

Question on notice no. 275

Portfolio question number: SQ18-000701

2018-19 Budget estimates

Community Affairs Committee, Health Portfolio

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

The Australasian Cochrane Centre advised NHMRC in relation to evidence regarding the effectiveness of homeopathy that "'...no reliable evidence' does not seem an accurate reflection of the body of evidence". Was this advice from the Australasian Cochrane Centre disregarded? If not please advise how it was taken into consideration in the Homeopathy Review.

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: SQ18-000701

OUTCOME: 1 - Health System Policy, Design and Innovation

Topic: Homeopathy Review

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Stirling Griff

Question:

The Australasian Cochrane Centre advised NHMRC in relation to evidence regarding the effectiveness of homeopathy that "... 'no reliable evidence' does not seem an accurate reflection of the body of evidence". Was this advice from the Australasian Cochrane Centre disregarded? If not please advise how it was taken into consideration in the Homeopathy Review.

Answer:

The comment from the Australasian Cochrane Centre (ACC) above was provided in the following context:

"If the intent [of the evidence statements] is to provide general statements about the effectiveness of homeopathy, then 'no reliable evidence' may not adequately reflect the research. For example, when a substantial proportion of small (but good quality) studies show significant differences, the concluding statement is 'no reliable evidence' (p 8 and 10 Principles for NHMRC Evidence Statements). While we agree that this level of evidence is inadequate for supporting a clinical practice recommendation, 'no reliable evidence' does not seem an accurate reflection of the body of evidence.

It should first be noted that the circumstances articulated by the ACC did not arise in the Overview – that is, in no cases did the body of evidence for a particular clinical condition comprise a substantial proportion of small but good quality studies, all of which showed significant differences.

In considering the abovementioned feedback, the Homeopathy Working Committee (HWC) concluded that the addition of text to clarify the purpose of the evidence statements in Section 3.6.2 of the Overview Report was sufficient to address this. Furthermore, the evidence statements comprise a comprehensive description of the evidence base for each clinical condition, including the number of systematic reviews and primary studies, and the quality and size of included studies. This information describes the evidence base and provides additional context to the overall statement about the effectiveness of homeopathy.

Further detail about NHMRC's process for considering the evidence was included in the NHMRC *Information Paper: Evidence on the effectiveness of homeopathy for treating health conditions*, including:

- information for the Australian community on how NHMRC considered whether the evidence from research studies was reliable (page 9); and
- clarification that “the studies of homeopathy were generally poor quality. For some health conditions, this meant that no conclusion could be made on whether or not homeopathy was effective. For other conditions, this meant that NHMRC could not be confident that the results reported by studies were reliable” (page 25).