

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-11, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-358

OUTCOME 5: Primary Care

Topic: PRACTICE NURSES IN GENERAL PRACTICE

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

According to media reports (Australian, 7 October 2010), the change was not recommended by the Primary Health Care Advisory Council.

- a) Was the decision to abolish Medicare Rebates for treatments by practice nurses based on improving primary healthcare delivery or budgetary concerns?
- b) What advice led to the decision to move away from the current proven model for practice nurses?

Answer:

- a) The decision to remove a number of the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) practice nurse items was based on improving primary healthcare delivery. This new arrangement will invest an additional \$390.3 million over four years and redirect current funding for practice nurses from the Practice Incentive Program practice nurse incentive and the MBS practice nurse items.
- b) The National Primary Health Care Strategy was informed by extensive health reform consultations undertaken by the Department including submissions received through the consultation process. A number of submissions commented on how the current funding arrangements impact on practice nurses' ability to operate at their full capacity and the task oriented and limited 'for and on behalf of' funding of the MBS items.

The Strategy recognises that the Practice Nurse Incentive Program represents a sustainable financing and system performance arrangement and is an investment in Australia's health workforce to deliver best care to patients.