

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018, 29 & 30 May 2017

Ref No: SQ17-000795

OUTCOME: 2 - Health Access and Support Services

Topic: Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Watt, Murray

Question:

- a) What strategies does the Department have in place to assist people with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis? Is the Department undertaking any work on strategies to support people with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis?
- b) Is the Government aware of the trial underway in Norway on the effectiveness of the drug rituximab to treat Myalgic Encephalomyelitis? Is the Government considering funding a similar controlled trial?
- c) Is there any work underway in relation to updating the clinical guidelines to assist GPs to accurately diagnose Myalgic Encephalomyelitis?

Answer:

- a) There is no specific Government program for Myalgic Encephalomyelitis/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS). Support for ME is primarily addressed through ongoing universal health programs, including rebated services through Medicare and subsidised medicines through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Funding is also provided to state and territory governments to ensure access to health care in public hospitals nationally.

The Department of Health is not currently undertaking strategy work in relation to ME. The Department interacts with Emerge Australia, as the national peak organisation for ME, and is advised by the organisation on key matters for consideration regarding ME.

- b) The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is aware of the work done using rituximab in association with ME/CFS. It is understood that this line of investigation is still being developed further.

The Norwegian rituximab trial results are expected to be published in 2018.

Researchers can apply to NHMRC's competitive schemes for research funding related to all areas of ME/CFS.

- c) The Royal Australasian College of Physicians' — *Chronic fatigue syndrome clinical practice guidelines for general practitioners* (2002) have not been updated and the NHMRC has not been advised of any plans to do so.

NHMRC officers have met with Emerge Australia (2013) and the ME/CFS Action Group (2017) to discuss the process for developing guidelines.