

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018, 30 May 2017

Ref No: SQ17-000613

OUTCOME: 2 - Health Access and Support Services

Topic: Medicare rebate freeze

Type of Question: Hansard Page 33, 30 May 2017

Senator: O'Neill, Deborah

Question:

Senator O'NEILL: For each of these, can you confirm that they are both part of the government's rebate freeze? Were you able to hear my question?

Mr Bowles: We can take it on notice, because we do not have that here.

Senator O'NEILL: It has been in the media that mental health services, in terms of access to GP rebate for the mental health plan and access to psychologists, are subject to a freeze until 2020.

Mr Bowles: You are conflating a range of issues now, Senator, and—

Senator O'NEILL: Why don't you clean it up for me and tell me the facts?

Mr Bowles: Excuse me, Senator; I was speaking.

Senator STERLE: How dare you—

CHAIR: Order!

Senator O'NEILL: I was listening for an answer and I was not getting one, Mr Bowles.

CHAIR: Furthermore, the secretary said that he would take it on notice, from memory.

Mr Bowles: I did, Chair. I will take it on notice. It was in an outcome raised yesterday. We did go through this in some detail yesterday.

Senator O'NEILL: Chair, I want to ask this question again. Mr Bowles has just indicated he went through it in some detail yesterday, so I cannot understand why he would not have the detail today. Also, this is a matter of a document in the public place.

CHAIR: Just so that we are clear, Senator O'Neill, I understand that the secretary took on notice your first question and pointed out also that you were conflating some issues and was going through the detail on that.

Senator O'NEILL: I have invited him to give me the facts, so I will ask my question again: in relation to the Medicare rebate freeze, specifically with regard to mental health services delivered by psychologists under Better Access, and the GP rebate for mental health plan, for each of those, can you confirm that they are both a part of the government's rebate freeze?

Mr Bowles: As I said before, I will take that on notice. We went through that outcome yesterday in some detail—not all with me, but with the relevant people in that particular outcome. I can take your question on notice.

Answer:

- Mental health service items on the Medicare Benefits Schedule will be indexed from:
 - 1 July 2018 for mental health services as part of a standard GP consultation;
 - 1 July 2018 for a mental health service from a consultant psychiatrist;
 - 1 July 2019 for a mental health service from an allied health professional, such as a psychologist, occupational therapist or social worker; and
 - 1 July 2020 for a GP service to establish or review a mental health treatment plan or a GP mental health consultation.
- Mental health patients will also benefit from the increased GP bulk-billing incentive from 1 July 2017, which encourages GPs to bulk-bill non-referred attendances.