



HEALTH CARE CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION OF THE ACT INCORPORATED  
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## **Cancer patients disadvantaged by Health Funds' intransigence**

"Vulnerable people will suffer because of the failure by health insurance funds to support key Canberra health services," Health Care Consumers' Association of the ACT President, Mr Russell McGowan, said today.

The ACT's largest private hospital Calvary John James Hospital is planning to close its cancer clinic by the end of September. It is understood that the cancer clinic is financially unsustainable, like the Wanniasa Medical Centre whose imminent closure was announced last week.

One of the reasons for such financial failure is that Health Funds no longer choose to meet the ever increasing costs of essential chemotherapy agents and other medications required to treat various cancers.

"The commercial imperatives observed by both health funds and private sector health providers cannot be ignored, but should not override the public interest because of their need to provide a return to their shareholders," Mr McGowan said. "The Health Funds' intransigence affects other aspects of cancer care, including palliative care at home, and is something Australian Governments should address as a matter of priority in their healthcare reforms,"

Mr McGowan acknowledged that the ACT Government had no direct involvement in the cancer clinic nor power to stop closure of private healthcare facilities.

"But surely the Territory and Federal Governments between them can take some action to support consumers retaining access to these essential health services," Mr McGowan suggested.

"Perhaps some public health services can be co-located with private clinics to defray overheads, and pressure can be applied to the Health Funds to ensure that their payments for the essential chemotherapy agents keep pace with justified increases in these costs."

The Cancer Unit at Calvary John James, which was open four days a week, treated about 70 patients. While most of the patients would be able to continue private treatment at the Zita Mary Clinic at Calvary Hospital, Bruce; or at National Capital Private Hospital, at Garran, services in the public sector at the Canberra Hospital were already stretched, and it would be difficult for the private patients to be absorbed there.

“People may be able to get suitable treatment elsewhere, but having to face these changes will be another impediment for consumers to confront at a time when they are least able to deal with the extra stress,” he said. “Ensuring continuity of care in the one location is an important element in providing the safe, high quality and affordable care that is essential in obtaining optimal outcomes from cancer treatment.”

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For further information about HCCA visit the HCCA website at [www.hcca.org.au](http://www.hcca.org.au) and blog at <http://hcca-act.blogspot.com>

