

Question on notice no. 274

Portfolio question number: SQ18-000700

2018-19 Budget estimates

Community Affairs Committee, Health Portfolio

Senator Stirling Griff: asked the Department of Health on 30 May 2018—

The Cochrane Overview method stipulates that the purpose of an Overview is to 'summarise the results' of systematic reviews, yet in the Homeopathy Review the decision was made to not accept the conclusions or interpretations of the systematic reviews, but instead to separately consider the included studies, although without retrieving and assessing the original studies. What NHMRC (or other) precedent exists for this approach and what NHMRC or other scientific standards exist to authenticate it?

Answer —

Please see the attached answer.

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2018 - 2019, 29 & 30 May 2018

Ref No: SQ18-000700

OUTCOME: 1 - Health System Policy, Design and Innovation

Topic: Homeopathy Review

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Stirling Griff

Question:

The Cochrane Overview method stipulates that the purpose of an Overview is to ‘summarise the results’ of systematic reviews, yet in the Homeopathy Review the decision was made to not accept the conclusions or interpretations of the systematic reviews, but instead to separately consider the included studies, although without retrieving and assessing the original studies. What NHMRC (or other) precedent exists for this approach and what NHMRC or other scientific standards exist to authenticate it?

Answer:

As per Chapter 22 of the Cochrane Handbook, overviews are designed to compile evidence from multiple systematic reviews into one accessible and usable document. While they do not aim to repeat the evidence searches, study selection or analysis of the included studies, they do include an assessment of the limitations of included systematic reviews when compiling the body of evidence. Importantly, the handbook states that, when presenting the overall conclusions of the overview, the report “should present the conclusions of the authors of the overview, not simply restate the varying conclusions of the authors of the included / underlying reviews.”