

## **QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE**

**ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES HEARINGS: 11 February 2013**

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

**(AE13/0447) PROGRAM – 1.1: Visa and Migration**

Senator Boyce (Written) asked:

At the end of October 2012, then Minister Bowen announced that DIAC would apply a 'net benefit' test to immigrants with a disability or with a health issue. He undertook to conduct consultations on detailed implementation of the reforms with key stakeholders. (a) The minister said the significant cost threshold would rise from July 1 from \$21,000 to \$35,000. Is this on track to happen? (b) Will other changes have to wait until July 1 as well? Have any of the changes from the Migration Committee report, tabled on June 21, 2010, that were accepted by the Government been implemented?

*Answer:*

The Significant Cost Threshold (SCT) was increased from \$21,000 to \$35,000 on 1 July 2012. The increased amount of \$35,000 reflects contemporary expenditure on health care and welfare services. The SCT will be revised annually. The 1 July 2013 increase is on track.

Many changes in response to JSCM recommendations have already been implemented. These include:

- the first increase to the significant Cost Threshold;
- streamlining of the health waiver for offshore humanitarian applicants who failed to meet the health requirement on cost grounds;
- a review of health insurance requirements in line with the JSCM recommendation that the Australian Government introduce a voluntary bond or other scheme for visa applicants to indemnify against, or manage, health care or community costs assessed under the health requirement. The Minister agreed with the Department's recommendation not to modify the current health insurance requirements and impose any additional burdens on visa applicants with a disability; and
- improvements to transparency of decisions:
  - uploaded the Notes for Guidance papers to Legend
  - made improvements to DIAC systems to ensure better recording of and reporting on MOC decisions
  - made improvements to DIAC's website content

- continued to update the Procedures and Advice Manual (PAM) and training program for departmental officers
- made changes to Medical Officer of the Commonwealth (MOC) opinions given to clients
- other improvements to the health processing systems.

Other changes will be implemented when appropriate considering IT, budget and regulation/law rounds.