

**This boy has had five heart operations but no money to help**

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Little boy's cost ... an insurance payout would have helped Olga Smitala subsidise the care and treatment of her five-year-old son, Alexandro, who has a congenital heart condition.

Photo: *Jacky Ghossein*

OLGA Smitala's son, Alexandro, was diagnosed with a complex congenital heart condition when she was 20 weeks pregnant.

Now five, Alexandro has undergone five heart operations and had countless medical procedures, which have forced him to spend much of his short life in the Children's Hospital at Westmead.

His condition, known as transposition of great vessels, would have been covered by ING's baby care policy.

Mrs Smitala, 45, said insurance would have defrayed some of the doctors' bills, monthly ultrasounds, medicines and his special diet, which includes a prescription-only type of cooking oil.

"It definitely would have helped ... I had three kids at home, wasn't able to work any more and we went down to just one income to pay the mortgage," she said.

After his third operation in March, Alexandro contracted a serious infection and has been in and out of intensive care since.

What was supposed to be a seven- to 10-day hospital stay has turned into six weeks. "My 14-year-old daughter has to look after the house and it's so hard because we don't have any family in Australia to help us," Mrs Smitala said.

Alexandro's paediatric cardiothoracic surgeon, David Murphy, said more than 85 per cent of children with his condition survived, if treated.

"What we endeavoured to do was make it function more normally and allow him to grow bigger and run around, go to school and hopefully go on to enjoy life," he said.