

MEDIA RELEASE



The Hon **David Hawker** MP
Federal Member for Wannon



13 August 2009

RUDD CUTS LOCAL CATARACT PATIENTS LOOSE

Western Victorians requiring cataract surgery have been hung out to dry by the Rudd Government, Federal Member for Wannon David Hawker said today.

In a desperate bid to make up some of the billions of dollars they threw away in their panicked reaction to the financial crisis, Labor has targeted the health and well being of older Western Victorians to cut costs.

“The Rudd Labor Government has taken two hits at cataract patients this year. Firstly, they cut the Medicare payments to doctors for cataract operations by half, then they capped payments under the Extended Medicare Safety Net for cataract operations, breaking an election promise in the process,” Mr Hawker said.

“The Medicare Safety Net was introduced by the Coalition Government to provide reimbursement for out-of-pocket costs incurred for medical treatment provided outside a hospital. It is intended to assist patients with high, cumulative medical expenses.

“Prior to the 2007 Federal Election, Labor gave an unambiguous commitment that it would not change the Medicare Safety Net. In a joint media release by Mr Rudd and Nicola Roxon on 22 September 2007 it was stated:

“With about one million people each year receiving some cost relief from the safety net, Federal Labor will not put more pressure on family budgets by taking that assistance away.”

“With 70 per cent of cataract surgery currently performed in the private system, these changes will drive many older Western Victorians into an already overstretched public health system.

“It’s unconscionable that a Government that has spent so recklessly should make savage cuts to such an important medical procedure. Not only does cataract surgery help restore vision, as a result, it also reduces the number of falls, fractures and associated hospitalizations,” Mr Hawker said.

In the 2009-10 Federal Budget, the Government also capped fees for a number of other important services under the Safety Net from 1 January 2010, including all assisted reproductive technology (IVF), treatment for varicose veins, injection of a therapeutic substance into the eye, obstetric items and ultrasound items related to pregnancy.

“To pay for its reckless spending, the Rudd Government has targeted critical areas like health, in an attempt to service its rapidly mounting debt,” Mr Hawker said.

“Western Victorians will already pay for the cash splash with crippling debt, now we will also pay with higher health costs.

“It’s unreasonable that older Western Victorian having cataract surgery and local families who require IVF treatment should have to pay the price for the Rudd Government’s excessive spending,” he said.

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