

## **Patients lose out in political wrangling over cost of private insurance and medical devices**

Political wrangling has left thousands of Australians languishing on public hospital waitlists for life-changing surgery, according to the peak organisation for Australians with an irregular heartbeat known as atrial fibrillation.

Tanya Hall, CEO of hearts4heart labelled the agreement reached between the Federal Government, private insurers and medical device companies as “a disaster for up to 18,500 privately insured atrial fibrillation patients” because it fails to close a bureaucratic loophole which means catheter ablation, a surgical remedy for atrial fibrillation, is not included on the Government’s Prosthesis List and therefore not covered by private insurers.

Ms Hall explained that because the catheter is removed from the body after the procedure, it does not fit the antiquated criteria for Prosthesis List inclusion, meaning privately insured patients are pushed to public waitlists of up to two years.

“The Health Minister understands that this illogical loophole is causing enormous problems, yet instead of a resolution, we have been told that a bureaucratic review is now planned,” she said.

“The last thing patients need is further delay. We need Minister Hunt to intervene and add catheter ablation to the Prosthesis List now.”

Today in the Federal Parliament, Members from both the Coalition and Labor Party will support a motion to fast-track the inclusion of catheter ablation on the Prosthesis List.

“The Government is trumpeting simpler and more affordable private health insurance, but what’s the value of insurance if the surgical procedure needed isn’t covered because the device isn’t left in the body? Hopefully, it’s not too late for common sense to prevail,” Ms Hall said.

Professor Andrew McGavigan from the Flinders Cardiac Centre in Adelaide, said: “Catheter ablation is highly effective, but most successful when performed soon after diagnosis. I am concerned that many patients will continue to face unnecessarily delays in accessing this procedure, prolonging the debilitating effects of atrial fibrillation and leaving them at heightened risk of cardiac complications.”

“We support efforts to reign in the cost of private health insurance, but the health of Australians must remain the priority. I would hate to think that money and influence have trumped the interests of patients,” Ms Hall added.

### **About Atrial Fibrillation and Catheter Ablation**

Atrial fibrillation increases the risk of stroke by five- to sevenfold and the risk of heart failure by threefold. Catheter ablation involves a device being placed into the body to correct electrical short-circuits that make the heart beat irregularly. It is removed after the procedure. Catheter ablation is considered a highly effective treatment for a large number of patients who would otherwise suffer from debilitating chest pounding, struggle to perform day-to-day activities, and face a heightened risk of cardiovascular events and dying.

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