

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

BUDGET ESTIMATES HEARING: 21-22 MAY 2012

IMMIGRATION AND CITIZENSHIP PORTFOLIO

(BE12/0237) Program 1.1: Visa and Migration

Senator Boyce asked:

Budget Paper No. 2 Immigration and Citizenship, Migration Health Requirements item reads: "The Government will reform the health criteria that applicants must meet to obtain an Australian visa, at a cost of \$4.6 million over four years. Under current arrangements, visa applicants are refused entry to Australia where the estimated costs of treating a pre-existing health condition are above the Significant Cost Threshold set at \$21,000. The reform will increase the Significant Cost Threshold from \$21,000 to \$35,000 to better reflect current health costs, and remove the requirement for offshore Humanitarian Visa applicants to meet the Significant Cost Threshold criteria. This reform will commence on 1 July 2012. These reforms are in response to the report of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration on the Migration Treatment of Disability: Enabling Australia." In this regard FaHCSIA received the following budgetary allocations \$100,000 in 2012/13 and 2013/14, rising to \$200,000 the next and \$400,000 in last year of forward estimate. The Minister for Immigration and Citizenship said this, "However, the change does not alter policies relating to health conditions that are a public health risk, or would require health care or community services that would prejudice the access of Australian residents." What work has the Department undertaken to provide increased transparency to the MOC assessment of costs and community services access?

Answer:

The Department has made many changes to systems and client information designed to improve transparency of the health assessment process.

All endorsed Notes for Guidance (used by Medical Officers of the Commonwealth to assist with identifying the required services and the likely cost of those) have been uploaded to LEGENDcom. LEGENDcom is an electronic database of migration legislation and policy documents available to the public on a subscription basis. The Department is committed to ensuring that new or revised papers are uploaded as soon as practicable.

In 2011, the Department revised the information available to applicants on the internet. New health requirement web pages were published on 11 November 2011. More detailed information concerning the costing process was included in these pages.

The Department has also made significant system changes to allow Medical Officers of the Commonwealth to record information about a health case in a more structured way. This includes a requirement to record a detailed breakdown of services required and costs associated with these.

When clients are found not to meet the health requirement, they are provided with information including the medical opinion. Recently, the Department has revised this information to include further details about the identified condition and services required. A clearer explanation of the regulations is also provided.