

Senate Community Affairs References Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Availability and accessibility of diagnostic imaging equipment around Australia

Wednesday 13 December 2017

Question no: 1

Type of Question: Hansard Page 58-59, 13 December 2017

Senator: Senator Watt

Question:

Senator WATT: What date did he request that that review—whether it be capital 'R' or lower case 'r'—be conducted? When did he ask that that review be conducted?

Mr Weiss: I'd have to check the exact date, but my memory of it was probably sometime during September.

Senator WATT: Could you just come back to us on that date?

Mr Weiss: Yes, sure.

Answer:

30 August 2017.

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Question no: 2

Type of Question: Hansard Page 60, 13 December 2017

Senator: Senator Watt

Question:

Senator WATT: In just getting back to this data point, to the extent that unmet demand would be a factor in deciding where new licences might be allocated, really you have nothing more detailed than PHN-level data to make those decisions on?

Mr Weiss: Not that I'm aware. We may, somewhere in the organisation, have access to better information than that, but not that we've come across so far.

Senator WATT: Could you just take on notice if there is anything that you've got access to. I'm quite interested in getting a sense of where the real needs are. While you're taking things on notice, I think you mentioned that there's a range of unlicensed machines out there. If you have any information about where they are, could you, please, provide that on notice, as well?

Mr Weiss: We can. As I said, it will be very partial information based on the scraps of information that you pick up. Like I said, there will be nothing systematic about it, but we can provide you with what we've got.

Answer:

Data

Through Medicare enrolment and claims processing systems maintained by the Department of Human Services, together with information about where Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines are located, data are collected that identify the patient's address and where they had the MRI service. These data are provided regularly to the Department of Health.

These data can be analysed for most geographic regions, for example, the states and territories, Primary Health Networks, Australian Bureau of Statistics statistical areas and remoteness area classifications.

List of Requests for Medicare Eligibility

There is no requirement under the practice registration (Location Specific Practice Number – LSPN) provisions of the *Health Insurance Act 1973* for practices to register ineligible MRI equipment. However, some practices have voluntarily registered the equipment, and the locations and number of these according to the LSPN register as at 15 December 2017 are shown at Attachment A.

Locations of ineligible MRI machines as recorded on the Location Specific Practice Number Register at 15 December 2017

Location	State	Number of ineligible machines
Adelaide	SA	2
Ashford	SA	1
Ashgrove	QLD	1
Ballarat	VIC	1
Bankstown	NSW	1
Barangaroo	NSW	1
Bella Vista	NSW	1
Berwick	VIC	2
Boronia	VIC	1
Buderim	QLD	1
Bunbury	WA	1
Burwood East	VIC	1
Cairns	QLD	1
Caloundra	QLD	1
Camperdown	NSW	1
Carindale	QLD	1
Clayfield	QLD	1
Clayton	VIC	1
Coopers Plains	QLD	1
Dandenong	VIC	1
Douglas	QLD	1
Dubbo	NSW	1
East Melbourne	VIC	1
Echuca	VIC	1
Frankston	VIC	1
Frenchs Forest	NSW	1
Garran	ACT	2
Gateshead	NSW	1
Geelong	VIC	1
Gladstone	QLD	2
Gosford	NSW	1
Greenslopes	QLD	1
Gympie	QLD	2
Heidelberg	VIC	1
Herston	QLD	3
Highton	VIC	2
Hobart	TAS	1
Hornsby	NSW	1
Hyde Park	QLD	1
Ipswich	QLD	1
Joondalup	WA	1
Langwarrin	VIC	1
Launceston	TAS	1

Lenah Valley	TAS	1
Liverpool	NSW	1
Mackay	QLD	1
Madeley	WA	1
Melton	VIC	1
Mentone	VIC	1
Merewether	NSW	1
Millner	NT	1
Mornington	VIC	1
Morphett Vale	SA	1
Mount Barker	SA	1
Murdoch	WA	1
Narellan	NSW	1
Nedlands	WA	2
North Sydney	NSW	1
Orange	NSW	1
Parap	NT	1
Parkville	VIC	2
Parkwood	QLD	1
Prahran	VIC	1
Richmond	VIC	1
Sale	VIC	1
Shellharbour	NSW	1
Shepparton	VIC	1
South Brisbane	QLD	3
South Hedland	WA	1
Springfield	QLD	1
Stepney	SA	1
Subiaco	WA	1
Success	WA	1
Sunbury	VIC	1
Sydney	NSW	1
Toowoomba City	QLD	1
Urraween	QLD	1
Warragul	VIC	1
Waurm Ponds	VIC	1
Westmead	NSW	1
Windsor	QLD	1
Woolloongabba	QLD	2
Wynnum	QLD	1
Total		96

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Question no: 3

Type of Question: Hansard Page 60, 13 December 2017

Senator: Senator Watt

Question:

Senator WATT: Am I right in saying that 238 of those licences were granted by the last federal Labor governments?

Mr Weiss: I can't confirm that number for you. I know that the last major expansion was in 2012. I would need to check the exact numbers.

Answer:

Resulting from the 2012 Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) expansion round, Medicare eligibility was granted as follows:

Year	Number of machines
2012	202
2013	13
2014	13
Total	228

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Question no: 4

Type of Question: Hansard Page 61, 13 December 2017

Senator: Senator Watt

Question:

Senator WATT: How many new licences have been granted since the Abbott government was elected in 2013?

Mr Weiss: I will need to check. If I had to give you a number right now, the number would be four—

Senator WATT: That's my understanding as well.

Mr Weiss: but I wouldn't mind—if I could just check that number. The first number that appears in my head when you ask that is four.

Answer:

An additional four machines, three with full Medicare-eligibility for Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) (Mount Gambier, Epworth Hospital Richmond, Maroondah Hospital), and one upgraded from partial to full Medicare-eligibility for MRI (Frankston Hospital).

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Question no: 5

Type of Question: Hansard Page 61, 13 December 2017

Senator: Senator Watt

Question:

Senator WATT: Was there any departmental advice provided to government in relation to those four licences that were granted by government discretion?

Mr Weiss: I would need to take that on notice. I don't know.

Senator WATT: Could you take that on notice. I'm particularly interested in whether there was advice given about the need in those four locations, but more generally I'd be interested to know whether there was any advice provided about the granting of those four licences by discretion.

Mr Weiss: Yes, sure.

Answer:

The Department of Health provided advice to the respective Minister in relation to two of these discretionary approvals, Mount Gambier (20 March 2015) and Epworth Hospital Richmond (27 August 2015).

Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) licences granted to Frankston and Maroondah public hospitals were both election commitments.

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Question no: 6

Type of Question: Hansard Page 64, 13 December 2017

Senator: Senator Watt

Question:

Senator WATT: Your submission notes that two positive MSAC recommendations are for diagnostic imaging services are in the process of implementation. Both were recommended in April, which is about eight months ago. Is there any reason for the delay, and when can we expect them to be listed?

Mr Weiss: What page are you referring there to, Senator?

Senator WATT: I might have to dig that out myself.

Mr Weiss: I found it: page 25. I'll need to take that on notice; I don't know where they're up to in the listing process.

Answer:

The two Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) applications (1479R – Substitution of Ga-68-DOTA peptide PET/CT scanning (in lieu of Octreotide) for patients with neuroendocrine gastroenteropancreatic tumours (GEP-NETs) and 1432 – Cardiac Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) – Cardiomyopathy – Part B) were both recommended for funding by MSAC.

The Australian Government announced funding for these services in the 2017-18 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO). It is anticipated that they will be implemented by 1 May 2018, subject to regulatory changes.

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Question no: 7

Type of Question: Hansard Page 64, 13 December 2017

Senator: Senator Siewert

Question:

CHAIR: We've had a number of points made to the committee around the transferring of some of the licences. Could you confirm that there is a formal process for when a licence is transferred?

Ms Street: Yes, there is a formal practice for the transfer of licences.

CHAIR: And how many have been transferred?

Ms Street: I think that's in our submission. I'll just find the relevant information. On page 28 of the submission we talk about permanent transfers, and in 2016-17—

CHAIR: That table? Yes. That's just in 2016-17?

Ms Street: Yes, that's right.

CHAIR: Have we got it for the length of time since they've been licensed, since this process has been operating?

Ms Street: We don't have it at our fingertips. We can look into what we've got. Because they're considered as they come in, we haven't necessarily collated them on an annual basis. We did for the purposes of this submission look at the 2016-17 numbers, but we can see what we can dig up.

Answer:

The number of approved Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) transfers from 2013 is provided in the table below:

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Total
Type of transfer						
Permanent	13	19	28	32	23	115
Temporary	16	12	20	17	15	80
Total	29	31	48	49	38	195

Notes:

1. Permanent transfer rejected in 2017 not included in count.
2. Information about transfers processed prior to 2013 is not readily available. Given that most Medicare eligibility for MRI was issued in 2012, it is expected that the number of transfers (not relating to equipment upgrades) would be very small.

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Question no: 8

Type of Question: Hansard Page 64, 13 December 2017

Senator: Senator Siewert

Question:

CHAIR: We've had evidence, both in Perth and here, that people can't receive two services in one day, so the criticism we've heard is that people, particularly from rural and regional areas, are told to wait for at least another day, if not longer, to receive follow-up service.

Mr Weiss: Okay.

Ms Street: It's being considered as part of the MBS review; I think it's come up in the diagnostic imaging clinical committee space.

CHAIR: Do you know what the background for that is?

Ms Street: I would have to take that on notice, the history behind those limitations.

Answer:

The Department of Health understands that the Chair was asking in context of evidence provided by Ms Spence of the Breast Cancer Network Australia regarding diagnostic ultrasound followed by an ultrasound guided core biopsy.

There are several rules which apply to the payment of Medicare benefits when multiple diagnostic imaging services are provided. These rules are long-standing and were developed in conjunction with the diagnostic imaging profession. The rules reflect efficiencies to the provider when multiple services are provided to a patient at the same attendance or on the same day.

In relation to ultrasound, Medicare benefits are generally only payable for one ultrasound examination performed within a three hour period on the same day.

As noted in the evidence given by Ms Street of the Department, the multiple services rules are being considered by the Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce.