

MEDIA RELEASE

Pressure increases on optometry as Medicare indexation fails to keep up with CPI

6 June 2022: With Medicare indexation well below CPI and inflation, Optometry Australia will press to discuss fairer Medicare indexation with Mark Butler, Federal Minister for Health.

The Australian Government has just announced an indexation increase for optometry items of 1.6% which lags significantly behind the Consumer Price Index which rose 5.1% in the past 12 months ([ABS April 2022](#)).

The peak professional body for optometrists says that this small 2022 indexation rise falls well short of the real cost of doing business and the cost of living with inflationary pressures brought about by a range of factors including skyrocketing energy prices, housing prices, fuel, insurance and transportation.

CEO, Lyn Brodie, said that Optometry Australia fought hard to have optometry included in the MBS schedule in 1975 but since 1997 adjustments to the Optometric Medicare Benefits Schedule have continued to significantly lag CPI.

'A freeze in indexation for optometry between 2013 and 2019, plus a 5% cut to MBS rebates introduced by the government in 2015, has resulted in Medicare rebates in real terms in 2022 being a decade behind where they should be today.'

Ms Brodie said that the gap between what optometrists can claim in Medicare rebates for patient consultations and the real cost of providing this service, has been widening for the past 35 years, but the real damage has been done in the past 10 years.

'Optometrists will have no choice but to charge patients more and more out-of-pocket costs. There are already too many Australians who are unable to access the timely care they need and we believe lagging Medicare indexation will contribute to a national eye health crisis.'

'Any increase in fees a patient is asked to pay can result in them delaying, or ignoring, the need for regular eye examinations and this will put the eye health of many at risk.'

'With half of Australia's population already suffering long-term eye conditions, Optometry Australia is doing everything in our power to seek the government's commitment to reverse, not contribute to, this alarming statistic.'

Long-term eye conditions place a \$16.6bn economic burden on the Australian economy annually.

Ms Brodie explained that 90% of vision loss can be prevented or treated with early detection and delaying or ignoring regular eye examinations will lead to rise in insidious and preventable, eye diseases. In fact, diseases such as glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy and macular degeneration, do not have any symptoms until it is too late resulting in significant vision loss and even blindness.

'Vision problems and eye disease can occur at any age, which is why regular eye examinations with an optometrist are important. Good vision isn't just about seeing well, it's about living well.'

'We will welcome discussing with Mr Butler the type of reforms and funding that is urgently needed to support better access to eye health in Australia,' Ms Brodie said.

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Optometry Australia is the peak professional body for optometrists. Representing 85% of registered Australian optometrists, Optometry Australia's focus is to lead and advance the profession of optometry by putting eye-health front and centre of Australian health care.