

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2018 - 2019, 29 & 30 May 2018

Ref No: SQ18-000694

OUTCOME: 1 - Health System Policy, Design and Innovation

Topic: Homeopathy Review

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Stirling Griff

Question:

The Homeopathy Review created a rule that trials with less than 150 participants were not 'reliable', meaning their results did not "warrant further consideration of their findings" (Information Paper, Appendix C). Does the NHMRC apply this rule to other trials it funds and/or reviews? If so, where else has this rule been applied and what internationally accepted scientific standards were used to authenticate it?

Answer:

Studies with less than 150 participants were not excluded from consideration in the evidence assessment. The Homeopathy Working Committee (HWC) deemed that, for the purposes of drafting evidence statements, the outcomes of studies with less than 150 participants were not sufficiently powered to reliably inform conclusions on the effectiveness of homeopathy to treat a particular clinical condition.

NHMRC establishes expert working committees, such as the HWC, under section 39 of the NHMRC Act, to advise NHMRC on the methodology and parameters of evidence evaluation when developing health advice and guidelines. This is in line with international best practice for formulating evidence-based health advice. The HWC has expertise in evidence-based medicine, clinical trials and complementary medicine.

There is no ruling as to the number of participants that is appropriate for a trial that applies for funding by NHMRC. Applications are selected for funding through a competitive peer review process. The grant review panel assesses the application against published criteria. Issues such as trial sample size, experimental design and the power are usually assessed under "scientific quality". If, in the judgement of the expert assessors, the scientific quality is compromised by inadequate trial size, this will be reflected in the score for that assessment criterion.