

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2016 - 2017, 19 October 2016

Ref No: SQ16-000472

OUTCOME: 4 - Individual Health Benefits

Topic: Excessive Surgeons' Fees - Out-of-Pocket

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Griff, Stirling

Question:

Does the Department have a threshold for determining what it considers to be excessive out-of-pocket charge for patients? If so, what proportion of surgeons and other medical proceduralists have been found to have exceeded that threshold through any complaints mechanism or through any auditing processes or other forms of oversight?

Answer:

The Department does not make judgements about what constitutes excessive fee charging, this is a matter for the medical profession. Some professional bodies, for example, the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, have a publically available position on excessive fee charging.

Under current policies consumers who have out-of-pocket expenses are assisted through a number of Medicare safety nets. The most significant is the extended Medicare safety net (EMSN) which provides an increase in benefits once an annual threshold of out-of-pocket costs for Medicare funded out-of-hospital services has been reached.

Once the relevant threshold has been met, Medicare will pay for 80 per cent of any further out-of-pocket costs for out-of-hospital Medicare funded services for the remainder of the calendar year. There are two thresholds for EMSN eligibility: A concessional threshold for people with a concession card, and for families who qualify for Family Tax Benefit Part (A); and a general (or upper) threshold for all other singles and families. The concessional threshold in 2016 is \$647.90 and the general threshold is \$2,030.