

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016, 10 February 2016

Ref No: SQ16-000034

OUTCOME: 2 - Access to Pharmaceutical Services

Topic: Accessing Closing the Gap Medicines

Type of Question: Hansard Page 109, 10 February 2016

Senator: Siewert, Rachel

Question:

Could you please clarify that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to access the 17 Over The Counter (OTC) medicines which were delisted from general availability from the PBS on 1 January 2016, under either the Close the Gap Measure or otherwise under the PBS?

Answer:

17 low-cost over the counter (OTC) products were delisted from general availability on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from 1 January 2016, following recommendations by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC). The PBAC recommended that where OTC medicines were being removed from general availability, PBS subsidies should continue for some medicines for certain populations, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients.

In some cases, despite the availability of PBS subsidies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, the sponsor elected to entirely delist medicines from the PBS. Four of the 17 medicines are no longer available on the PBS: aluminium hydroxide with magnesium trisilicate and magnesium hydroxide (Gastrogel®); chloramphenicol (Chlorsig®); ferrous fumarate (Ferro-tab®); and ferrous fumarate with folic acid (Ferro-f-tab®).

The sponsors of these medicines made a commercial decision to delist these products from the PBS entirely, although the PBAC recommended their retention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients. Companies cannot be compelled to maintain products on the PBS.

It should be noted that consumers can continue to buy these medicines over the counter, without a prescription. There are also a wide range of iron and folic acid supplements marketed in Australia.

Further, alternate products such as iron (as polymaltose) 100 mg/2 mL injection remains listed on the PBS, as does ferrous sulfate 30 mg/mL (equivalent to 6 mg/mL elemental iron) oral liquid, on an unrestricted basis. Folic acid 5 mg tablets and folic acid 500 microgram tablets also continue to be available through the PBS in a quantity of 200 units — these listings are restricted to patients identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.