



The Hon Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care

Ref No: MC24-002245

Ms Susan Templeman MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
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Dear Chair

Thank you for your correspondence of 12 February 2024 to the Minister for Health and Aged Care, the Hon Mark Butler MP, concerning petition number EN5699 regarding Medicare funding of GP Referred Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI).

The Australian Government is focused on delivering its priorities for the health and wellbeing of all Australians. Key among these priorities is strengthening Medicare to make it easier for Australians to see a doctor, cutting the cost of healthcare, and ensuring all Australians are treated with the respect they deserve and receive quality services to support them as they age.

The Government recognises MRI scans are an important diagnostic tool for medical practitioners in diagnosing, managing and treating illness. In 2022-23, the Government supported patient access to MRI scans through Medicare at a total cost of \$545 million.

From 1 November 2022, the limitations on where an MRI machine could operate were removed in regional, rural and remote (Modified Monash Model 2 to 7) areas. This means MRI machines located in these areas are Medicare eligible when they satisfy the MRI requirements to deliver Medicare-eligible MRI services. This has significantly increased the number of Medicare eligible MRI machines available. Locations of Medicare-eligible MRI machines around Australia is available from the Department of Health and Aged Care's website at www.health.gov.au using the search term 'MRI locations'.

In terms of specific concerns about GP requests for MRI services, there are instances where services, including diagnostic imaging services, listed on the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS), may have restrictions. These are based on clinical considerations such as gender, age, frequency of services, and requester requirements.

For an MRI scan to qualify for a Medicare rebate, the service must be:

- listed on the MBS
- performed on a Medicare-eligible MRI unit by a Medicare-eligible provider
- requested by a specialist doctor, or by a general practitioner for a limited number of specified services.

Most MRI scans on the MBS must be requested by a specialist doctor. This is because the specialist is usually managing the conditions for which MRI scans can help with clinical decisions with the patient. There are however a limited number of MRI scans available on the MBS that may be requested by a GP.

The MRI scans that can be requested by a GP were developed in consultation with the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists. The scans available were based on the appropriate scope of practice for GPs and based on clinical guidelines for the managing of patients. The RACGP has issued clinical guidance for MRI requesting which is available on the RACGP website at www.racgp.gov.au by using the search term 'MRI'.

The Government is also looking to unleash the potential of our health workforce and the Independent Scope of Practice Review is examining the barriers and incentives health practitioners face working to their full scope of practice. This is an independent review, led by Professor Mark Cormack. It is looking at the available evidence about health professionals' ability to deliver on their full scope of practice in primary care. Further information on this review including updates is available from the department's website by using the search term 'scope of practice review'.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely

Mark Butler

18/03/2024