

CANCER VOICES AUSTRALIA

Thankyou for the opportunity to comment on the 2016 Review of the Radiation Oncology Health Program Grants (ROHPG) Scheme whose aim is to ensure that Commonwealth funding of radiation therapy equipment in Australia is contemporary, fair and equitable.

Cancer Voices Australia wishes to express its support, in the best interests of Australians affected by cancer, for the continuation of the ROHPG Programs.

Continuing investment in infrastructure for cancer treatment by more effective and efficient machines and the newer technologies associated with them is essential in our view. We are aware of the large cost of new equipment to provide sound radiation oncology, as well as the need to ensure machine reliability and replacement as machines age. The ROHPG ensures that this remains sustainable.

Cancer incidence is increasing and more Australians die of cancer than of any other cause – having just “pipped” heart diseases. We also know that access to radiation oncology, despite recent investment, is still well below the optimal level of 52% of cancer cases. Cancer Voices sees support via ROHPGs as being essential to not only maintain best practice levels and outcomes, but also to meet the expected increase in demand. We note this demand will be both from growth in population and its aging, and also due to this effective and efficient mode of cancer treatment being more frequently prescribed.

Up to date equipment will ensure that good radiation oncology services are available to all cancer patients for successful treatment and reduced side effects. We are aware of some of the larger gap payments which occur in the private sector, and are engaged in advocating that all patients are advised of those gaps up-front, and that they can be treated in the public system at no cost with equal outcomes. The Royal Australian College of Radiology (RANZCR) has agreed to include a requirement that this information is provided to cancer patients in its recently updated Code of Ethics. We see this as another compelling reason for the ROHPG Scheme to continue so that the public sector can respond adequately to minimise any differences between public and private services (one of the ROHPG’s goals).

We also support the separation from the MBS funding mechanism, as this allows for greater flexibility and responsiveness to incremental changes in technology, costs of equipment and demand.

We trust that the Review will take into account our considered support.