



**The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Health**

27 JUN 2013

The Hon John Murphy MP
Chair
Standing Committee on Petitions
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Murphy

Thank you for your letter of 27 May 2013 regarding a petition recently submitted for the consideration of the Standing Committee on Petitions requesting nurse practitioners gaining access to the same Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items and rebates as medical practitioners.

Under the Expansion of the Nurse Practitioner Workforce measure, eligible nurse practitioners working in private practice may provide Medicare rebateable services within their area of speciality using four time-tiered MBS attendance items. These eligible nurse practitioners may also request a range of diagnostic tests, and refer patients to specialists and consultant physicians.

The present structure of MBS nurse practitioner items, and the fees set for those items, was developed in consultation with two Advisory Groups that included representatives of all nursing professional organisations. The membership of the Advisory Groups included the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners, the Royal College of Nursing Australia, the Australian Nursing Federation, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council, the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery, and the Council of Remote Area Nurses.

In addition, the Advisory Groups also included representatives of the main medical peak organisations representing general practice - the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners – and of state and territory governments.

I note the concerns raised in the petition that nurse practitioners are not able to provide health management plans, general procedures, and referrals to allied health professionals. The reason for this is that these services are intended to help medical practitioners to provide more comprehensive care to people with complex and chronic health conditions. These patients present with complicated care needs, and their treatment requires the comprehensive diagnostic and planning skills that medical practitioners are specifically trained to provide.

At this stage, the Australian Government has no plans to allow nurse practitioners to have access to medical practitioner MBS items. However, it will continue to monitor the use of the existing nurse practitioner MBS items, and to engage with nurse practitioner organisations in relation to how effectively they support access by patients to private nurse practitioner services.

The petition also recommends that nurse practitioners be enabled to provide services for the Department of Veterans' Affairs, the Transport Accident Commission and Work Cover. As these are not the responsibility of my portfolio, I am unable to comment on this recommendation.

Once again, thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely

Tanya Plibersek

20.6.13