

Question on Notice
No. 179
Asked on 1 March 2006

MS NELSON-CARR asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON) –

QUESTION:

With reference to his welcome efforts to have the Federal Government reconsider its stance on limitations to the Medicare rebate for cervical cancer screening whereby women in Townsville and other cities with a population of 25,000 or more can't make a claim when the test is conducted by nurses in local general practice clinics and in light of his approach -

What seems the likelihood of the Federal Government relenting and expanding Medicare provisions to encourage more Australian women to have this vitally important screening procedure, no matter what their city of residence?

ANSWER:

It must first be emphasised that Medicare is the responsibility of the Federal Government.

I feel strongly that women in urban areas are being disadvantaged under current Medicare arrangements. Item 10998 is claimable by rural General Practitioners and enables them to employ a female Practice Nurse pap smear provider which increases rural women's access to appropriate services. This item cannot be claimed by urban General Practitioners. Therefore women in urban areas with low cervical screening participation rates have lesser access to female pap smear providers. This is particularly relevant in low socio-economic areas where there has been significant population growth.

The death rate for cervical cancer is currently 2.5 women per 100,000 for non-Indigenous Australians and 11.4 women per 100,000 for Indigenous Australians.

High concentrations of Indigenous women and women from diverse cultural backgrounds reside in urban areas. These women generally have lower rates of participation in cervical cancer screening.

There is no doubt that having a choice of health professional able to offer this screening service would help to improve access for women who have cultural sensitivities or language barriers around medical services.

Federal Health Minister Tony Abbott is producing a two-tiered system that will reduce access to this life saving screening service.

I wrote to Minister Abbot concerning this issue on 31 January 2006, however to date I have not received any response. I will continue to lobby the Federal Government on behalf of women from urban Queensland. The Beattie Government focuses on increasing participation rates for all women including Indigenous women and women from different cultures.

Both the Queensland Cancer Fund and the Queensland Division of General Practice support the Queensland Government call for change.