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GREEK TRIBUNE

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AUSTRALIAN NEWS

Medicare rebates drop to 50% for specialist fees

Medicare now covers just over half of specialist fees, with rebates dropping to 52 per cent of the total cost in early 2023, down from 72 per cent two decades ago.

This decline has led to Australians paying more out-of-pocket and delaying care, especially in areas like obstetrics, where only 39 per cent of costs are covered.

Experts have blamed

rising provider fees and stagnant rebates, which have not kept pace with inflation.

Specialist shortages and high private fees further limit access, with over 10 per cent of Australians delaying care due to costs.

Calls for higher rebates and structural changes will aim to make healthcare more affordable and accessible.

Psychiatric prescriptions for young Australians have doubled in a decade

Psychiatric medication prescriptions for children and teenagers in Australia have more than doubled in the past decade, reflecting a significant rise in mental health issues among youth.

Stimulant and antidepressant use among those aged under 18 surged between 2013 and 2023, with stimulant prescriptions nearly quadrupling.

Antidepressant prescriptions have increased by 165 per cent, while the number

of antipsychotic prescriptions has risen 37 per cent.

This increase mirrors global trends of rising mental distress in young people, attributed to factors like social media and intergenerational inequality.

Experts have emphasised that medication is part of a holistic approach to treatment, alongside therapy and lifestyle changes, with growing acceptance reducing stigma and encouraging more families to seek help.

Record number of Australian homes surpassed \$1 million property value mark

A record number of Australian suburbs now have a median house or unit value above \$1 million, according to a new report.

New data from CoreLogic shows 29.3 per cent — or 1,057 — of the nearly 4,800 suburbs surveyed across the country now have a million-dollar median.

That's more than doubled since the beginning of the COVID pandemic, when just 14.3 per cent of dwellings met that mark.

The report looked at the number of markets across Australia with a median house or unit value of at least \$1 million.

At no one's surprise, Sydney still dominates as Australia's most expensive capital, making up nearly half of the entire country's million-dollar suburbs.

Prices in Brisbane also skyrocketed, with 46 suburbs joining or re-joining the seven-figure club.

Melbourne was the only capital city which saw house price in some suburbs drop below the mark.

House markets in 104 (36.6 per cent) of the 284 suburbs surveyed in Adelaide met the \$1 million mark.

This is up from 75 suburbs in August 2023.

Tomato virus outbreak leads to disruptions

Australia's tomato supply chain is bracing for disruption and potential price hikes, while hundreds of jobs have already been lost, following the discovery of an exotic plant virus that has plunged three SA growers into lockdown, the ABC reports.

Prior to the current outbreak in SA, the tomato brown rugose fruit virus (ToBRFV) had not been detected in the country.

The outbreak has already led some states to impose bans on SA tomatoes — prompting predictions of price rises in those states — and fanned growers' fears the restrictions could cause more harm than the virus itself.

The virus was first detected in Australia in August and the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) said it likely entered the country via infected seeds.

The disease causes yellowing and deformity on the leaves of the host plants, while the crop itself can form wrinkled spots and show uneven ripening.

Affected tomatoes are safe to eat but the virus is highly transmissible among tomatoes, capsicums and chillies, authorities say.

In tomatoes, the virus reduces the plant's marketable yield by up to 75 per cent.

PIRSA's director of plant and invasive species biosecurity, Nick Secomb, said it was a "very significant disease on production".

"If we were to allow this disease to spread, not only will there be trade impacts but this disease is considered significant nationally for a reason," he said.

The virus can spread through infected seeds, plants and cuttings, plant-to-plant contact and through touch transmission.

ToBRFV has been found at three businesses — Perfection Fresh, Gawler River Tomato and SA Tomato — in the northern Adelaide Plains foodbowl region.

PIRSA has taken more than 2,500 plant samples from 18



Tomato virus leads to job losses and industry disruptions

businesses for testing and has said it was following up with four businesses about infected seeds.

Western Australia and Queensland have introduced bans on South Australian tomatoes and New South Wales is only doing business with properties cleared from the disease.

The SA government has placed three SA businesses into quarantine.

"The decision to quarantine those three facilities are all about seeking to contain the

virus with the view to eradicate it," Premier Peter Malinauskas said on Wednesday.

PIRSA said no shortages of tomatoes or price rises were expected at this stage.

SA Produce Market managing director, Penny Reidy, said prices would not be impacted "overnight".

Ms Reidy said impacts could be "double-edged"; consumers in states that have banned SA tomatoes could end up paying more, while shoppers in SA could end up paying less.

Mount Gambier MP Troy Bell, appeals court decision

An independent MP accused of theft has been found guilty of 20 counts of theft, after a three-month trial.

Member for Mount Gambier Troy Stephen Bell, 51, had pleaded not guilty to 20 counts of theft and six counts of dishonest dealing with documents when the trial started in June.

He was found not guilty of just one count of dishonest dealing with documents.

The jury returned unanimous verdicts on all counts except for two theft charges — on which they instead reached a majority guilty verdict, where 10 or more jurors agreed.

According to the ABC, the jury delivered its verdicts for each charge after deliberating for more than two days.

Prosecutors had told the jury Bell abused his position as a Department for Education employee to steal more than \$430,000 from not-for-profit educational organisations between 2009 and 2013.

They had alleged he used the money, which was intended to support disengaged and

vulnerable high school students to re-engage in study, to instead fund home renovations and pay credit card debts.

Lawyers for Bell, however, had told the jury the entire prosecution case against him was a "mad rabble" and had "more holes than a Balfours crumet".

Opening the trial in June, prosecutor Jemma Litster told the court Bell abused his position of power at the helm of the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) in Mount Gambier, which he had helped establish in 2006.

She said it was alleged that the funds he stole — totalling \$436,023.24 — were intended to be used for the purpose of not-for-profit associations in the South-East, which invoiced Millicent High School to fund the ILC.

During the trial, the jury was played an intercepted phone call between Bell and former Liberal leader Isobel Redmond, in which he asked for her help to find "a pretty good lawyer".



Sir Samuel Way Courts Building, Victoria Square

The court had heard the alleged offending ended in 2013 when Bell quit to pursue a career in politics.

He won the March 2014 election as a Liberal candidate, but quit the party after he was charged in 2017.

Since then, he has been re-elected as the independent member for Mount Gambier twice, in 2018 and 2022.

Bell's defence barrister, Nick Healy told the jury the prosecution case against his client had been "all sizzle and

no sausage" and an attempt to discredit Bell.

"The entire prosecution case is misguided, it is misleading, it is confused and confusing, and it is internally inconsistent," he had told the jury.

Judge Rauf Soulio thanked the jury for their "crucial" service and the "clear attention" they paid though the three-month trial.

Bell has since announced that he has lodged an appeal. (Source abc.net.au)

Patriarchal visit

By Kostas Karamarkos

For a number of years now, I keep on arguing that the institutionally defined Greek-Australian community, as expressed through its organisations, schools, churches, media, etc, does not have any real influence and impact in the everyday lives of Greek-Australians. We address almost all of the fundamental issues in our lives, issues such as education, health, welfare, political representation, to name a few, and we make our claims via the institutions of mainstream society.

Furthermore, our ethnic identity is experienced and celebrated

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mostly through the private sphere, that is, through our families. When this happens, it is happening through the intellectual, emotional, linguistic and others "tools" provided by the hegemonic Anglo-Celtic culture.

I come back to this argument again, because, in my opinion, it was tested and verified once more, as a result of the recent visit to Australia of the Patriarch of Constantinople and New Rome Vartholomeos.

Here is the case study...

For months now, there was a huge mobilization by the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese



Poor attendance at the Melbourne Tennis Centre...

of Australia, aiming at successfully staging two mass events in Melbourne in the presence of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, a liturgy at the Tennis Centre and a school

parade nearby, however...

For the liturgy, only approximately 3,500 people turned up, the vast majority of them first generation migrants, whereas for the parade... The participation was significantly less...

It is worth mentioning here that the Greek origin population in Melbourne, according to the 2021 census, is just over 180,000 people, that might reach or surpass the 200,000 mark, if we include the Greek Cypriot background members of the community.

The vast majority of these people are second, third and fourth generation members of a multifaceted and diverse community that no longer exists, as a collective...

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The President John Kapiris and members of the Chios Society of SA, at a recent social event held at their Club in Rosewater

David Speirs to face Court on drug charges

Former SA Liberal leader David Speirs to face court charged with drug offences, police confirm

South Australian police say former Liberal leader David Speirs has been charged with two counts of supplying a controlled substance.

The member for the SA state seat of Black said he was arrested and questioned by police after "allegations of illicit substance use" at his home emerged several weeks ago.

Mr Speirs says he will fight to clear his name "of any allegations", and says he intends to resign from parliament in the next sitting week later this month.

South Australia's former Liberal leader has been charged with drug offences and will face court, police have confirmed.

In a statement, SA Police said David Speirs was arrested

at Berri on September 26 before police searched his home.

He has been charged with two counts of supplying a controlled substance in early August, police said.

"Since allegations of illicit substance use at my home became public, my home has been raided by armed police, and I was arrested and I was questioned," Mr Speirs said in a video statement on Facebook.

Police have since confirmed Mr Speirs will face court.

"As a result of the public statement made on social media by MP David Speirs in which he reveals he had been arrested, police can confirm that on September 26, 2024, Mr Speirs was arrested at Berri and charged with two counts of supplying a controlled substance between August 2 and 3 and on August 9," a

police spokesperson said.

"Mr Speirs was given police bail and will appear in court at a later date."

In an earlier statement, police said they searched a property on Strickland Road at Kingston Park on September 26 "as part of an ongoing investigation".

The member for Black said he intends to resign from parliament later this month, adding his mental health has been "in significant decline".

"I've not been the best version of myself. I've not been the best version of David Speirs, and I have spent time with people who did not bring out the best in me, to be quite honest," Mr Speirs said.

"I believe there's someone pretty sinister behind this, and while I am personally devastated by what has happened, and I will fight to clear my name of any alle-

gations."

In his video, he said he did not believe he could adequately serve his community "while dealing with this matter, protecting my mental health, and supporting my family and friends".

"As such, I do intend to step down formally from parliament in the next sitting week.

SA Liberal leader Vincent Tarzia said he met with the state executive of the party on Saturday, which has ratified the decision to suspend Mr Speirs's membership.

Mr Tarzia said the party is "focused" on pre-selecting "the best candidate" for the southwestern Adelaide seat of Black before nominations close on Tuesday.

"We'll make sure that we do everything possible to make sure that seat stays with the Liberal party," Mr Tarzia said. (Source abc.net.au)

Rheinmetall Defence Australia builds on National Maintenance Capability

Rheinmetall, one of the largest Defence prime contractors in Australia, is building on the success of the existing Maintenance and Support Partnership established with RGM Maintenance Townsville for the Medium Heavy Capability by joining with Defence prime contractor, Supacat, to ensure a maintenance footprint across Australia.

Nathan Poyner, Managing Director, Rheinmetall Defence Australia, said the signing of the deed of agreement in 2022 was the first step in providing original equipment manufacturer supported maintenance in regions where the vehicles are located.

"These new strategic partnerships aim to reduce total cost of ownership to the Commonwealth and bring ongoing secure jobs, training and sovereign industrial capability to the regions."

"The deed brings together both organisations of working in region on the Medium Heavy Capability services for logistic vehicles as part of the Australian Defence Force's Land 121 program, at RGM premises in Townsville."

has added two additional partners, RGM Maintenance Darwin and Supacat Perth, a world leading design and technology organisation specialising in high mobility defence vehicles."

"These partnerships grow Rheinmetall's ability to support the Commonwealth of Australia and allied nations, in regions where HX logistic vehicles are located with specialist expertise through the deployment of Field Service Representatives (FSRs) and assistance from technical experts."

"The agreements allow our partners to provide value-for-money light and medium grade repairs and FSR supported heavy grade repair where the vehicles are located with OEM support."

"Rheinmetall also gains valuable insights in to how vehicles are performing by utilising these existing trade repair relationships," Mr Poyner added.

Mr Poyner said that representatives from both organisations participated in a course delivered by Rheinmetall trainers at facilities in regional Victoria on the HX platform focussing on systems, documentation



The combined teams from Rheinmetall, RGM and Supacat at LAND FORCES 2024 trade fair recently

and the associated diagnostic tools across all vehicle variants from the 40M to the 45M Heavy Recovery.

Bruce Tait, Supacat Managing Director, said, "We are delighted to continue to expand our relationship with Rheinmetall to include supporting the HX logistics vehicles from our Support Centre in Perth."

"Rheinmetall's training and support program means that we are confident of being able to support the Rheinmetall vehicles with the same responsiveness and competency that we apply to our own vehicles. Our focus remains on continuously

evolving the capability and availability of Army's vehicle fleets as it transitions to a literal and amphibious force," Mr Tait said.

RGM Maintenance Business Development Manager, Mick Ferguson, said RGM had heavy vehicle operations throughout Queensland and the Northern Territory and has a 20+ year history of service provision to the ADF.

"RGM's support to Rheinmetall reduces maintenance lead times for the ADF's Land 121 fleet in region, putting vehicles back in the hands of ADF operators sooner," Mr Ferguson said.

(Contributed)

ACCC takes legal action against supermarkets

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has launched legal proceedings against supermarket giants Woolworths and Coles, over misleading discount pricing claims.

The consumer watchdog has alleged that both retailers have raised their prices by at least 15 per cent on hundreds of products before placing them in their "Prices Dropped" or "Down Down" promotions.

Woolworths allegedly engaged in the practice for up to 20

months, involving 266 products, while Coles is accused of doing so for 15 months on 245 items.

ACCC (A-triple-C) Chair Gina Cass-Gottlieb stated that the pricing claims misled consumers, diminishing their ability to make informed choices.

Woolworths and Coles have both committed to addressing the claims.

The Commission is seeking significant financial penalties to be paid by the two supermarket retailers in order to deter future violations.

Australia's population passes 27 million

The Australian Bureau of Statistics has released new figures revealing that Australia's population has surged past 27 million people.

The latest population figures mark a significant growth spurt, which has largely been driven by post-pandemic overseas migration.

Specifically, in the 12 months to March 2024, the population grew by 2.3 per cent, with migration accounting for 83 per cent of this increase.

Net migration added 509,800 people, with students comprising a significant portion of the population increase.

Natural population increase contributed 105,500 people, while the national fertility rate remains low at 1.6 births per woman.

Western Australia recorded the highest population growth at 3.1 per cent, while Tasmania saw the smallest at just 0.4 per cent.

Australia's next population milestone of 28 million has been projected for 2027.

NSW to strengthen anti-Nazi laws

NSW may tighten laws to explicitly ban the Nazi salute following a white supremacist rally in Corowa, which drew around 50 participants.

While displaying Nazi symbols without reasonable excuse is already illegal in NSW, Premier Chris Minns vowed to eliminate any legal ambiguity regarding the salute.

No arrests were made at the rally, but investigations are ongoing.

Deputy federal oppo-

sition leader Sussan Ley urged stronger state action, noting participants crossed into NSW to exploit legal loopholes.

Federal laws banning Nazi symbols and salutes took effect in January, with Victoria and Tasmania already enforcing similar state bans.

In June, three men were convicted in NSW for making Nazi salutes, though they have appealed the convictions.

Ten per cent of workers suffer from work related hearing loss

One-in-ten Australians have suffered hearing loss due to workplace incidents, according to a report by Hearing Australia.

Despite the risks, many people still neglect any form of ear protection, with only 25 per cent consistently using it at work, or during noisy leisure activities.

The survey found that 11 per cent had experienced workplace-related hearing damage, and more than 20 per cent reported damage from leisure

activities.

Hearing Australia's principal audiologist, Karen Hirschausen, emphasised the need for protection in both work and leisure environments, warning that people often underestimate the risks posed by concerts or nightclubs.

Recommendations include taking breaks, moving away from speakers, and following workplace laws that require regular hearing tests for noise-exposed workers.