

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-2011, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-263

OUTCOME 3: Access to Medical Services

Topic: ARTHRITIS

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

- a) Large numbers of people are complaining about the removal of this procedure from the MBS schedule, does the government recognise that it made a mistake in doing so?
- b) Is it intended that the procedure will be re-instated to the MBS schedule?

Answer:

- a) As per the response from Mr Bartlett (Hansard CA79) "We are working with the rheumatologists. Certainly the feedback I have had is that they are satisfied with the process. They would like the item there, but they understand the process we are working through and they are satisfied with it. I spoke with the arthritis association about a week ago. Again, they understand the process that we are working through and the reasons for it. I think that both groups would like the item to be there, but they understand the need for us to establish an evidence base and assess it against that."
- b) As per the response from Mr Bartlett (Hansard CA78) "It has not been reinstated. We are going through a somewhat more extended process of working through it with rheumatologists than I have indicated at previous estimates. We hoped it would be a swift process. It has been a somewhat extended one, as I indicated. This is a new process. We are in effect trying to gather together the evidence that supports the listing of this item on the MBS. We have worked with rheumatologists. We have hired an independent consultant who has got that evidence together. A draft protocol about the way in which it will be reviewed is being finalised at the moment. That will be made available for public consultation. We will then work through, evaluate the evidence and provide a recommendation to the minister. The process has become clearer over the last few months as we have worked through it. I will not pretend that it has been the quickest exercise in the world. We have had to develop the process as we have gone. I believe that we now have a very robust exercise to examine the evidence. I think that it will lead to a good outcome and certainly a good understanding of the benefits that come from joint injections with rheumatologists."