



MEDIA RELEASE

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Cancer charities welcome Opposition's \$10m plan for reducing bill shock

Leading cancer charities have welcomed the federal Opposition's plan to help protect patients from the shock of unexpected medical costs through a \$10 million plan to embed informed financial consent into the health system.

The federal Opposition has committed to build on work started in the not-for-profit sector by Cancer Council Australia, Breast Cancer Network Australia, Prostate Cancer Foundation Australia and CanTeen to promote a new informed financial consent standard for health services.

Danielle Spence, Head of Division, Strategy and Support at Cancer Council Victoria, said many Australians experience "financial toxicity" following a cancer diagnosis, including high and unexpected medical costs.

"When you are diagnosed with cancer you don't know how much it's going to cost you – and often no one tells you," Ms Spence said. "A series of unexpected bills can throw someone who is already financially stressed into financial hardship, forcing them to sell their home, max out their credit cards or in the worst case, modify or forgo recommended treatment.

"In some cases, patients pay high costs for services that might have been more affordable elsewhere, or for services that don't deliver better clinical outcomes than lower-cost options."

Ms Spence said cancer charities had been promoting improved financial consent "but with very little money".

"A substantial \$10 million allocation would enable a formal embedding of improved financial consent in the system. It could fund the development of an interactive web resource, a formal expert advisory group, extensive public consultation and a commitment to continuous improvement. A great outcome would be for an informed financial consent code and resource to be aligned with the Optimal Care Pathways for cancer – promoting best care and optimal clarity around how much it might cost."

Kirsten Pilatti, CEO, Breast Cancer Network Australia, said the problems of bill shock were increasingly evident. "We see it a lot in breast cancer, because breast cancer is so prevalent," Ms Pilatti said. "We know it occurs across the spectrum. This is a great opportunity for cancer charities to work together to help patients navigate the system."

The Opposition's announcement follows the publishing of a draft voluntary [Standard for Informed Financial Consent](#) released for public consultation last year by Cancer Council Australia, the Breast Cancer Network of Australia, the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia and CanTeen

Among the recommendations in the draft standard was guidance on providing full financial disclosure to patients, providing an accurate fee estimate, engaging patients in decisions about their care, not charging a higher fee for a service that isn't backed up by publicly available evidence and not increasing medical bills for those who have a greater capacity to pay.

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