



Media release

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## Patients demand immediate end to cataract saga

The Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) and National Seniors have joined together for the first time to condemn the ongoing cataract saga which is putting the wellbeing of thousands of cataract patients at risk.

The Australian Society of Ophthalmologists indicated today that they were unwilling to seek a way forward in negotiations with the Government on the issue of Medicare benefits for cataract surgery.

Australia's largest senior's organisation, National Seniors Australia, has today demanded that the issue be immediately resolved through negotiations.

National Seniors chief executive Michael O'Neill said the cataract dispute had reached crisis point, and needed to be immediately resolved.

"Ophthalmologists should think long and hard about why their patients will have to pay \$300 extra or more because of their apparent unwillingness to commit to a way forward.

On average, ophthalmologists are charging \$1,260 for basic cataract surgery.

"With around 140,000 older Australians undergoing cataract surgery each year this issue is simply too big to be allowed to continue to fester and create uncertainty for patients."

CHF executive director, Carol Bennett, said ophthalmologists can no longer justify their ongoing refusal to engage in serious discussion.

"For this profession to deliberately use older Australian health consumers as cannon fodder in their industrial campaign is completely unacceptable and certainly not reflective of sound professional ethics," she said.

"It is time the ophthalmologists laid down their arms and started thinking more about the health and wellbeing of their patients and less about the health and wellbeing of their inflated bank balances.

"If Medicare is to survive, there needs to be ongoing review and, where previously complex procedures have become much more efficient, the payment provided by the taxpayers through Medicare needs to be adjusted accordingly."

**For further comment, contact:**

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