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Transcript: AMA Victoria President and Federal AMA Councillor, A/Prof Julian Rait, ABC News, Friday, 5 April 2019

Subject: Labor's cancer care announcement

ROS CHILDS: More now on Labor's \$2.3 billion cancer package that would fund scans, specialist appointments, and medical treatments. Here's Associate Professor Julian Rait, the Victorian President of the Australian Medical Association.

Hi, Julian.

JULIAN RAIT: Hi, Ros.

ROS CHILDS: So what do you make of Labor's proposal?

JULIAN RAIT: Well, the AMA really welcomes this, Ros, because we've been calling for some time for measures to try and ease the burden on cancer patients. Obviously, the journey for many cancer patients and their experience is complicated by the fact that they have to deal with some substantial out of pocket costs in some cases. And we really welcome this announcement of an extra \$2.3 billion by the Federal Opposition to try and address that, by making sure that consultations, and treatments, and scans, and other tests are actually covered and fully covered by the rebate rather than relying on the rebates we've seen over the last few years, which of course have fallen very much behind the rate of inflation. In fact over the past five years have been frozen altogether.

ROS CHILDS: So if a doctor suspects, Julian, a patient has cancer, what are the costs involved in diagnosing and then treating the condition? In general terms, of course.

JULIAN RAIT: Well, in general terms, the costs can mount up to very many thousands of dollars, because there can be quite a variety of specialists involved, quite a number of tests required, and of course, over the course of the journey of one patient, this could be quite a considerable burden. And each sort of individual provider is sometimes unaware of what other providers are charging, and therefore oblivious to the overall burden that they might be putting on a patient. So this is a great step to try and coordinate the care of cancer patients and make sure that, as a result of this extra funding, we can reduce or even eliminate the out-of-pocket costs for many people suffering from cancer.

ROS CHILDS: Yeah and roughly what proportion of those out of pocket costs are covered by Medicare and also a health care fund now?

JULIAN RAIT: Well that's a good question. The amounts would probably be around about two-thirds we believe, so therefore maybe up to three quarters in some cases. So the journey for many cancer patients varies, of course, on their type of cancer. Some may not have very much in the way of cost but others may have very much more. But overall, it's a significant amount of the total cost is actually now becoming an out of pocket cost. And this really revolves around the fact over the last five years we've had a freeze of Medicare rebates, and so

with the rate of inflation behind that pushing ever much more pressure on providers to provide high quality care, of course the out of pocket component has been increasing.

So it's really terrific that the Opposition has actually listened to AMA advocacy and the advocacy of other groups seeking some further support for cancer patients, who, of course, really need to focus on the treatment and their recovery, not on the cost of their care.

ROS CHILDS: Labor says \$2.3 billion will cover the costs of this, do you think that will be enough?

JULIAN RAIT: Ah well, time will tell, Ros. I think that this is a very good start. We're obviously looking for further announcements through the course of the election campaign. There are two other components outside this, which include the costs of surgery and possible costs of radiation oncology or radiotherapy. So those two aspects obviously need to be possibly addressed, but I think that's a very good start to look at consultations and medical treatments and also the cost of scans and other tests, because these actually are where a lot of the, I suppose, unexpected costs come from for many patients.

ROS CHILDS: Associate Professor Julian Rait, thank you.

JULIAN RAIT: Pleasure.

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