

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 30/31 May 2011

Question: E11-164

OUTCOME 2: Access to Pharmaceutical Services

Topic: LUCENTIS INJECTIONS FOR WET MACULAR DEGENERATION

Written Question on Notice

Senator Boyce asked:

What plans are there to provide new technologies like Lucentis injections for wet macular degeneration in the elderly patients living in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions?

Answer:

The Australian Government has provided funding of \$544,438 (GST inclusive) to the Indigenous and Remote Eye Health Service for the purchase of a range of eye health testing and treatment equipment for use in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions. This new equipment will allow a greater range of treatments to be provided locally and improve patient outcomes.

This is in addition to benefits already available on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and Medical Benefits Scheme – national programs that make health services available to all Australians.

For example, Ranibizumab solution for intravitreal injections (Lucentis®) has been listed on the PBS since August 2007 for the initial and continuing treatment of subfoveal choroidal neovascularisation due to age related macular degeneration, in a patient where certain conditions are met. Subfoveal choroidal neovascularisation due to age related macular degeneration also includes 'wet macular degeneration'. The PBS-subsidised ranibizumab treatment must be initiated and continued by an ophthalmologist.

Further, Medicare item 42740 provides benefits for the injection of therapeutic substances into eyes, (such as Lucentis) or for the removal of aqueous or vitreous for diagnostic purposes - a 75 per cent benefit of \$217.05 or 85 per cent benefit of \$245.95 applies to this item and the choice of "therapeutic substance" is a clinical judgement issue for the treating practitioner.