



3 February 2022

The Hon Greg Hunt MP  
Minister for Health and Aged Care  
Via email: greg.hunt.mp@health.gov.au  
CC: NMP Review chair,

Dear Minister,

**Request for extension to the consultation period for the draft of  
the National Medicines Policy**

Better Access Australia is writing to ask you 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, and your Government's effort to hold good on that commitment despite the challenges your department faced in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We respect your desire to deliver within the parliamentary term upon the commitment the Morrison Government made, and to deliver on your own personal commitment and legacy before retiring from the Parliament, but we consider that in an effort to deliver within a specific time, the community you gave that commitment to is being disenfranchised.

*As you have stated many times during your tenure as Health Minister, you are proud of your Government's legacy on the PBS, and for your innovative solutions for making treatments like CAR-T therapy available via the MSAC processes.* We know your direct intervention for timely resolve of the CAR-T access challenge was what saw Australian children and eventually Australian adult patients able to access a treatment the system was struggling to adapt its thinking to.

These system and access challenges are the reasons the review of the NMP was long overdue. Conversely these delays in finding a solution for CAR-T therapy are also the reason appropriate time and care needs to be given to making the new NMP a visionary document.

*The new NMP should not just be a reflection on the past and tactical issues of today, it must contemplate the future of our health system including the influx of new diagnostics and treatments made possible by your considerable investment as Health Minister in clinical trials and programs through the Medical Research Future Fund.*

*Future-proofing our health system has never been a more important legacy to leave. We are asking you to make that your legacy by giving the community and the Review itself more time to get it right.* The NMP must genuinely reflect the social compact of community-driven public health programs and the acceptance of responsibility by all parties

engaging with the system that our policies are about improving the health and quality of life of all in the Australian community.

The draft NMP apparently reflects input from over 150 stakeholders yet these inputs and influences appear difficult to identify. A timeframe of two weeks for all in the community to genuinely reflect on the content and input of others and then share their views on a defining piece of policy that will shape medicines access for the next twenty years is just not feasible at best, and unfair at worst.

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.

***For the dozens of groups we work with it 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 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 your Department'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 them 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 those who had made submissions to date had still not been directly contacted about the draft report release. This is simply not fair.

We note that BAA are not alone in sharing frustrations with these timeframes.

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.

***Therefore, BAA is asking you to intervene and give the community, industry and academia until mid-March 2022 to contribute to their National Medicines Policy and in doing so also extend the time period for the Review team to complete their work until June 2022.***

As a show of bipartisan support for the future of the next twenty years of medicines access in Australia we are also asking the Shadow Minister for Health to request an extension of the consultation period. BAA thanks you for considering this request and hope that you and the review team will give consumer and patient input the value and time it deserves.

Yours sincerely,

Felicity McNeill PSM  
Board Chair

Helen Innes  
Board Member

David Mackay  
Board Member

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

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