

KEY MESSAGES

Key message 1: The contribution of nuclear medicine to Australia's health outcomes

- On average, every Australian will have more than two nuclear medicine procedures over their lifetime. Over 700,000 nuclear medicine services are delivered in Australia every year.
- Nuclear medicine is an internal medicine specialty that uses small amounts of radioactive materials or "tracers" to provide a picture of organ and tissue physiology and structures in order to diagnose, stage and treat disease. This allows nuclear medicine specialists to visualise disease in organs and tissues that are traditionally difficult to see using other imaging techniques, such as x-rays, CT and MRI.
- Nuclear medicine tests allow quick and accurate diagnoses of a wide range of conditions and diseases, such as heart disease, blood clots in lungs, bone infections, orthopaedic injuries, tumours and cancer metastasis (spread). They are also used to detect conditions such as irregular blood flow to tissues, particularly in the heart. In addition, nuclear medicine therapy may be used to control, and in some cases cure, a range of conditions such as thyroid cancer, prostate cancer, neuroendocrine tumors, overactive thyroid, and bone pain caused by cancer metastasis.
- It is estimated that there is an average of 413 new diagnoses for cancer each day in Australia as at 2021.
- Because it is a rapidly-evolving inter-disciplinary area (compared to other medical specialties), existing regulatory systems and funding mechanisms are not always appropriate for the specific and unique needs of nuclear medicine.
- This reduces the contribution that nuclear medicine can make in the diagnosis, management and treatment of serious diseases, such as cancer and heart disease.
- Nuclear medicine is an important factor in reducing long-term healthcare costs, particularly where it enables early diagnosis, accurate staging and treatment prior to diseases progressing or prevents futile therapies being employed and reduces the number of other tests or treatments a patient is required to undergo.
 - Early and precise diagnosis leads to improved patient health outcomes for a range of conditions, including cancer, heart conditions and neurological conditions such as epilepsy and neurodegenerative disorders.

Key benefits of nuclear medicine

- Avoids the risk of multiple (in some cases duplicative or closely substitutable) tests and/or treatments.
- Avoids a patient being subject to unnecessary treatments.
- Prevents later costs from recurrent or more severe disease, and may also keep the patient in the workforce and out of care longer.
- Average survival rates for six of the most prominent cancer types in Australia drop from 88.25% with early detection, to only 28.83% with advanced stage detection.

Key message 2: Funding for nuclear has not been indexed for 23 years

- MBS rebates for nuclear medicine been frozen indefinitely for 23 years, and the effective cost of nuclear medicine for service providers has now grown to unsustainable levels.
- With the growth in the key cost components for nuclear medicine services over the past 23 years and the absence of indexation for the relevant MBS items, nuclear medicine is one of the most under-funded diagnostic imaging modalities on the MBS.



- While all other medical fields have been re-aligned with inflation, public assistance to nuclear medicine remains frozen.
- Indexation in the last 23 years has risen 58%.
- There is no compelling reason for such benefits to not be extended to patients accessing nuclear medicine imaging services and the current status is detrimental to best practice standards in nuclear medicine.
- The resulting cost gap has a range of implications for consumers including out-of-pocket costs, limitations in access to some services and inferior diagnostic tests or treatments being performed. Nuclear medicine clinics have one of two choices – to absorb the rising costs of delivering care, or increase the out-of-pocket expenses for consumers.
 - Out-of-pocket costs have risen by 24% in the past 10 years, 26% more than general inflation.
- AANMS's recent focus has been achieving re-indexation of nuclear medicine on the MBS, to ensure patients can continue to afford this crucial diagnosis and treatment tool.
- This will be particularly important during the COVID-19 recovery, with the expected increase in diagnoses of late-stage cancers as a result of delayed cancer screening and diagnosis during the height of the pandemic.
- The AANMS is seeking to address this in order to reduce out-of-pocket costs for patients and improve access to crucial nuclear medicine services. Broader availability of nuclear medicine has the potential to generate significant economic benefits through early diagnosis and treatment.

Key message 3: The cost of delivering nuclear medicine has escalated over that 23-year period

- Funding and industry support is vital to ensure a viable and sustainable nuclear medicine sector, which is critical for Australian patients.
- Practice costs have increased across the board over the past two decades, these include wages, rent, capital equipment and consumables.
- These increased costs are placing stress on practices, making them less viable and forcing them to consider passing costs on to patients or reduce service offerings.
- Unless the cost pressures on practices are addressed, this will undermine the capacity of the sector to meet the needs of the community for this important service in the future.

Key message 4: Nuclear medicine is an innovative sector with the potential to meet the evolving health needs of the Australian community

- Demand for nuclear medicine services is growing due to the development of new techniques which provide opportunities to diagnose and treat a broader range of conditions.
- Nuclear medicine is an innovative and evolving field of medicine with the potential to meet increasing needs in the community for early diagnosis and treatment of cancer and other conditions.
- Investing in this sector now will ensure Australians in the future will benefit from the latest developments in nuclear medicine technologies and treatments.
- Ensuring that all consumers who could benefit from nuclear medicine have timely and affordable access will save lives, improve health outcomes and reduce future healthcare costs.
- Australia is a world-leader in nuclear medicine technology, and there is significant scope for expansion of both domestic supply and export.

