

Federal election 2022: MPs urged to back Sydney Adventist Hospital breast cancer genomic test research

One of Australia's leading breast cancer surgeons has urged MPs to commit Medicare funding to a breakthrough test which prevents patients undergoing unnecessary chemotherapy.

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Treasurer Josh Frydenberg says additions to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme laid out in the budget will save lives including spinal muscular atrophy sufferers. “Last night, we listed this drug on the PBS at a record \$2.5 million for a one-off treatment,” he said, referring to Zolgensma. “This is the most expensive drug Australia has ever listed on the PBS. “It will save 30 children a year, and listing drugs, like Zolgensma and last night Trodelvy to treat breast cancer patients, is only possible because of a strong economy.”

Sydney Adventist Hospital breast cancer surgeon Dr Nicholas Ngui is urging federal election candidates to demand an expensive but highly accurate test which prevents patients undergoing unnecessary chemo is funded by Medicare.

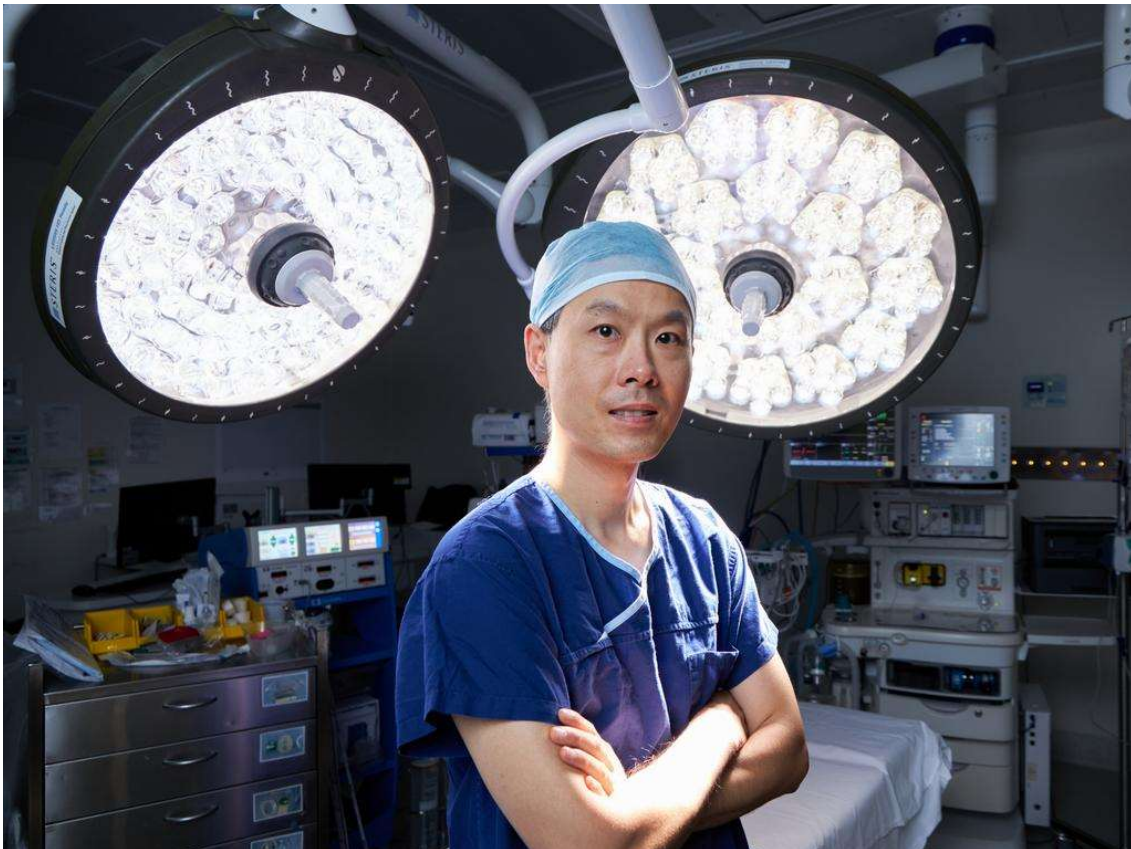
A North Sydney doctor whose Australian-first research has proven the reliability of a simple test to predict whether or not a breast-cancer patient will require

post-surgery chemotherapy is puzzled why the government continues to refuse to fund it.

Genomic testing is considered best practice internationally and is subsidised by the government or private health funds in countries including the Europe and the US.

In mid-2021 the Medicare Services Advisory Committee rejected an application to publicly fund the test stating its predictive value had not been adequately demonstrated.

Dr Ngui recently had a study published in the globally renowned The Breast Journal.



As the lead researcher, he followed 71 of his patients and their long term outcomes and illustrated the test was correctly predicting the behaviour of the cancer.

He hopes his recent research which proves the test's efficacy in an Australian sample of patients – data which mirrors international findings – may sway the committee to change their minds.

At a cost of between \$3000 and \$6000 all but the most affluent Australian patients are currently being denied access to the test.

“These tests rely on genetic molecular profiling so they are looking at the genetics of the cancer which determine its behaviour,” Dr Ngui said.

“It’s rare for public hospital patients to get this test except in rare clinical trial situations because essentially this is a test beyond the means of public hospital patients.

“Aside from the financial side and benefits to the health system of not administering chemo when it is unnecessary, a woman who has chemo often can’t work for six months, she suffers from side effects and so her quality life diminishes.”



Leigh Squire of Thornleigh undertook genomic testing following her breast cancer surgery.

Thornleigh's Leigh Squire, 48, jumped at the chance to take the test when Dr Ngui offered it to her in 2016.

Six years after making the decision not to undergo chemotherapy following her surgery as the test showed she was low risk, the retirement living manager remains cancer free.

"I believe this is a test that should have been offered to every single woman or man with breast cancer," Ms Squire said.

"I happen to be in a decent financial situation where I was able to invest this money in my health but not everyone is.

"I absolutely think if this is being used around the world then why not here and why is Medicare not funding it?

"Why are we putting people through chemotherapy they don't need?"