



THE HON SUSSAN LEY MP

Minister for Health
Minister for Sport

MEDIA RELEASE

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Unnecessary, out-dated or unsafe medical services? Tell us about it!

Australians who have undergone a Medicare-funded service, procedure or test they considered to be unnecessary, out-dated or even potentially unsafe in recent years are being encouraged to let the Federal Government know about it.

The same goes for doctors and other health professionals concerned about particular Medicare items, rules and regulations they feel need to be updated or removed to reflect contemporary clinical practice.

Minister for Health Sussan Ley today officially launched the start of consultation on the Turnbull Government's clinician-led review of all 5700 items on the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) as part of its plans to build a healthier Medicare.

This includes two discussion papers individually tailored towards consumers and health professionals and a user-friendly online survey to help make submissions easier.

Ms Ley said it was important doctors and their patients had access to medical services, tests and treatments that reflected contemporary clinical practice and this review – the first of its kind since Medicare was first established back in the 1980s – was “long overdue”.

“Patient safety is at the core of our plan to build a healthier Medicare and we want to empower health professionals with a modern system that reflects 21st Century Medicine,” Ms Ley said.

“Unfortunately the current system is lagging in the last century, with only 3 per cent of all 5700 Medicare items assessed or tested to see whether they actually work, are out-of-date or even harmful.

“Inefficient and unsafe Medicare services, tests and procedures also cost the nation dearly because they stop taxpayers being able to invest in new, innovative medical treatments and technologies.

“This is particularly important when Medicare claims are now hitting one million per day.

“That's why we want to hear from health professionals and patients about any services, tests or procedures they've come across in the Medicare system that are out-of-date, unnecessary or unsafe in certain circumstances.”

Professor Bruce Robinson – who is head of the Sydney University Medical School and is chairing the Government's MBS Review Taskforce – said these examples demonstrated the importance of looking at all 5700 MBS items “line by line” to ensure they reflected best contemporary clinical practice.

Professor Robinson said it also made sense look at the relevancy of rules and restrictions governing the use of Medicare items, not just the physical service, test or procedure itself. **(contd overpage...)**

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“It has been estimated that 30 per cent or more of health expenditure is wasted on services, tests and procedures that provide no or negligible clinical benefit and, in some cases, might be unsafe and could actually cause harm to patients,” Professor Robinson said.

“Sometimes this is because a procedure is out-of-date and should be removed altogether.

“In other instances the test or treatment is contemporary practice; it’s just not always necessary or appropriate in every circumstance and needs stronger rules or restrictions around its use.

“I’ve spoken to many health professionals – young and old – and there’s a growing consensus we as a profession have a responsibility to work together to ensure patients are getting the best treatments available. Here is our opportunity.

“While this Review is clinician-led, consumers are also well represented on the Review Taskforce and our on-line questionnaire is seeking input directly from the public about their experiences having tests and procedures that they may believe are unnecessary,” he said.

Members of the Taskforce are all experts in the public and private health sectors with experience in general practice, surgery, pathology, radiology, public health and medical administration. In addition consumers are specifically represented and there is also academic expertise in health technology assessment.

The Discussion Papers – developed by the MBS Review Taskforce – builds on feedback already received through face-to-face consultations conducted since July 2015 in various cities around Australia.

The Taskforce is due to deliver an interim report to the Government by late 2015.

To have your say; download the discussion papers; or check out the review terms of reference, visit: www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/MBSReviewTaskforce.

The MBS Review Taskforce is part of a three-pronged approach to Medicare reform being undertaken by the Government, which also includes a review of the primary care system, including the current fee-for-service model, and better education and compliance around the use of MBS items.

In 2014/15 Medicare funded 368 million MBS-listed services at a cost of \$20.2 billion, more than doubling in the last decade.

2014-15 Annual Medicare Snapshot:

	2014-15	2004-05	% Change
Population	23,950,000	20,177,000	19%
Number of Patients	21,322,000	17,590,000	21%
Patients as % of Population	89%	87.2%	2%
Number of Services	368,489,000	236,316,000	56%
Number of Services per Patient	17.3	13.4	30%
Benefit Paid	\$20.188 billion	\$9.922 billion	104%
Benefit Per Patient	\$843	\$491	72%
Number of items on the MBS	5754	4751	21%

Labor’s Only Policy on Medicare and Primary Care:

“the opposition would be kidding itself if it didn’t recognise there were challenges in the budget and that savings needed to be found”... “There is no area that is going to be exempt”... “We have to look across the board.”

- Labor Shadow Health Minister Catherine King – 22 Feb 2015 – Sky News

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