

MEDIA RELEASE
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Cancer Council, COSA call for overhaul of patient travel assistance schemes

A whole-of-government commitment to boosting the funding and efficiency of patient travel and accommodation assistance schemes is needed to help reduce geographical inequities in cancer care outcomes, Australia's peak non-government cancer control organisations said today.

Responding to an ongoing Senate inquiry, the Chief Executive Officer of The Cancer Council Australia, Professor Ian Olver, and the President of the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia (COSA), Professor David Goldstein, said patients in remote areas were not accessing treatment they needed because of under-funded, fragmented travel and accommodation assistance.

They said national leadership and a shared commitment across jurisdictions was the best way to bring patient travel and accommodation schemes into line with need.

"Most cancers require complex, extensive treatment that is only available in large population centres," Professor Olver said. "Isolated patients report making treatment decisions that lead to suboptimal outcomes, because of a lack of travel and accommodation support to access care in metropolitan hospitals.

"Despite evidence showing a widening gap in cancer patient outcomes between rural and metropolitan Australia, patient travel and accommodation schemes have received only marginal increases in funding since they were devolved to the states and territories 20 years ago.

"With the Senate now reviewing the schemes, it is time for the Federal Government to work with the states and territories to establish a national framework that provides genuine funding increases and streamlines the confusing cross-border administrative procedures."

Professor Goldstein said that while Australia was a world leader in cancer survival, our success was not shared across the rural/metropolitan divide, with remote patients diagnosed with cancer experiencing substantially poorer survival outcomes than their urban counterparts.

"All governments need to work in partnership to address this inequity, which is all the more unacceptable in view of the substantial contribution to our economy made by regional Australia," he said.

"A national overhaul of the under-funded, inconsistent patient travel and accommodation schemes has the potential to generate measurable improvements in cancer treatment outcomes for Australians living in remote areas."

The Cancer Council Australia/COSA submission to the Senate inquiry is available at: http://www.apf.gov.au/Senate/committee/clac_ctte/pats/submissions/sublist.htm (submission number 109).

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