

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2016 - 2017, 1 March 2017

Ref No: SQ17-000082

OUTCOME: 4 - Individual Health Benefits

Topic: MBS Review

Type of Question: Hansard Page 127, 1 March 2017

Senator: Siewert, Rachel

Question:

Senator SIEWERT: I understand the review, but, in order to put even a temporary fix in that provides better access to services than what we have just talked about, what has to be done to make that happen in terms of process? Surely you could do it via a change to regulation.

Mr Bowles: I would have to take some advice on that. But clearly it is a policy decision of government to do it, so we are working on that at the moment through this review mechanism that Mr Cormack talked about.

Senator SIEWERT: But that is the general MBS review. I am asking if it is possible to elevate it and fix it in the short term while you carry out the review to ensure that people in residential care are no longer classed as 'patients'? Surely that is something you could fix fairly easily through either a delegated instrument or a policy decision by government to change that definition of 'patient', given that we have all agreed things have moved on and it is not contemporary anymore.

Mr Bowles: I am happy to take it on notice to see what we can do. I do not have the answer here. Again, I cannot make that decision.

Senator SIEWERT: So no-one has asked yet look at how we solve this issue in both the short and long term?

Mr Cormack: We have just indicated to you that we recognise that there is an issue here. It is an issue of longstanding. It was predicated on a previous policy decision. We are seeking to have a look at that. We will take some advice to government. Currently like items are available under the chronic disease management Medicare Benefits Schedule.

Senator SIEWERT: Mr Cormack, I have taken that on board. I understand that the review is happening but you have also told me that there is no end date for that and it is going to take a while. I am looking for a short-term fix. Is it possible to do either a short-term fix or prioritise fixing this much more quickly given the circumstances?

Mr Bowles: As Mr Cormack said, there are some items available. That is fine. We can deal with that. I will take the rest on notice because I do not have the answer right here right now.

Answer:

The Department of Health is aware of concerns raised about residential aged care facility (RACF) residents not meeting eligibility requirements for Better Access services under the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS). The Department is exploring the issues associated with accessibility to psychological therapy services for RACF residents, for consideration by Government. This may include options that could be implemented outside of the MBS that would achieve an equivalent outcome of improving access to psychological therapy services for older Australians in RACFs.