



**IS THE GOVERNMENT ABOUT TO TAKE MEDICINES OFF THE PBS
– TIME TO CALL A HALT TO THE NATIONAL MEDICINES POLICY REVIEW AND DO THIS OURSELVES**

Better Access Australia has written to the Prime Minister asking for urgent clarification on whether the Government is pursuing a policy of removing medicines from the PBS as part of its new National Medicines Policy (NMP) and to call a halt to the Review until after the election.

In an effort to rush this Review for completion patient and community input has been largely set aside both in time to contribute and the inclusion of those contributions in the draft NMP issued on 2 February.

More concerning is the inclusion of statements within the draft policy emphasising disinvestment in medicines, budget constraints and limiting patient access – a first for the national medicines policy, and at odds with every other health policy or strategy on the Department of Health’s website currently framing our leader’s priority of investment in health decisions.¹

Better Access Australia has commenced redrafting the NMP to reflect the feedback from the 120 publicly available submissions and is calling on others in the community to be part of the redrafting process.

“The Minister for Health regularly cites Labor’s ‘deferrals’ policy in 2011 as a stark comparator to the current Government’s approach to the PBS. The Community needs to know right now if this ‘disinvestment’ initiative in the draft NMP is a new policy position of Government coming into effect as part of the current or future Budget processes,” BAA Chair Felicity McNeill said.

“The community has been frustrated by the Review Team’s failure to acknowledge the need for timely access for patients as a fundamental pillar of the new policy. To have this compounded with the threat of losing access to medicines they have come to rely upon already – that’s something the community needs to tackle head on right now and understand its implications for their medicines access in the future. Ms McNeill said.

“That’s why we have asked the Prime Minister to immediately clarify what the intent of these changes are, and to stop this current Review in its tracks.

“The NMP Review to date has neither empowered the community nor listened to its opinions on access, affordability, workforce, research, literacy, accountability, and governance.

“Affordability for patients is not just the affordability of the cost of the medicine *to them* it is equally about the irreversible cost of time for patients in waiting for that access. When a system has an average approval time of 820 days before listing on the PBS, a policy that does not elevate timely access to medicines as a priority is not a policy that will drive accountability within government to do better.

¹ Department of Health Review Team, Draft Revised National Medicines Policy, 2 February 2022, page 10

“Better Access Australia has asked the Prime Minister to stop the current Review and direct that a new process involving an independent Review team with new patient-centric terms of reference be established after the election. This will enable the new Review team to consider the submissions to date and commence a consultation that is genuine and informed by the social compact that is our medicines access system – a public health program.

“Because after 156 submissions, the policy we are all being rushed to comment upon, is not a reflection of the community’s input.

“In the meantime, Better Access Australia has commenced drafting a new version of the National Medicines Policy based on an analysis of the input from the 120 submissions publicly released.

“We want to give the community something to work with that reflects their views, and hopefully makes it easier for the community to demand adherence to the social compact that is our health system. We will of course make it publicly available for comment and use by others, but if any individuals, consumer groups, industry groups, organisations or private companies want to help us in this regard, we would gratefully welcome their further input and support.

“Have no doubt – improving the timeliness of access to therapeutics in the new draft will shine bright and strong. Ms McNeill said.

“This is Australia’s public health policy. It is not for the Review team or government to rush. And a policy that intends to cut access to medicines needs more time than a tick and flick process.

“Never has the community’s contribution to a Review been more important.

Organisations interested in working with BAA or seeking more information on the disinvestment implications of the current policy can contact us via the [BAA website](#)

A copy of our correspondence to the Prime Minister can be found [here](#).

For further details or media inquiries please contact [Tim Davies](#)

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