

‘Super no good to the dead’: Aussies raiding retirement for weight loss surgery

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Weight loss surgery has Australians dipping into their super at increasing rates, with one clinic seeing a five-fold increase since 2010.

Joanna Metzakis is one who has done it and she said she couldn't put a price on how it had improved her life.

Ms Metzakis had battled morbid obesity since her teens, and when she turned 30 she was battling high blood pressure and lower back problems.

Joanna Metzakis doesn't regret using her super for gastric sleeve surgery.

Unable to afford gastric sleeve surgery, she withdrew half her super - a total of \$25,000 - to cover the cost.

"I made a decision I didn't want to wait, and that was the quickest and best way for me," she told *A Current Affair*.

"I just thought that I want to live to be able to use that money, and I might not if I don't do it now."

Ms Metzakis weighed 128kg before the surgery, and has dropped as low as 73kg since.

Joanna, before and after.

Joanna had her operation after she turned 30.

Bariatric surgeon and Melbourne Gastro Surgery director Dr Arun Dhir said the percentage of patients he had seen using super to pay for surgery

had leaped from seven percent in 2010, to 35 percent in 2016-17.

He said patients considering weight loss surgery needed to show a good understanding of the risks involved, and demonstrate commitment to lifelong changes before the operation proceeded.

Recently, his clinic had a 65-year-old morbidly obese woman come in seeking weight loss surgery, with \$500,000 in her super fund.

"I say that there is no use of superannuation to a dead person," he said.

Weight loss operations paid for by super are on the rise.

"People want to enjoy a superior quality of life now, rather than after 65."

However, with clinics around the country marketing their super-funded services, one expert has warned against the practice.

Financial Planning Institute of Australia head of policy and government relations Ben Sharman said taking even a small amount out of your super could have a massive impact on your retirement.

"For someone in their 40s, for every \$10,000 they need to access, they're reducing their retirement benefits by \$42,000," he said.

"And for someone in their 30s and looking at 40 years until retirement, \$10,000 will decrease by \$180,000."

More than 15,000 Australians drew down more than \$200 million in superannuation to fund medical procedures in the past year.

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