

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Budget Estimates Spill-over June 2017
Communications Portfolio
Department of Communications and the Arts

Question No: 284

Program 1.1

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Topic: Non-monitored medical alarms – Department's involvement date

Senator O'Neill, Deborah asked:

Senator O'NEILL: The department was not always involved, was it?

Senator Fifield: The request was for the department and NBN Co to work together on the issue. I asked because of an issue that I think everyone around the table is aware of. The Medical Alarm Register, as you know, forms the basis of the information for NBN Co to be aware of both people who have monitored alarms and those who have non-monitored alarms, so that NBN Co can provide advice to them. The medical alarm subsidy scheme, as designed by NBN Co, applies to monitored medical alarms. The basis for NBN Co's decision is that there was an Australian standard that relates to that, but as I have indicated here before, I have asked for work to be done to look at the issue of the non-monitored alarms.

Senator O'NEILL: So there is an indication of a change from previously. When did you make this request of the department? As I recall from evidence previously it was exclusively in the domain of NBN Co for a period of time.

Senator Fifield: I will check, but typically with issues of this nature the department has a skill set, NBN Co has a skill set and they work cooperatively together. We can take on notice when the formal request, if you like, went forward.

Senator O'NEILL: Dr Smith, you cannot advise me of that this evening?

Dr Smith: Not of the exact date. I can check with my colleagues as to whether we would have that information on hand and get back to you.

Answer:

The Department has been monitoring the transition of medical alarms to the National Broadband Network on an ongoing basis for several years as part of broader migration review processes.

Late last year the Minister asked the Department to provide advice on considerations and options including support measures for users of non-monitored medical alarm and auto-dial devices. The Department provided preliminary advice to the Minister on these matters in late December 2016. In consultation with nbn, the Department has been providing further advice on an ongoing basis, in response to additional requests from the Minister since that time.