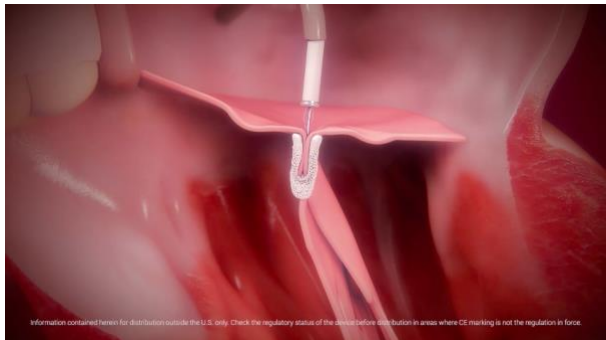


## MEDIA RELEASE

29<sup>th</sup> September 2020

### Melbourne man calls on Federal Minister for Health to fund medical device that repaired his heart from life-threatening condition

- **Mitral regurgitation affects over 10,000 Australian adults each year and could lead to heart failure or be fatal if left untreated.**
- **Lack of funding for Transcatheter Mitral Valve repair (TMVr) with MitraClip means hundreds of Australians are likely to miss the opportunity for treatment.**
- **Australia is behind the US, UK and European countries for funding this procedure.**
- **The medical device MitraClip allows Melbourne resident Michael Budge to lead a “normal” life.**



#### [Transcatheter Mitral Valve repair animation](#)

MELBOURNE: Michael Budge, Brighton, is calling on the Federal Minister for Health to reimburse the medical technology and procedure that saved him from a life-threatening heart condition.

Melbourne-based cardiologist, Associate Professor Tony Walton, said of this technology and procedure: “If you look at the data from the trials, it helps keep people out of the hospital and it saves people’s lives. It saves money. A hospital stay for patients is very expensive.”

After noticing constant breathlessness, Mr Budge’s life took an unexpected turn when he was diagnosed with severe mitral regurgitation at the Alfred hospital in August 2019.

“I got breathless. I couldn’t walk too far without getting breathless. I couldn’t sleep at night properly,” said Mr Budge.

A few months earlier, Mr Budge had a heart attack and had received emergency coronary bypass surgery. The mitral valve in his heart no longer closed properly as a result of his heart attack.

The mitral valve ensures that blood flows in one direction only. Mitral regurgitation occurs when the mitral valve does not close properly, leading to blood flowing in the wrong direction into the lungs.

Mr Budge was “relieved and grateful” that the Alfred Hospital offered him a Transcatheter Mitral Valve repair (TMVr) procedure to mend his damaged valve, as the doctors did not find him fit for the alternative option: open-heart surgery.

“I was surprised that I was not able to have the {TMVr} procedure done in a private hospital, after paying for private health insurance for many years,” said Mr Budge.

TMVr is a minimally invasive procedure in which a miniature clothes-peg-like clip called MitraClip is inserted into the heart through the groin to pinch the leaky mitral valve. Five days after the operation, Mr Budge was discharged from hospital.

MitraClip is not currently on the Prostheses List and TMVr is not on the Medicare Benefits Schedule. Due to this, the limited number of hospitals that provide this service fund the cost entirely, with no reimbursement from private insurers.

As a result, the hospitals that provide this service can only offer it to a very small numbers of patients, meaning many miss out on the procedure.

In November 2020, a decision is to be made by the Federal Minister for Health on the reimbursement status of the device and procedure. TMVr received a favourable evaluation by the Medical Services Advisory Committee in June 2020.

In cases where conventional open-heart surgery to replace the damaged valve is ruled out due to factors such as advanced age or deteriorating health, such as in Mr Budge's situation, patients are eligible for TMVr.

There is a short timeframe during which patients are eligible for this procedure. If missed, their last hope is medical management, which alleviates the symptoms but does not repair the valve.

Therefore, delays in accessing the device can impact on both the quantity and quality of life for patients suffering from this debilitating condition.

Associate Professor Walton said: "Reimbursing TMVr for patients living with mitral regurgitation would put Australia on the same level as the US, UK and other European countries.

"We look forward to MitraClip being properly funded both in the public and private sector."

Mr Budge hopes that other Australians will be able to benefit from TMVr: "If it wasn't for this procedure, I probably would not have met my first grandchild who was born in June. It's been an absolute game changer for me. I'm living life normally. I hope Mr (Greg) Hunt will give other Australians a fighting chance of beating this debilitating condition."

The symptoms of mitral regurgitation are shortness of breath, fatigue and light-headedness, and can cause heart failure or be fatal if left untreated.

Globally, 100,000<sup>1</sup> patients have been treated with Abbott's MitraClip over the past decade.

**ENDS**

- Michael Budge, mitral regurgitation patient.
- Associate Professor Tony Walton, Melbourne-based cardiologist.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://abbott.mediaroom.com/2020-01-13-Abbott-to-Initiate-Trial-to-Study-MitraClip-as-an-Option-for-Moderate-Surgical-Risk-Patients>