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Medicare rebate system a dud

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Article from: (http://www.news.com.au/heraldsun/) **Herald Sun**

Ben Packham
November 08, 2008 12:00am

A PLAN to pay Medicare rebates to patients by Eftpos at doctor's surgeries has been a massive flop.

According to [Medicare Australia's](#) (http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au) annual report, only \$300,000 in Medicare payments were made to patients using the new Easyclaim system in the past financial year.

And, despite promises of shorter Medicare queues, the number of people wasting time in Medicare offices has increased.

More than \$70 million of taxpayers' money went to GPs to implement the scheme.

Millions more were spent designing and setting up the scheme, but no one can say exactly how much.

Human Services Minister Joe Ludwig said the Howard government's system had been poorly designed.

"The situation is serious, but not irretrievable," he said.

"There's still a long way to go, but, unlike the previous government, we are beginning to move things in the right direction."

Former human services minister Joe Hockey wanted two-thirds of claims to be processed through Easyclaim by June this year. But only 0.6 per cent were made through the system in 2007-08.

"There is clearly a vast disconnect between Mr Hockey's high hopes and market reality," Senator Ludwig said.

But Mr Hockey, who oversaw Easyclaim's introduction, blamed doctors for failing to embrace the system.

"I thought I had the co-operation of the medical profession," he said. "But it obviously had to be driven much harder at a ministerial level, and Joe Ludwig has had nearly 12 months to do it."

Australian Medical Association president Dr Rosanna Capolingua said the Easyclaim system was a dud.

"It's hard work, it's not cost effective, and all it does is transfer the Medicare queues out of the Medicare offices into doctors' waiting rooms."

The number of people claiming cash rebates rose by 2 per cent last year.

About 73 per cent of services were bulk billed.

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