

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2016 - 2017, 1 March 2017

Ref No: SQ17-000203

OUTCOME: 2 - Health Access and Support Services

Topic: After Hours Services

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Griff, Stirling

Question:

The number of MBS rebates being claimed for urgent after hours services is reportedly escalating each year and has doubled between 2010 and 2015 (as reported in the SMH: <http://www.smh.com.au/national/health/boom-in-afterhours-gps-raises-concerns-about-medicare-cost-blowout-20160511-gosr95.html>)

- a) What does the department attribute this growth to?
- b) Is this rate of growth considered sustainable?
- c) If not, what measures is the department considering in order to address this?

Answer:

- a) It is difficult to attribute this growth to any one cause. Of the over 180,000 patients who received three or more urgent after-hours services in 12 months between 2014 and 2016, over 10,000 received no standard, in-hours GP care at all. This suggests that some patients are substituting after-hours home visits for routine general practice care. The Department notes that there is a widespread marketing of these services.
- b) The growth rate for these services increased by an average of 25% per year over the last three years (2012-13 to 2015-16). In contrast, the growth rate for all GP services over the same period was 5% per year.
- c) The use of urgent after-hours Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items is being reviewed by the MBS Review Taskforce.