

MEDIA RELEASE



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



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CATARACT CUTS HURT WESTERN VICTORIANS

The Rudd Labor Government should immediately reverse its decision to halve rebates for cataract surgery in light of evidence revealed in Senate Estimates this month.

The evidence is clear, this is an ill-considered, short-sighted budget cut, which will hurt local patients, most of them elderly.

The government's 50% cut of Medicare rebates for cataract surgery will push up the cost for local patients, many of whom will no longer be able to afford access to this life changing procedure through the private system.

Private health fund rebates are invariably linked to MBS fee/rebate arrangements, and Medibank Private's Managing Director confirmed this month that its rebates for cataract surgery would automatically be cut by a further \$290 as a result of the government cut.

Coming on top of the government's \$313 rebate cut this will result in increased costs for local patients of more than \$600 per procedure.

As more and more patients are forced into the already overburdened public system, there are no savings for the health system either.

The Rudd government wants to save \$313 per procedure, forcing local taxpayers to pay more than \$3,500 to fund free access to the same procedure in the public system. At least for those lucky enough to get in.

Answers from Health Department officials to questions in Senate Estimates have revealed that more than 70% of nearly 200,000 cataract surgery procedures are performed in the private system.

Minister Roxon has again been found wanting on all this. She clearly didn't think through the implications for patients and the health system.

This is yet another battle she engaged in as part of Labor's long-running ideological crusade against private health, irrespective of what it means for local patients.

The Rudd Labor government is intent on forcing elderly patients needing access to life changing cataract surgery to pay the price for its reckless spending and that is completely inappropriate.

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