



7 October 2021

The Hon Greg Hunt MP  
Minister for Health and Aged Care  
Via email: [greg.hunt.MP@health.gov.au](mailto:greg.hunt.MP@health.gov.au) [minister.hunt@health.gov.au](mailto:minister.hunt@health.gov.au)

Dear Minister Hunt,

**REQUEST TO EXTEND CONSULTATION PERIOD FOR THE NATIONAL MEDICINES POLICY REVIEW**

Better Access Australia (BAA) is writing to ask you to extend the consultation process and overall review time-period for your review of the National Medicines Policy (NMP).

BAA has been voluntarily assisting individuals and patient groups in their efforts to make a contribution to the NMP Review. During this time we have noted that it has been incredibly difficult for many on limited budgets and/or exclusively volunteer organisations. As a result they are contemplating not participating. We note as people who sat in on the Consumers Health Forum (CHF) session ten days ago, we are not the only ones receiving this feedback and trust we are not the only ones writing to you in this regard.

The timeframe for the submissions, given the level of complexity associated with the NMP is insufficient, and the quality of the Review will be severely impacted if patient and consumer groups aren't permitted an appropriate amount of time to draft and for their organisations to review prior to submission. This is in addition to the truncated timeframe for the Review itself, making the opportunity for further and genuine engagement equally challenging for consumers and the review team itself.

BAA notes that the Government's decision to consult with select groups in January 2020 on the Terms of Reference means there are those such as Medicines Australia, the Pharmacy Guild, Consumers Health Forum, Rare Cancers Australia and select others who have had 18 months to prepare their submissions and advocacy. Conversely, smaller community groups and individuals who are not in receipt of government funding are grappling to find time to reflect on this complex issue alongside contributing to other critical processes within Government such as the new NDIS legislation, HTA Consumer Consultative committee consultations, COVID-19 changes in their work and community, access to medicines currently before the PBAC, cancer group forums on new policy development, multiple state and federal inquiries into health access and then doing their day jobs and caring for their families.

These are not multi-billion-dollar pharma companies or well-resourced industry groups or colleges or academia, these are the people that the Terms of Reference for this review supposedly wants to put at the centre of the policy. Actions speak louder than words and the Government's actions on this process and timetable speak a truth we are most disappointed to hear.

We are asking you to reflect upon your own question to the community in this process, "How can the NMP's focus on consumer centricity and engagement be strengthened? Is

anything missing, and what needs to change?" It can start by giving consumers the chance to tackle the complex questions you have asked. For example, whether devices and vaccines should be part of the new medicines policy and what accessibility, timeliness and quality use mean to consumers versus government and suppliers?

Consumers were excluded from 16 months of negotiations on the future of the PBS by Government and industry as part of your Strategic Agreement developments. It is time to take a different approach, an approach that is commonplace in other areas of the health system when it comes to consumer engagement and which BAA and other patient and consumer advocates greatly appreciate.

This review should not just be about the half dozen usual suspects. It should not just be about pharmaceutical companies complaining about HTA and pricing, it should not just be about justifying more money for community pharmacy programs, and it should not just focus almost exclusively on the processes of the PBS.

Genuine policy development, such as you have delivered with revisions and development of Australia's obesity plans, preventive health, quality use of medicines plans and rare disease plans, take time and encompass a broad range of views.

Please give the Australian community, not simply large, vested interests, a chance to be part of this incredibly important policy review, just as the original development of the NMP did over 20 years ago.

We thank you for your consideration of our request and hope you and the review team will see fit to taking a different approach to this Review.

We have copied this letter to the NMP Review Team, Medicines Australia, the Pharmacy Guild, the PSA, the CHF and the Shadow Minister for Health.

Yours sincerely,

Felicity McNeill PSM  
Board Chair

Helen Innes  
Board Member

David Mackay  
Board Member

**CC:**

Shadow Minister for Health [REDACTED]  
NMP Review chair [REDACTED]  
NMP Review member [REDACTED]  
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CEO Medicines Australia [REDACTED]  
CEO Consumers Health Forum [REDACTED]  
CEO, Pharmacy Guild of Australia, [REDACTED]  
CEO Pharmaceutical Society of Australia, [REDACTED]

**Better health, disability and social services. Better Access Australia.**