



11 July, 2013

ANTA Media Release

Govt Review PHIR for Natural Therapies

Defend your health care choice

Private health is about individual choice of the most suitable health care option, but natural health care consumers could be denied this basic right following a review currently underway by the Chief Medical Officer of Australia.

Did you know that the review is to decide whether those natural health therapies not already regulated under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme should be eligible for private health benefit refunds?

If they are excluded many Australians who depend on natural therapies in their health care will be denied access to insurance cover.

This could include the health professionals not regulated under this scheme, such as naturopaths, nutritionists, herbalists, musculoskeletal therapists, myotherapists, remedial massage therapists, homoeopaths and aromatherapists.

After recommendations are put to the Federal government by the Chief Medical Officer, the decisions of the review are expected to be implemented on 1 January 2014.

Although you will still be able to purchase the natural therapies of your choice, if the Private Health Insurance Rebates for natural therapies are excluded from the scheme, insurers will not be able to pay benefits for those services.

Understandably, the Federal Government wants to be assured that it is spending wisely and the public needs to be assured of the safety and quality of the health services it receives and the review seeks to establish if natural therapies are clinically effective and supported by a robust evidence base. It is also looking at the safety, quality and cost-effectiveness of natural health therapies.

However, real choice of health care is also important, both to the individual consumer of health services and to the efficiency of the health service as a whole.

Complementary and alternative medicine is now a thriving profession in Australia, and Natural Health Care professionals say the reason for this is that patients are generally satisfied with the treatments and therapies they receive because they are of benefit.

National Administration Office

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Advocacy by ANTA

ANTA, the Australian Natural Therapists Association, has responded to this review with a submission that sets out the evidence to support the continuation of already existing subsidies. In that submission it has also highlighted the need to include naturopaths, western herbalists, nutritionists, homoeopaths, musculoskeletal therapists, myotherapists, remedial therapists, aromatherapists and other health professionals in the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, and the need to fund further research into the effectiveness of natural health care.

ANTA believes that there is now a compelling case for policies and reforms that see natural therapies play an even greater role in the Australian health system. Numerous studies and research has established the safety and effectiveness of many alternative health remedies and practices and there is a greater acceptance of its role in complementing and assisting mainstream medical practice.

Safety and quality matter

ANTA members are required to have completed high quality education and training courses to obtain membership and accreditation with the association. High standards and demanding codes of practice are required and there is also a strong emphasis on improving knowledge and skills. So, if you are seeking advice or treatment from a practitioner with ANTA membership you can be assured of both quality and safe practice. This applies to the therapies presently under review for PRHI insurance rebates — massage, homeopathy, naturopathy, western herbalism and nutrition therapists.

More research needed

Research is necessary to properly demonstrate the effectiveness of treatment. The ANTA submission sets out the conclusive research already done which supports the effectiveness of these natural health care regimes, but argues that, although research has been undertaken by credible institutions and universities, both locally and overseas, more is needed to establish the further integration into conventional health services. To date, natural health practitioners have not been able to resource government research funding necessary for this to occur.

More government support, not less, is needed and removing natural therapies from the Health Fund Rebate scheme would be a retrograde step.

Why does choice matter?

Everyone likes to have a choice, whether it is buying food, new clothes, a new car, or what type of treatment works for your own health care. And these choices should be genuine ones. A private health refund for any treatment of choice should be available if it accords with quality and safety standards. ANTA membership ensures that this is the case.

Choice means better health care

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Choice of health care has the added benefit of reducing pressure on an already overburdened health system. Research has shown that many conditions have benefited from natural health care. This, in turn, has led to less dependence on sometimes undesirable medical solutions and a more effective spread of effective health care options. Most importantly, because the nature of natural health care is holistic, it has meant that conditions that could lead to the need for hospital care can be successfully managed, and often avoided.

What can you do?

If you care about choice in your health care, and equal treatment in relation to government benefits, you should write, email or call your local Federal Member of Parliament and let them know that you care about choice.

If you need more information on the review or ANTA's response to it, contact ANTA: info@anta.com.au phone 1800 817 577 or log onto www.anta.com.au

PULL OUT QUOTE:

'A private health refund for any treatment of choice should be available if it accords with quality and safety standards.'

880 words