

**Australian Medical Association Limited**

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**CATARACT SURGERY: AMA CONDUCTS THE CONSULTATION THAT THE GOVERNMENT FAILED TO DO**

AMA President, Dr Andrew Pesce, said today that the AMA is surveying more than 500 ophthalmologists nationally to gather the evidence on the contemporary realities of performing cataract surgery in Australia.

Dr Pesce said the AMA is doing the grassroots consultation with doctors that the Government failed to do before slashing Medicare patient rebates for cataract surgery in the May Budget.

“The Government claims that new technology has made the procedure quicker and cheaper and simpler,” Dr Pesce said.

“That may be true if you are looking back 20 years, but the Government made adjustments in 1987 and 1996 to reflect changes at those times.

“The Government has not produced any evidence to justify this current decision.

“Cataract surgery is a highly skilled procedure that saves the sight of thousands of older Australians.

“This Budget cut will hurt vulnerable Australians.

“We are seeing a disturbing theme with vital health decisions being made by Treasury officials and not the medical practitioners who perform these procedures successfully every day.

“Medicare rebates are paid for around 135,000 cataract removals performed every year in Australia.

“The ophthalmologists know the reality of how much time and how much individual care is required to restore or improve vision to allow these patients a better quality of life

“But the Government failed to consult them before cutting the Medicare patient rebates.

“The AMA will get the facts from the doctors and continue lobbying the Government to reverse this ill-informed decision.

“It is not too late for the Government to do the right thing by the thousands of Australians who need this important operation every year,” Dr Pesce said.

Dr Pesce said it is curious that there has been no word from the Government or from the private health insurance industry about whether the health insurers are planning to provide better cover for patients hit by the Medicare rebate cuts.

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