

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 17 OCTOBER 2011

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(SE11/0184) Program 1.1: Visa and Migration

Senator Cash asked:

Given that 410 and 405 visa holders need to maintain “adequate” health insurance while they are in Australia and the only cover available to them is “Overseas Visitors Health Cover”, does DoHA consider this to be “at least equivalent to Medicare benefits and cover pharmaceuticals?”

Answer:

Those holders of retirement visas (Subclass 410 and 405) who are not eligible for assistance from Medicare are required to maintain adequate health insurance while in Australia. While Medicare eligibility is the responsibility of the Department of Health and Ageing, the definition of adequate health insurance and the assessment of relevant visa requirements is a matter for the Department of Immigration and Citizenship.

A number of private health insurers and general insurers provide health cover for temporary visa holders in Australia. While there are other products available, overseas visitor health cover is the insurance that most Australian insurers market to holders of retirement visas. It should be noted, however, that it is not a requirement that the insurance provider be an Australian insurer.

The health insurance requirement is intended to assist retirement visa holders who do not have access to Medicare to be able to access health care services while in Australia. In doing so, it also helps to minimise the potential impact on the Australian budget of allowing these retirees to live in Australia.

It is not possible to make a generic statement about all overseas visitor health cover products as the benefits available, membership costs and eligibility vary between insurers. Many of the products available provide public and private hospital cover, ambulance cover, cover for visits to the doctor or specialists in private practice, and a range of other health services including dental, optical and physiotherapy. Most overseas visitors' health cover products have limited cover for pharmaceuticals.