

Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration  
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE  
Human Services Portfolio  
Department of Human Services  
Additional Estimates 2007-08 – February 2008



**Question:** HS113-HS115

**Outcome 1, Output 1.1**

**Topic:** Medicare Australia – Access to Medicare card for under 18 year olds

**Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice:** Written

**SENATOR COONAN asked** on 22/02/2008:

HS113: What steps are in place to provide Medicare services to people under 18 years of age?

HS114: What are 'special needs'?

HS115: Who is an 'approved authority' and what means of authentication are acceptable?

**Answer:**

HS113: A person's age does not impact their ability to receive Medicare services. If a person is under the age of 18 and has paid for a medical service they are considered to be the 'claimant' and as such are entitled to a Medicare benefit for the service. If any person, including those under 18, has had their medical service paid for by another person (eg parent, grandparent, carer or friend) then the person who paid for the service can claim the Medicare benefit.

Teenagers aged 15 and over can request a Medicare card of their own. There are policies in place to cater for children who are younger than 15 and are considered to be in exceptional circumstances (eg a ward of the state or a homeless child) that allow for a card to be issued to them on an individual basis.

Where a person (regardless of age) visits a doctor without their Medicare card the doctor can call the Medicare enquiry line on 132011 and be given the person's card number to assist the doctor when billing the patient.

HS114: While there is no legislative definition for 'special needs' within the *Health Insurance Act 1973*, Medicare Australia has a number of policies in place to assist people who would be considered to have special needs to enrol in the Medicare program or claim a Medicare benefit. These people include the homeless, children in foster care or wards of the state.

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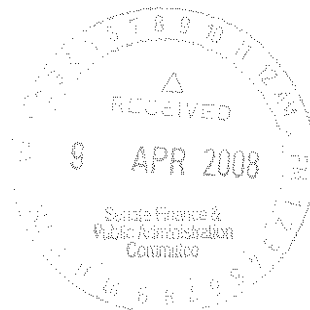
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In addition it is common practice, particularly in remote communities, for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and newborn babies to be enrolled in Medicare under their own Medicare number and card. This process supports access to Medicare benefits in circumstances where the child moves frequently and may be cared for by multiple extended family members or by allowing for storage of the child's Medicare card on the child's medical file in the community health clinic.

HS115: The legislation does not have any concept of an 'approved authority' in relation to providing services to people under 18 years of age, or those with special needs. However, where a person does not have the required documentation to confirm their identity to enable them to enrol in Medicare, Medicare Australia accepts supporting documentation from people in the community. For example, documentation would be accepted from teachers, social workers, Ministers of religion, refuge workers, police officers, representatives from charitable organisations and officers from state welfare departments to establish the identity of a person who is homeless or a child who is in foster care, or a ward of the state.