

Finance and Public Administration Reference Committee The Government's administration of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)

Health Consumers NSW (HCNSW) would like to thank the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee for the opportunity to provide input to the Inquiry on the Government's Administration of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

HCNSW is the peak health consumer organisation which provides an independent voice for health consumers to shape policy and services in our state. Incorporated in 2010 it is supported by a Ministerial grant and membership is open to organisations and individuals who support the consumer role in shaping health policy and services. Its members are active in the areas of policy consultation and consumer representation across generic health issues at State, and sometimes Federal level.

The February 2011 decision by Government to defer listing of medicines recommended by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) onto the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) has created great concern amongst many of our members in NSW. Particularly concerned are those representing the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in our communities and those who experience long term chronic illness and disabilities.

HCNSW believes that the current system of approvals has served the Australian health community well. It is an efficient and cost effective mechanism which maintains a balance between the health needs of Australians and costs to taxpayers. The decisions made by Cabinet to arbitrarily defer listing of some drugs and not others, politicises what has been a process of relative integrity and transparency for over 50 years. It might also result in opportunities for pharmaceutical companies to exert pressure on Government.

HCNSW has joined with the Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) in supporting them in their campaign to oppose those changes, and supports them in their submission which summarises the key concerns as:

- 1 *Potential delays in access to essential medicines*
- 2 *Lack of transparency in the new process*
- 3 *Politicising of PBS listing process*
- 4 *Lack of consideration of other healthcare costs likely to arise as a result of consumers not having access to essential medicines*

(Ref: CHF submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee Inquiry into the Government's administration of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme – July 2011)

We support the arguments which address the specific Terms of Reference in the submissions by the Consumers Health Forum Australia, ACOSS, the Chronic illness Alliance and Cancer Voices NSW, and refer the Inquiry to these.

Thank you once again for this opportunity to express our concerns, and we look forward to hearing the Senate Committee's recommendations to Government.

Yours sincerely

Betty Johnson AO

Sally Crossing AM

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