

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee**

**ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**HEALTH PORTFOLIO**

**Additional Estimates 2015 - 2016, 12 February 2016**

**Ref No:** SQ16-000037

**OUTCOME:** 2 - Access to Pharmaceutical Services

**Topic:** Accessing Closing the Gap medicines

**Type of Question:** Hansard Page 50, 12 February 2016

**Senator:** Siewert, Rachel

**Question:**

- a) Is the Department aware that four medicines normally available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been removed from the PBS by the manufacturers?
- b) If so, what action is being taken?
- c) Is the Department monitoring the impact of the decisions?
- d) Is there work being done with the manufacturers to resume the supply?
- e) If not, what is going to happen?
- f) Are there arrangements for informing the computerised medical record software companies of changes so that software is up-to-date with the availability of particular brands of medicines for the right patients on the PBS?

**Answer:**

a) to e)  
17 low-cost over the counter (OTC) products were delisted from general availability on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from 1 January 2016, following recommendations by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC). The PBAC recommended that where OTC medicines were being removed from general availability, PBS subsidies should continue for some medicines for certain populations, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients.

In some cases, despite the availability of PBS subsidies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, the sponsor elected to entirely delist medicines from the PBS. Four medicines are no longer available on the PBS: aluminium hydroxide with magnesium trisilicate and magnesium hydroxide (Gastrogel®); chloramphenicol (Chlorsig®); ferrous fumarate (Ferro-tab®); and ferrous fumarate with folic acid (Ferro-f-tab®).

The sponsors of these medicines made a commercial decision to delist these products from the PBS entirely, although the PBAC recommended their retention for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients. Companies cannot be compelled to maintain products on the PBS.

It should be noted that consumers can continue to buy these medicines OTC, without a prescription. There are also a wide range of iron and folic acid supplements marketed in Australia.

Further, alternate products such as iron (as polymaltose) 100 mg/2 mL injection remains listed on the PBS, as does ferrous sulfate 30 mg/mL (equivalent to 6 mg/mL elemental iron) oral liquid, on an unrestricted basis. Folic acid 5 mg tablets and folic acid 500 microgram tablets also continue to be available through the PBS in a quantity of 200 units — these listings are restricted to patients identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders.

- f) The Department of Health provides advance notice of all changes to PBS listings and prices under embargo to software companies and other affect stakeholders, usually four weeks before the effective date of the Schedule.