the Taskforce, I am pleased that the Government has accepted 38 major recommendations in full, and accepted two others in part. All of the changes will improve patient care, help modernise the MBS, improve the MBS's focus on clinical best practice, and provide greater value for money for patients, providers and the health system.

The changes to the MBS are in the areas of:

- dermatology, allergy and immunology
- knee imaging
- endocrinology
- renal medicine
- spinal surgery
- thoracic medicine
- breast tomosynthesis
- capsule endoscopy.

They include:

- A new item to support the delivery of dialysis in very remote areas to improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with kidney disease;
- A new item to enable access to three dimensional breast tomosynthesis – a form of high resolution imaging – as an interim measure while an application for long-term funding is considered by the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC).
- Improved diagnosis of asthma in general practice through changes to spirometry items to encourage greater use of spirometry tests and support;
- Changes to allergen testing to improve the diagnoses of allergens in line with modern clinical guidelines;
- New restrictions to ensure patients aren't being exposed to excessive radiation when undergoing phototherapy;
- Amendments ensure patients aren't undergoing painful procedures to have skin lesions removed when it isn't clinically necessary;

- New restrictions on requesting knee MRIs to ensure patients genuinely receive the tests they need;
- A modernised spinal surgery schedule that reflects contemporary surgical practice; and
- A new fee for capsule endoscopy items to fairly remunerate providers for this service.

A further two recommendations in relation to restructuring spinal surgery items were accepted in part, to allow the Government to clarify that spinal fusion must not be performed or claimed for treatment of uncomplicated axial chronic lower back pain. The Taskforce welcomes this clarification, noting this change is in line with Choosing Wisely Australia's recommendations in this area.

The Government's acceptance of these recommendations represents the latest in a number of major reforms recommended by the MBS Review Taskforce. To date, the Government has accepted 88 recommendations either in full or in part, with a strong pipeline of recommendations forthcoming.

Over 500 clinicians, consumers and health system experts have been involved in the MBS Review and participated in its some 65 clinical committees and working groups. I want to thank the clinical committees for their most important and excellent work, which is making a real difference in ensuring the clinical and cost-effectiveness of the MBS. I also thank the Australian Government for its continued support and trust in the Taskforce and look forward to continuing this important review process.

The new MBS items will be introduced from 1 November 2018. Greater detail on all changes will be provided to the profession and on MBS Online before this date.

More information on [this package of changes](#) can be found on the Department of Health website.

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