

**MEDICARE-ELIGIBLE MRI UNIT FOR THE HUNTER REGION** 16/01/2009

The Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon and Member for Hunter, Joel Fitzgibbon today announced that Hunter residents would have greater access to bulk-billed MRI services after an agreement was signed between the Federal Government and Hunter Imaging Group.

Earlier this year, the Government announced 15 locations for new Medicare-eligible magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) services, including the Hunter region, and applications were invited from potential providers.

In the Hunter, the service will be provided at the Maitland Specialist Centre at Maitland Private Hospital in East Maitland by the Hunter Imaging Group.

The Minister for Health and Ageing said it is especially pleasing that Hunter Imaging Group has agreed that all Medicare-eligible patients will be bulk-billed.

Ms Roxon said “MRI services in Maitland will become Medicare-eligible in the first half of this year once changes to the Health Insurance (Diagnostic Imaging Services Table) Regulations 2008 have taken place.

“MRI uses magnetic fields to generate images that can help diagnose illnesses. It is especially effective on soft tissue, making it important for working with diseases such as some cancers and strokes,” said Ms Roxon

The Member for Hunter Joel Fitzgibbon welcomed the service and said he looked forward to the service commencing and offering convenient and affordable MRI services to patients in the Hunter region.

“I am also pleased to be advised that there will be no out-of-pocket expenses for patients who use the service and that the service will be conveniently available on Saturday mornings,” said Mr Fitzgibbon.

Enabling people to be able to claim MRI services on the proposed Hunter Imaging Group MRI unit in Maitland is part of the Government’s comprehensive plan to deliver better health care to working families – and an important step towards building a better health system for a modern Australia.