

HEALTH CONSUMERS' COUNCIL (WA) INC

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees

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Inquiry into the Government's administration of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

The Health Consumers' Council (WA) is an independent community based organisation, representing the consumers' 'voice' in health policy, planning, research and service delivery. The Council advocates on behalf of consumers to government, doctors, other health professionals, hospitals and the wider health system. Funded by the Department of Health WA, the Council provides a state wide service. To find out more you can check our website www.hconc.org.au

The Health Consumers' Council WA welcomes the opportunity to provide a brief submission to the Inquiry. Comments were gained from consumers through formal and informal methods.

General Comments

Consumers are deeply concerned at the change to medicines approval to be listed on the PBS announced in February 2011. While people recognise the burgeoning cost of healthcare and the sustainability of the Australian health system and the responsibility of government, parliament and cabinet to guide and support the financial viability of the system this decision appears at best ill-considered and at worst meant spirited.

Particular points consumers made:

1. The role of PBS and PBAC has been internationally recognised as the one that effectively controls costs as well as delivering high quality medicines on prescription to patients
2. With this decision on 25 February 2011 grave concern was expressed by consumers regarding restricted access to subsidised medicines for sick and vulnerable people access that may be influenced by political expediency rather than evidence based medicine.
3. Consumers noted that medicines subsidised by PBS enable people to continue to participate in employment and contribute to the economy.

4. An unintended consequence of this decision may be a return to the 'disease competition' of previous years where competitive health lobbying across patient groups sees the approval of medicines as a result of the most effective use of the media rather than the rigorous considered view of PBAC.
5. Consumers report that the Cabinet decision lacks transparency and explanation, ironically features that are central to the work of PBAC.
6. Consumers report another unintended consequence may see sick people having to seek other more expensive treatments or having to go to hospital for care.
7. Through our Aboriginal Consumer Participation Programme, Aboriginal consumers report the barrier that cost is to many medicines, and their reliance on PBS for subsidised medicines. Given the commitment by the Australian Government to 'Close the Gap' in Aboriginal life expectancy, any move that increases inequities in access to affordable healthcare for disadvantaged Aboriginal people would be indefensible.

Michele Kosky
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR