



Media release: Thursday March 24, 2022

Removing the financial toxicity from the cancer care journey Private Cancer Physicians of Australia and Rare Cancers Australia call for a Cancer Care Patient Safety Net

Canberra: A cancer diagnosis should not force any Australian to live under the poverty line. The nation's peak body of cancer specialists and the leading patient advocacy group have collaborated over a suite of measures, aimed at better protecting Australia's most vulnerable patients from financial duress.

At the heart of the 'Cancer Care, No Gaps' proposal by the Private Cancer Physicians of Australia and Rare Cancers Australia is a **Cancer Care Patient Safety Net** which is triggered the moment a clear diagnosis of cancer is made.

Right now, cancer patients must spend more than \$2133 on medicines¹ (Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme) and \$1542.10 on medical services² (Medicare Benefits Scheme for non-concessional patients) in a calendar year before they can access the Government's respective patient safety net schemes.

"To tell a patient they have cancer, is hard," President of the PCPA, Associate Professor Christopher Steer said. "To watch that patient, and their family, then struggle with the worry and stress over the financial impact of such a diagnosis, is something we can no longer tolerate, without trying to do as much as we can to lessen that burden.

As private cancer physicians providing high quality, personalised, patient-centred care, we work very hard to negate the out-of-pocket expenses that are within our control. But there are also other appointments, scans, medicines and a range of unexpected costs, that quickly add up."

A/Professor Steer said a **Cancer Care Patient Safety Net** was a simple, scalable approach mobilising a proven platform that is already in place for all Australian patients.

"Removing the financial toxicity of the cancer care journey is a shared priority," the founding Chair and founder of Rare Cancers Australia, Mr Richard Vines said.

"In the first year of the pandemic, more than 7000 Australians either missed or delayed seeking diagnosis and treatment out of fear of contracting COVID-19³," Mr Vines said. "Many of these Australians were also dealing with the economic stress of the pandemic.

Sadly, cancer does not wait and nor do the bills, that can quickly pile up. No Australian should feel they can't seek lifesaving treatment because of all of out-of-pocket costs that they incur along the way."

Among the other initiatives the PCPA and RCA recommends the next Australian Government adopt are:

- the provision of experienced patient facilitators to help all cancer patients and their families navigate what can be an overly complex private health system;
- Putting an end to bill shock with the creation of a technology-driven 'financial concierge' system to ensure all bills (regardless of what, and where, that provider is) can be seen and centred in one place;
- permanent patient access to subsidised specialist phone consults; and

¹ http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/Factsheet-MSNThresholds_1Jan2019

² <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/pharmaceutical-benefits-scheme/when-you-spend-lot-pbs-medicines/pbs-safety-net-thresholds>

³ <https://www.canceraustralia.gov.au/about-us/news/cancer-wont-wait-during-covid-19-pandemic>



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- a pilot program to financially enable people living with cancer in rural and regional Australia to access investigator-led clinical trials away from home.

“We must always prioritise the wellbeing of our most vulnerable Australians,” A/Professor Steer said.

Mr Vines agreed. “We will do all we can to work with the next Government to reduce the out-of-pocket costs of those already struggling with cancer and ensure any future policy decisions do not add to the financial toxicity of their cancer journey.” ENDS

The **Cancer Care, No Gaps** election manifesto is available on request.

Media enquiries

PCPA:

Jannette Cotterell. Executive Counsel Australia jcotterell@executivecounsel.com.au

Mobile: 0419 204 059

NB Assoc Professor Steer is a practicing regional-based oncologist and may not be available at all times

RCA:

Casey Virgin. Communications Manager casey.virgin@rarecancers.org.au

Mobile: 0499 880 742

About the Private Cancer Physicians of Australia

The [Private Cancer Physicians of Australia \(PCPA\)](#) is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the improvement of the health system for all cancer patients, but particularly for private cancer patients in Australia.

Our mission is to promote and work towards a health system that provides high quality, fair, integrated cancer treatment

About Rare Cancers of Australia

[Rare Cancers Australia Ltd \(RCA\)](#) is a charity whose purpose is to improve the lives and health outcomes of Australians living with rare and less common (RLC) cancers. In Australia in 2017, an estimated 52,000 people were diagnosed with RLC cancers, and 25,000 died from them, according to Cancer in Australia 2017 estimates.

As distinct from common cancers (breast, prostate, bowel, lung and melanoma) there is very little patient support offered to RLC cancer patients. RCA works tirelessly to ensure that this cancer group will never be forgotten or ignored again.