

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: 171

NBN Co Limited

Hansard Ref: Pages 24-25, 25/11/2016

Topic: Medical alarm subsidy Scheme – types

Senator Dastyari, Sam asked:

Senator DASTYARI: I think this is above politics here. I am sure there are many different types, but there seems to be two main types of technology. One type of technology is eligible for the subsidy scheme as it has currently been created. One type of technology is not. I am generalising here when I say that the nature of the two types of technology appears to be that the non-monitored type tends to be the cheaper of the two options. The anecdotal evidence is that perhaps that is the type that is used by those on lower incomes who are struggling, the type of people—and, again, I am making some broad assumptions here—who would be more in need of the assistance of a subsidy than others. Minister, on 13 October 2016 you were asked questions about this on a radio interview on FIVEaa in Adelaide with Mr Leon Byner and, at that point in time, you had a discussion with him about this. You have given evidence that you have also been aware of this as an ongoing issue. It seems that the evidence is that this is a subsidy scheme that has been developed by NBN Co in consultation with the department using government standards or guided by government standards.

Senator Fifield: No. The Australian standards are not set by the department of communications. Australian standards are something that apply across a range of portfolios. In fact, I am not even sure that Standards Australia—and I stand to be corrected—is a government body. There are various standard-setting bodies—

Senator DASTYARI: That was not where I was going with the question.

Senator Fifield: so the government has not set the standard. NBN, across a range of internal NBN policies, consults with stakeholders, and the department of communications, obviously, is a stakeholder.

Senator DASTYARI: Minister, have you called on or asked the NBN Co—and, again, I do not know where your powers do you do not lie on this—to extend the subsidy scheme to include non-monitored alarms?

Senator Fifield: I have not asked NBN to do that. I have asked for information to better inform myself about how the scheme will operate. It is something I continue to seek advice on. In relation to some of the issues you have raised about the profiles of people who use different sorts of technologies, as I say, it is something that continues to be raised with me. It is something that I seek advice on. We are happy to come back to the committee with further information that addresses some of the questions you have raised.

Answer:

Please see responses to QoNs 166-170, which provide further information that addresses the questions raised by Senator Dastyari.