

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Finance and Administration Portfolio

Department of Human Services and agencies

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2005-2006, 1 November 2005

Question: HS60

Outcome 1, Output Group 1.1

Topic: Medicare Australia – Authority Prescriptions

Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: Written

SENATOR McLUCAS asked on 1/11/2005:

Authority in prescribing a PBS listed drug:

1. Which drugs require a written authority from Medicare Australia?
2. What is the process that the prescribing doctor must adopt to prescribe a "written authority" drug?
3. What does the patient have to do to receive the drug?
4. What is the rationale for "written authority" as opposed to the more regular phone authority?

Answer:

1. The Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) is responsible for recommending to the Minister of Health and Ageing which drugs and medicines should be available as a pharmaceutical benefit and any restrictions that should apply to a particular medicine. Where the restriction 'authority required' is applied by the PBAC, an authority approval needs to be sought from Medicare Australia. An authority approval is also required where a doctor prescribes an increased quantity or repeats of any PBS listed medicine.

In most instances a doctor can obtain authority approval from Medicare Australia by telephoning a 24/7 Freecall service. Over the last financial year 6.3 million Authority prescriptions were approved, with 5.4 million of these being handled by telephone. However in certain circumstances as determined by the PBAC, a doctor must apply for an authority approval in writing to Medicare Australia. This includes, but is not limited to:

- instances where documentation to support application criterion (e.g. test results) must be sent to Medicare Australia with the authority prescription and/or
 - PBS prescribing for high cost, highly restricted medicine including bosentan, etanercept, and infliximab; or
 - prescribing narcotic analgesics (e.g. morphine, oxycodone etc) in higher doses, for treatment between one and three months.
2. To seek a written authority approval, the prescribing doctor must complete an authority prescription form and post it to Medicare Australia along with any required supporting documentation. If approved, Medicare Australia will post the written Authority prescription directly to the patient or back to the doctor, depending on the doctor's indication on the prescription.

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3. Once the approved prescription is received by the patient or patient's agent, the prescription is presented to a pharmacist for medicine to be supplied in the normal manner.
4. The PBAC is the expert committee responsible for recommending to the Minister of Health and Ageing, which drugs and medicinal preparations should be available as a pharmaceutical benefit. The PBAC also recommends any restrictions that should apply to a particular medicine, and where a regular phone authority is not appropriate, the manner in which authority approval should be sought.