

Review caves in to pressure

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In an abrupt about-face, the National Medicines Policy Review team has reversed a decision to keep the submissions it received under wraps - but the move has been branded too little, too late.

After a campaign spearheaded by consumer advocacy group Better Access Australia (BAA) calling for transparency, 120 of 156 submissions were [published](#) on the Department of Health website on Friday. Fourteen of the published group came from major pharmacos plus one from Medicines Australia.

The cave-in came after BAA published a swathe of submissions provided by patients, industry groups and companies demanding across-the-board transparency.

"Their leadership in action compelled the government to do what it should have done in the first place - publication of all submissions in one place the community can find them," BAA Board Director David Mackay said.

"Alas it is action that can be simply described as too little too late. The community called for the publication of these submissions almost three months ago on 3 November.

"Throughout November and December the NMP Review team consulted with stakeholders citing findings and analysis from these 140 plus submissions allowing the community no opportunity to consider the veracity and value of these ideas.

"Now with less than three weeks until the review team presents their draft policy and findings for a last ditch comment by the community, those who will be most impacted by these changes have less than three weeks to consider the ideas of others and have the chance to reach out and work together with those with a common goal or interest.

"Add this to the growing list of bureaucratic specials being reported on at the moment in a range of policy and programs across government where consultations are released during the January holiday period, with minimal time for response."

Worrying speed

The review headed by Deputy Chief Medical Officer Professor Michael Kidd is on track to be completed by March after Health Minister Greg Hunt announced last year it would kick off in August and be delivered by this May.

Calls to extend the timeframe to allow for a more thorough review have been [rebuffed by Kidd](#) who has said there was a commitment to deliver the NMP "within the life of this government".

"Better Access Australia remains concerned at the speed of this review," Mackay said.

"Its task is to establish the overarching principles that will shape and even dictate medicine and therapeutics access and development in Australia regardless of program over the next 20 years. Yet it is envisaged to be completed in less than a quarter of the time allowed for the Medicines Australia Strategic Agreement Health Technology Assessment Review for the PBS.

"As such we hope that those invited to participate in these next sessions, and those yet to have their say, can use the long overdue publication of these submissions to make a contribution, have a voice, and ensure the NMP policy reflects the community it serves and the changing environment they seek healthcare in, not just paraphrase the PBS system it supposedly guides."

The NMP Review Committee received 156 written submissions in total. Although not all gave permission for their response to be made public, the committee said all responses will be considered.

Medicines Australia

In its submission, MA called for an new national medicines policy to "deliver the world's best outcomes for access and utilisation of medicines, biotherapeutics and vaccines".

"This requires the ability to make the fastest, most efficient, decisions for safe and effective use of medicines, biotherapeutics and vaccines. Contemporary processes that comprehensively incorporate the patient's views are fundamental. The policy must recognise and facilitate the full realisation of Australia's capacity to research, develop, manufacture and supply new medicines, biotherapeutics and vaccines, from early discovery to the delivery to patients, for the benefit of the community, the economy and broader society," the peak body said.

It added that these objectives should be supported by "a clear governance and oversight structure" that should include "agreed measurement, monitoring, review, reporting and shared oversight of the outcomes to hold all partners to the NMP to account".

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