

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2011-2012, 15 February 2012

Question: E12-149

OUTCOME 6: Rural Health

Topic: AFTER HOURS CARE IN RURAL AREAS

Written Question on Notice

Senator Boyce asked:

Please provide details of the following:

What guarantees does the Government have in place to ensure that practices and doctors who currently provide after hours care in rural areas, often under onerous on call ratios, will be fully compensated for the removal of these after hours incentives and loadings?

Answer:

Access to after hours Medicare Benefits Schedule items will not change as part of the after hours primary health care reforms.

There is no guarantee that every practice currently receiving a Practice Incentive Program after hours incentive will continue to be funded to the same level by a Medicare Local. However, where a practice is currently providing good access to after hours services, it is expected that those practices will continue to be funded to provide those services, and indeed may receive additional funding for expanded services.

Medicare Locals are required to support health professionals in the arrangement and/or provision of after hours care for patients and will work with local providers, including local doctors, to assist them in the continued provision of after hours services to the community. The Government will put in place effective reporting and performance mechanisms to ensure that this occurs.