

The missing piece of the puzzle: Helping people feel whole again
Addressing the unmet survivorship needs of Head and Neck Cancer patients
8 October 2024, Parliament House, Canberra

Tracey had her eye, eye socket and part of her cheekbone removed after being diagnosed with Head and Neck Cancer. She was stunned to find out her facial prosthetic was not covered by Medicare or her private health insurance because it was considered "cosmetic" rather than functional.

Ahead of the 2025 Federal Election, Head and Neck Cancer Australia (HANCA), Australia's only charity dedicated to supporting people affected by Head and Neck Cancer, is heading to Parliament House to call for support from the Australian Government to address the critical gap in recovery for people needing access to facial prosthetics and oral rehabilitation services after treatment for Head and Neck Cancer.

"The reality is most patients who undergo major Head and Neck treatment covered by Medicare are left with profound and disfiguring side effects, yet we have no reliable or affordable route for facial prosthetics or oral rehabilitation so they never access the survivorship care they need," said A/Prof Bruce Ashford, Head and Neck Surgeon and Founding Director of HANCA.

"This results in a very poor quality of life for people who have been treated and cured of their cancer but are living with the lifelong side effects of treatment."

"We have a duty of care for our patients to find a solution to give them quality of life," said A/Prof Ashford.

Tracey's facial prosthetic to replace a part of her face removed after surgery cost \$6,500 which was not covered by Medicare or her private health insurance.

"I was lucky that I had some savings, but what about those people who don't? A facial prosthetic is literally a life saver. It's not optional. People's faces need to be put back together at the end of all of this. You can't leave the job half done," says Tracey.

The event at **Parliament House on 8 October** will include personal testimonies from survivors, insights from leading health professionals with a call for the Australian Government to invest \$34 million to establish a **Head and Neck Cancer Maxillofacial Benefits Scheme** to provide priority groups living with Head and Neck Cancer assistance to meet facial prosthetic costs, and address the financial barriers faced by patients needing oral rehabilitation following the removal of part of their teeth or jaws.

There will be an opportunity for journalists to ask questions following the formal presentations outside Parliament House.

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Head and Neck Cancer Australia is the only national charity dedicated to providing education and support to people living with Head and Neck Cancer. We are dedicated to supporting people impacted by Head and Neck Cancer, advocating for their needs, raising awareness, and driving change to improve the quality of life for survivors.

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