

Senate Community Affairs Committee
ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2010-2011, 23 February 2011

Question: E11-016

OUTCOME 3: Access to Medical Services

Topic: Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC)

Written Question on Notice

Senator Siewert asked:

Is the Government aware of a recent submission to MSAC from the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia where it is stated that:

- 'PET has a critical and irreplaceable role in the investigation and management of several cancers, including upper gastrointestinal and head and neck cancers. PET scans have been shown to restage 25% of cancer patients, ensuring that areas of cancer not detected by other imaging modalities are identified and treated.'

- 'PET scans are unfunded for many cancer patients, regardless of the fact that determination of the optimal management pathway relies on PET results.'

- a) Does the Government agree that its approach to Health Technology Assessment is not meeting the needs of cancer patients?
- b) If so, are there any plans to improve on this situation?

Answer:

Yes. The Department received a submission from the Clinical Oncological Society of Australia in relation to public comments sought on the "Draft Information Requests for Assessing a Pair of Co-Dependent Technologies" in December 2010 which included these comments.

- a) No. The needs of cancer patients are an important aspect of consideration of new medical services by the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC). 28 cancer-related applications have been received by MSAC since 24 November 2007. Of those 28 applications, 27 assessments were accepted for assessment (including nine re-assessments of earlier applications), and one application was deemed ineligible for assessment.
- b) On 27 February 2010, the Minister for Health and Ageing and the then Minister for Finance and Deregulation released the report of the *Review of Health Technology Assessment in Australia (December 2009)* (HTA Review). The Government accepted the recommendation, which has now been implemented, that a single entry point be established in the Department of Health and Ageing to improve management of applications for health technology assessment (HTA) to ensure the Minister receives comprehensive and coordinated advice to inform reimbursement decisions, particularly in respect of co-dependent technologies (such as new cancer drugs that require a genetic test to select appropriate patients for treatment).