

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2016 - 2017, 1 March 2017

Ref No: SQ17-000202

OUTCOME: 2 - Health Access and Support Services

Topic: After-Hours Medical Deputising Services

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Griff, Stirling

Question:

- a) Regarding after-hours medical deputising services, can you please provide a breakdown of the total cost of this service to the Commonwealth?
- b) What proportion of this total funding was for urgent after hours visits – specifically items 597, 598, 599 and 600?
 - i. Does the department have projections of what these items will cost the MBS in forward years?
 - ii. Does the department have a definition of what constitutes “urgent” to guide doctors? If not, has the department considered whether this would be useful?

Answer:

- a) There are no specific items within the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) for medical deputising services. However, medical deputising services may establish arrangements with doctors that provide Medicare eligible services on behalf of the Medical Deputising Service.
- b) The following table shows total Medicare expenditure for urgent after-hours attendances by financial year. These figures include benefits paid for all urgent after-hours attendances; including urgent after-hours attendances rendered in association with a medical deputising service.

MBS Expenditure for urgent after-hours attendances (MBS items 597-600) by financial year

Item	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
597	\$77,980,826	\$91,391,563	\$115,419,366	\$152,901,067	\$196,784,087
598	\$4,118,486	\$4,844,554	\$4,152,409	\$4,561,549	\$6,749,961
599	\$19,916,779	\$24,082,505	\$30,698,222	\$35,990,755	\$39,409,495
600	\$1,004,246	\$1,349,237	\$1,292,871	\$1,530,871	\$2,982,726
Total	\$103,020,337	\$121,667,859	\$151,562,868	\$194,984,242	\$245,926,269

Source: Department of Human Services website.

Note: figures are date of processing; Expenditure does not include bulk billing incentives or benefits paid for other services claimed in association with an urgent after-hours attendance.

- i. The forward estimates for Medicare are published in the context of Budget updates. The most recent forward estimates for Medicare are available in the 2016-17 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO). The Medicare forward estimates are available at: http://www.budget.gov.au/2016-17/content/bp1/html/bp1_bs5-01.htm

The Department of Health does not publish projected Medicare expenditure below this level of detail.

- ii. The requirements for billing urgent after-hours attendance items are set out in the item descriptor and explanatory notes of the MBS. There is currently no definition of 'urgent' set out in the MBS and this determination is left to the discretion of the providing practitioner.