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**SICK AND VULNERABLE AUSTRALIANS HIT HARD BY
GOVERNMENT HEALTH CUTS**

AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, said today the human cost of the Government's savage cuts to Medicare patient rebates for critical medical procedures is becoming more evident as people with eye, heart and joint conditions become aware that they must pay more for their treatment.

As a result of the Government cuts, people seeking cataract surgery, joint injections for arthritic conditions, or coronary angiography for the examination of coronary arteries are from this week paying significantly more for their pain-relieving or life-enhancing procedures.

Dr Pesce said the Government has abolished the Medicare patient rebate for joint injections altogether, cut the rebate for cataract surgery by 45 per cent (adjusted last Thursday), and cut the coronary angiography rebate by 20 per cent.

"The people most affected by these cuts are the elderly," Dr Pesce said.

"Two of the things they value most as they get older are their sight and their mobility.

"But instead of getting Government assistance for their health at the stage of life when they need it most, they are being penalised.

"The cuts to the cataract surgery rebate affect thousands of Australians.

"The abolition of the joint injections rebate affects thousands of Australians, many elderly, but also some middle-aged and young sufferers of juvenile arthritis.

"The cuts to the coronary angiography rebate also affect thousands of Australians – with more than half of the Medicare rebates for these services going to people over the age of 65.

"These cuts will place pressure on our already overburdened public hospital system.

"Many thousands of ill, elderly and vulnerable Australians are feeling pain and uncertainty as a result of the Government's ill-directed policy.

"The Government still has a chance to show it has some compassion by restoring the original rebates for these important medical procedures."

Dr Pesce said the Government must consult closely with the medical profession over any future changes to the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) so that patients are not disadvantaged.

"We have seen the damage to our public hospitals caused by state governments that don't consult. We can't afford to see the same thing happen at the federal level," Dr Pesce said.

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