

Chapter 1

Introduction

Terms of reference

1.1 On 18 June 2008, a motion was moved in the Senate by Senator Guy Barnett to disallow item 16525 in Part 3 of Schedule 1 to the Health Insurance (General Medical Services Table) Regulations 2007. On 16 September 2008, the Senate passed the following resolution:

1. That the subject of the motion for disallowance of item 16525 in Part 3 of Schedule 1 to the Health Insurance (General Medical Services Table) Regulations 2007 be referred to the Finance and Public Administration Committee for inquiry and report on and not before 13 November 2008.
2. That the committee in particular report on:
 - (a) the terms of item 16525 of part 3 of Schedule 1 to the Health Insurance (General Medical Services Table) Regulations 2007;
 - (b) the number of services receiving payments under this item and the cost of these payments;
 - (c) the basis upon which payments of benefits are made under this item; and
 - (d) the effects of disallowing this item.

1.2 Following referral of the inquiry to the committee, the motion to disallow item 16525 was withdrawn by Senator Barnett on 17 September 2008.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The inquiry was advertised in *The Australian* and through the Internet. The committee invited submissions from the Commonwealth Government and interested organisations and individuals.

1.4 The committee received 484 public and 45 confidential submissions. A list of individuals and organisations that made public submissions to the inquiry together with other information authorised for publication is at Appendix 1. The committee held two days of hearings in Canberra on 29 and 30 October 2008. Appendix 2 lists the names and organisations of those who appeared. Submissions and the Hansard transcript of evidence may be accessed through the committee's website at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/fapa_ctte/index.htm.

Use of terms in evidence

1.5 During the inquiry, the committee found that the terms 'abortion', 'termination' and 'late term termination' were used in different contexts and had different meanings for some witnesses. The Department of Health and Ageing in its submission used both the terms 'abortion' and 'termination': it stated that services under item 16525 'relate to both spontaneous abortion (miscarriage) and medical or induced abortion (termination)'.¹ Some witnesses also used both the terms 'abortion' and 'termination' to refer to the cessation of a pregnancy as a result of either a spontaneous event or an induced event. However, the committee is mindful that many in the community use the term 'abortion', as some witnesses did, only in relation to an induced event.

1.6 In this report, the terms have been used interchangeably without any implied meaning as to whether an induced or spontaneous event has occurred.

1.7 Item 16525 is used for procedures during the second trimester of pregnancy. The second trimester is generally considered to range from 13 to 26 weeks gestation.² In evidence, many witnesses used the term 'late term termination' which the committee notes is generally understood to apply to terminations after 20 weeks gestation.

1.8 The committee notes that a significant preponderance of evidence supporting disallowance related to terminations occurring in the latter half of the second trimester. While it is not possible to ascertain the exact numbers of procedures claimed under this item number that occur before or after 20 weeks gestation, the committee also notes that the evidence indicates that the majority of such claims occur before the 20 week mark, this is, in the first half of the second trimester.

Acknowledgment

1.9 The committee thanks those organisations and individuals who made submissions and gave evidence at the public hearing.

1 Department of Health and Ageing, *Submission 218*, p.1.

2 Department of Health and Ageing, *Submission 218*, p.1.