

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

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

Question: E12-209

OUTCOME 9: Private Health

Topic: NATURAL THERAPIES

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Number of pages: 2

Senator: Senator Di Natale

Question:

What progress has there been to date on the Budget announcement to review the evidence base for natural therapies covered by private health insurance?

Answer:

The review of the Australian Government rebate on private health insurance for natural therapies (the review) will identify which of the in scope natural therapies currently offered by private health insurers are underpinned by an evidence base that supports their clinical efficacy, cost effectiveness and safety and quality, so that they can continue to receive the rebate.

For the purposes of the review, an in scope natural therapy includes:

- A natural therapy that is currently covered under private health insurance;
- Is not a natural therapy that can be subsidised directly under Medicare; and
- Is not provided by a health professional regulated under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.

The Department of Health and Ageing is currently writing to stakeholders to invite submissions to the review. They will be asked to provide evidence that supports the clinical efficacy, cost effectiveness and safety and quality of those natural therapies being reviewed. Evidence informing the review will be assessed in the context of the National Health and Medical Research Council Additional Levels of Evidence and Grades for Recommendations for Developers of Guidelines (NHMRC evidence guidelines).

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC), through an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Department, will provide assessments to the Natural Therapy Review Advisory Committee (Advisory Committee) regarding available evidence of the in scope natural therapies by conducting an extensive scientific literature review of the evidence base for confirmed in scope natural therapies, including consideration of evidence provided in stakeholder submission.

The Advisory Committee, chaired by the Department's Chief Medical Officer, will review the work of the NHMRC in order to advise the Australian Government about natural therapies underpinned by an evidence base that would continue to attract the rebate. Advisory Committee members will include the natural therapy industry, private health insurers, consumers and clinical experts. Arrangements for the Advisory Committee are being finalised and it is anticipated that the first meeting of the Advisory Committee will occur early in 2013.