

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2016 - 2017, 1 March 2017

Ref No: SQ17-000318

OUTCOME: 5 - Regulation, Safety and Protection

Topic: Codeine

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Watt, Murray

Question:

- a) Can you please outline what public awareness campaigns are being developed to support the scheduling change of codeine – including specific details of how the campaigns will reach consumers?
- b) What is the timeline for this?
- c) How much money has been allocated to developing materials to educate consumers about the change?
- d) What work is being undertaken to engage with pharmacists about this issue?
- e) What work is being undertaken to engage with GPs about the change?
- f) How many additional GP visits are anticipated because of the change – and what will this cost?
- g) Are there any plans to offset this cost with cuts in the health portfolio?"

Answers:

a) to e)

The Department of Health, through the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), has developed a communication and engagement strategy for informing and educating the public, pharmacists and general practitioners of the changes to the availability of codeine-containing medicines that will take effect from 1 February 2018.

The Nationally Coordinated Codeine Implementation Working Group (NCCIWG) has been established comprising representatives from state and territory health departments and peak professional bodies representing consumers, pharmacists and medical professionals to assist with implementation of the strategy. A key focus for NCCIWG is to ensure that the information provided to consumers, pharmacists and GP's is consistent and relevant to their needs.

As an example the Department is working with the Guild to develop information to support community pharmacists fulfil their role in helping to ensure that Australians are well informed on the changes in accessing codeine-containing medicines and where to get support.

A new Codeine Information Hub has also been established on the TGA website. This site contains all the relevant information about the scheduling decision, safety reports, the consumer factsheet and links to further advice, including pain management advice provided by NPS MedicineWise. This site will be updated as further communications are rolled out between now and February 2018. The site can be found at: www.tga.gov.au/community-qa/codeine-containing-medicines-harms-and-changes-patient-access

f) and g)

The TGA recognises that some individuals will have to consult with their GP to find alternate treatment options to manage any chronic pain that they may be experiencing. It is considered that most people will be able to manage their acute pain in consultation with their pharmacist, with other safe and effective alternate non-codeine based medicines that are available without a prescription. This will result in a reduction in out of pocket costs with no change in health status.

KPMG modelling concluded that the net economic benefit to society resulting from the change in codeine scheduling is estimated to be \$5.2 billion over 10 years. This is a consequence of:

- prevention of accidental deaths from accidental or deliberative codeine overdose;
- improved quality of life years (QALY), resulting from adoption, more effective treatment options for moderate pain;
- net financial savings to consumers through lower cost OTC medicine alternatives;
- prevention of adverse events related to unintentional overdose of paracetamol or ibuprofen (which is combined with codeine in many products; and reduced dependence and reduced risk of dependency).

Importantly, even when the assumptions for costs were maximised and those for benefits were minimised, the estimated net economic benefit to society was still found to remain positive.