

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2012 – 2013, 17 & 19 October 2012

Question: E12-033

OUTCOME 3: Access to Medical Services

Topic: MRI SCANS OF THE BREAST

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Number of pages: 2

Senator: Senator Xenophon

Question:

The current Medicare Benefit Schedule item relating to breast Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scans is only applicable for women who are under 50 years old, who are asymptomatic for breast cancer but who are at high risk of developing breast cancer due to family history or genetic mutation. Therefore women who are over 50 and who have a history of breast cancer do not qualify for a Medicare rebate for breast MRI scans.

- a) Can the Department advise the rationale behind excluding this high-risk category of women from being eligible for Medicare rebates for breast MRI scans?
- b) What is the status of the Medical Services Advisory Commission's review of the MBS funded items relating to breast MRI scans?
- c) I understand mammograms are not as effective at detecting tumours in women with dense breast tissue or heavy scarring due to multiple surgeries. Can the Department advise whether doctors are required to inform women with the abovementioned characteristics of the potential inadequacy of mammograms in detecting tumours?

Answer:

- a) Patients receive Medicare rebates for items listed on the Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS). Currently there are no Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) items on the MBS for the detection of breast cancer for women who are aged 50 years and older.

For the approval of an item to be included on the MBS, an organisation or individual must apply to the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC). It is the role of MSAC to evaluate applications and to advise the Minister for Health on evidence relating to the safety, effectiveness and cost effectiveness of new technologies and procedures. This advice informs Australian Government decisions about public funding for new and in some cases existing medical services.

MSAC's previous evaluation of breast MRI focussed on the role of this technology in the screening of women who are aged less than 50 years and who have risk factors for the development of breast cancer. MSAC accepted that mammographic imaging may not be optimal in this age group, owing to the radiographic density of the premenopausal breast.

- b) The Protocol Advisory Subcommittee of MSAC has determined the review protocol and following the evidence evaluation by an external assessment group, the assessment report will be reviewed by the Evaluation Sub-Committee of MSAC.
- c) Doctors have a duty to disclose information to patients that is relevant to the patient's decision about diagnosis and treatment, including the relative risks and benefits of the proposed diagnostic tests and treatments.