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.