



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

QUESTION

Wednesday, 1 June 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

QUESTION

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Questioner Mr WILKIE
Speaker

Source House
Proof No
Responder Ms GILLARD
Question No.

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (14:44): My question is to the Prime Minister. Tasmanian grandmother Dorothy Thurley has been fighting bowel cancer for eight years and is being kept alive by a drug not covered by the PBS. Too sick to work, Mrs Thurley has applied for a credit card to help her cover the \$60,000 a year cost of buying the drug, even though she is broke from spending \$20,000 on another drug, which has stopped working. Why on earth are people like Mrs Thurley in such circumstances when we live in one of the richest countries in the world? Please, will the government reconsider its decision to pause new PBS listings so that people like Mrs Thurley do not have to take out loans to save their lives?

Ms GILLARD (Lalor—Prime Minister) (14:45): I thank the member for Denison for his question. I understand that he is genuinely and deeply concerned about the circumstance of his constituent and I think many members in the parliament have seen similar representations from their constituents. You always want to try to give a helping hand, so I understand his motivation in raising this question and I am very concerned to hear about the circumstances of his constituent Mrs Thurley.

I assure the member for Denison that we continue to work through the processes that have guided Australian governments on pharmaceutical benefits listing. They are processes that have enabled us as a nation to afford medicines, to get them to people and to ensure that we share that burden equitably through our budgeting arrangements. Indeed, our PBS is very much envied by nations around the world. But in order for it to continue to work we need to go through stages of assessment.

First and foremost we need to take the advice of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. They are the experts who make recommendations, and we cannot as politicians substitute our sense of what should be listed for what is on the PBS. We do have to listen to the advice of the PBAC. We of course respond to that advice. We work through and deal with the financial issues. The government is well used to that, because Labor has added 500 new medicines or brands to the PBS since coming to government, costing

around \$4 billion over four years. We continue to work through them and have listed a considerable number of new medicines. For example, we very recently listed, as a supported vaccine, pneumococcal vaccine. That was important, and we funded the catch-up program.

We will continue to do those assessments with advice from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee. There are always decisions to work through. There are always questions of how to deal with the funding of medicines. We work through them and will continue to work through them. I understand that the member is concerned about his constituent and I am very happy to keep him informed on this particular medicine as the government works through its assessments.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Prime Minister has concluded. I apologise that I did not see earlier that the member for Denison is on his feet.

Mr Wilkie: Mr Speaker, a point of order on relevance: my question goes to the fact that new PBS listings have been paused as a result of the budget. My question was: will the government—

The SPEAKER: The member for Denison will—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! I could quite easily have indicated to the member for Denison—

Mr Pyne interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Sturt of his status. Whilst I am not a high roller I might take a risk. The Prime Minister had indicated that she had finished her response. I had been distracted and had not called the member for Denison earlier. That is the only reason I allowed him to put on record what was to be his point of order. We are ready to move on. I now really regret that I talked about high rolling—in his presence especially!

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