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## Government costing cancer patients and the savings won't save lives

**The Federal Government is leaving cancer patients and those impacted by other chronic illnesses out in the cold, without much needed care, due to financial pressure.**

Exercise physiologists play a crucial role in the treatment of cancer, but the profession is seeing many patients cease treatment early, given the tax the government applies to these services.

The profession remains the only Allied Health Service to have an additional ten per cent charge applied for consultations, hitting the pockets of cancer patients.

This tax is an added financial blow to cancer sufferers, with a recent Consumer Health Forum report finding more than a quarter of cancer patients each incurred out of pocket costs of over \$10,000 in the last two years.

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), cancer and chronic diseases are the leading cause of death and disability in Australia.

David Beard, spokesperson for Exercise & Sports Science Australia says the government tax is having a damaging impact on the recovery of patients suffering from a variety of life-threatening illnesses, like cancer.

"If someone is going through cancer treatment, they are often seeing an exercise physiologist around two to three times per week," Mr Beard explained.

"The GST adds \$7-\$10 on top of the consultation fee, so that's an extra \$30 per week in some cases. It is simply unaffordable for patients who need it – and they are walking away".

"Cancer treatment is already expensive. But the thing that is going to make the most difference in their life during this treatment, is the patient doing the right type of exercise to complement their medical treatment."

"Evidence shows exercise makes chemotherapy more effective. It helps prevent fatigue, it prevents muscle loss and muscle wastage, and counters the effects of chemotherapy, from a mood and mental health point of view."

"It aids recovery and patients don't lose as much of their physical capacity if they do the appropriate exercise whilst they are going through their treatment."

"In breast cancer and prostate cancer, patients are limited to various exercises due to surgery. In other cancers, such as sarcoma, people have had bones removed."

"We work to get the muscles around that surgical site functioning as well as they can so people can maintain as normal a life as possible."

Already, chronic diseases are associated with high use of health care services, contributing to major funding pressures in Australian health care that are expected to rise over the coming decades as prevalence increases.

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Cancers, cardiovascular diseases and mental disorders will contribute to almost half of the projected disease burden on the health system by 2023.

The Morrison government says it already spends close to \$6 billion on cancer treatment and services.

A Labor government is declaring a \$2.3 billion cancer plan, promising cheaper scans, and cheaper cancer medicine, as part of its policy for the upcoming election.

But neither political party is willing to stand up and say they will remove the tax on critical health services provided by exercise physiologists despite the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia recommending that exercise be mandatory as part of every cancer treatment.

“Many cancer patients are not seeking the guidance of an exercise physiologist due to the cost and lack of Medicare support for allied health services,” Mr Beard said.

“This leads to increased financial burden to the health system because these patients haven’t received adequate treatment and care – they can’t afford to.”

“The Government collects its ten percent tax, earning it about \$20 million, but it ends up spending much more than that on surgery, drugs and hospitalisation.

“I suspect it has no idea at what it is costing the health system further down the line or what impact it is having on cancer patients.”

“The tax may raise some money, but it is not saving lives or making the lives of cancer sufferers better.”

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