

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Answers to Senate Estimates Questions on Notice
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearings November 2016
Communications Portfolio
NBN Co Limited

Question No: 169

NBN Co Limited

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Topic: Non-monitored alarms – subsidy scheme

Senator Dastyari, Sam asked:

Senator DASTYARI: And the line you have drawn is the standard AS 4607?

Mr Morrow: The team has the details on that. I am not sure that that would be a correct statement, so we are happy to check, if that is what you would like.

Senator URQUHART: Sorry. Can I just ask one thing? Mr Rue, you indicated that there was information on the website. Is that about the Medical Alarm Register or the alarm subsidy scheme?

Mr Morrow: The register.

Senator URQUHART: It is just that?

Mr Rue: The registry.

Senator URQUHART: So there is nothing about the subsidy on the—

Mr Morrow: Correct.

Senator URQUHART: Yes—I could not find anything.

Senator DASTYARI: On the standard, Mr Morrow—and, again, I am not expecting you to be an expert on Australian standards—AS 4607 was the standard. It has not been updated since 1999. That was the last time that standard was updated, which was 17 or so years ago now. That was well before reliable smart technology was introduced into non-monitored alarms. My understanding of your scheme is it does not extend to non-monitored alarms.

Mr Morrow: Again, I am not certain whether or not it is that particular document you are quoting that defines what we do and do not do in terms of offering the subsidy. I am happy to have that looked into, if you would like. But, again, as I said before—

Answer:

In relation to which fixed line, monitored medical alarms are eligible for the Medical Alarm Subsidy Scheme (MASS), key criteria include:

- The existing alarm to be replaced must be compliant with the Australian Standard AS4607-1999 and monitored by an active AS4607-1999-compliant monitoring subscription. AS4607-1999 requires the alarm to work for 40 hours in a power outage.
- The existing alarm to be replaced must have been in use at the commencement date of the scheme, and remain in use on the date it is due to be replaced.
- The end user of the alarm must be living within the forecast nbn fixed-line footprint and subject to mandatory disconnection of the copper-based standard telephone service (STS) used for the alarm to dial out.

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Other criteria are predominantly administrative controls to ensure that scheme funds are accessed by monitored medical alarm providers for the benefit of actual users. Additionally, the criteria exclude end users already eligible for an alarm replacement through any other government funding scheme, and/or end users who already have an alarm that has a secondary communication path that can be used if a fixed line is not available.

The key reason the Medical Alarm Subsidy Scheme is limited to professionally monitored medical alarms compliant with AS4607-1999 is that the scheme addresses specific technical and logistical challenges that are particular to the movement of such alarms from one connection type to another (e.g. copper landline to phone service over nbn). These challenges include:

- modification of telephone socket wiring in customer premises,
- tight coordination needed between multiple commercially-unrelated parties involved in the provision of cabling services, monitored medical alarm hardware, monitoring services, phone services and telecommunications infrastructure, and
- potential interoperability variability with different phone services provided over the nbn network due to the rapid bursts of tones transmitted and received by monitored medical alarms.

The Scheme was not designed solely to address the power outage resilience characteristics of the nbn network, and the technical and logistical migration challenges above do not apply to alarms and autodiallers that do not meet the Australian Standard AS4607.