



3 February 2022

The Hon Mark Butler MP
Shadow Minister for Health
Via email: mark.butler.MP@aph.gov.au

Dear Mr Butler,

**Extension to consultation period and review completion timeframe for
the National Medicines Policy**

Better Access Australia is writing to ask you to support a request to extend the consultation period for the draft of the new National Medicines Policy (NMP) issued on 2 February 2022 to mid-March 2022 and extend the timetable for the review's completion to June 2022 to allow detailed consideration of that input by the Review Team.

Better Access Australia welcomed the bi-partisan support to this review in the 2019 election. We note that the Morrison Government followed the lead of Labor during the election on this initiative, and hope Labor will continue to have the same interest in taking leadership on this issue should you win government in the forthcoming election.

As you are aware the process for this Review has been truncated and rushed, making it difficult for patients to participate in the process. Following a significant delay in the public release of the submissions to the Review the community is being afforded only two weeks to consider a new draft of a defining piece of policy that will determine their access to medicines and therapeutics over the next twenty years.

We have written to the Minister for Health the Hon Greg Hunt MP requesting he intervene and provide the community with an appropriate timeframe to consider and input to this Review. We have also requested he provide the Review team with further time to consider that input and ensure it is a genuine reflection of the social compact that is access to medicines in Australia. A copy of that letter is attached for your information.

As we are asking for timeframe extensions to this Review that will likely run into the election period and into a new Parliament, we are asking for your bipartisan support for these changes.

The new NMP as currently drafted is a reflection on the past and tactical issues of today. This is not acceptable, it must contemplate the future of our health system including the influx of new diagnostics and treatments that will come in the future and the increasing delays Australians are experiencing in access to the healthcare they need.

We all need to take the appropriate time and care to ensure the new NMP is a visionary document. The NMP must genuinely reflect the social compact of community-driven public

health programs and the acceptance of responsibility by all engaging with the system that this policy is about improving the health and quality of life of all in the community.

The draft NMP as currently released supposedly reflects input from over 150 stakeholders yet these inputs and influences appear difficult to identify.

For major industry groups, academic institutions and companies, there is a chance they can devote the necessary resources to make a robust and reflective submission over the next two weeks. *For the dozens of groups we work with the NMP Review is becoming an increasingly difficult process given their limited budgets and/or exclusively volunteer organisations.*

It is another demand for a response that matters to them on top of last week's for Pre-Budget submissions, comments on the PBAC agenda, a surprise consultation on the MSAC cost recovery proposal, and the suite of other consultations currently listed on the Department of Health's website.

Many patient groups and organisations are asking the same one or two people to find the time on top of everything else they do, often voluntarily, to participate and comment on this seminal document for therapeutics access in Australia. We need to give everyone time to have their say and for the Review team to also have a chance to fully reflect on those views and reconsider their work to date accordingly.

At the time of writing this letter, those who had made submissions to date had still not been directly contacted about the draft report release. Aside from being the decent thing to do given the time and effort it took to make the initial submission, considering the limited timeframe available for this input it is simply not fair.

We note that BAA are not alone in sharing frustrations with these timeframes and the direction that NMP Review has taken. If the NMP asserts that the community's views matter it must not thwart an opportunity for the community to genuinely share their views on the draft paper.

BAA thanks you for considering this request and welcome any

Yours sincerely,

Felicity McNeill ^{PSM}
Board Chair

Helen Innes
Board Member

David Mackay
Board Member

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