



The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the
Public Service and Cabinet

Ref No: MC20-011615

Dr Alan Young - President
Dr Sutapa Mukherjee - Clinical Chair
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08 JUN 2020

Dear Dr Young and Dr Mukherjee

Thank you for your correspondence concerning temporary Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) items for home based sleep studies. I regret the delay in responding.

I appreciate your concerns about access to appropriate sleep health care during this challenging time. The Australian Government remains fully committed to keeping Australians as safe and well as possible during this pandemic and to support our doctors, nurses and other health workers to continue to provide world class health and hospital services.

I understand that the temporary items to which you refer relate to services which have not been assessed by the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC). It has been Government policy for some time now for medical services to be subject to a robust assessment by the MSAC prior to being considered for listing on the MBS. The MSAC process ensures all medical services listed on the MBS are safe, effective and cost-effective. This policy has not changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and I support this decision at this time. The MSAC process continues to be an integral step in assessing services for listing on the MBS, particularly while patients have access to essential medical services.

Thanks to the efforts of all Australians, the containment measures implemented to date have been effective in suppressing the virus. These efforts have enabled some elective surgery procedures to be reintroduced in a staged and controlled process. The first phase of the reintroduction occurred on 27 April 2020. On 15 May 2020, it was announced that the Prime Minister and National Cabinet agreed to recommencing all elective surgeries with timing to be determined by each state and territory.

The Government continues to subsidise a range of sleep study services through the MBS. This includes items 12203 to 12217 for level 1 (laboratory based) sleep studies and item 12250 for Level 2 home based sleep studies. I note that there has been a decrease in the use of these items. I agree this is a concern, including for paediatric patients who require laboratory based studies.

I have asked my Department to continue to monitor the utilisation of the items in light of the further easing of restrictions on elective procedures. Given restrictions are being eased, I see no immediate action is necessary to change any current MBS arrangements at this time.

I would like to assure you that the Government is doing all it can to ensure health care staff have the equipment they need to perform essential services, including those for sleep studies. As part of the Government's response, additional funding has been made available to increase the supply of personal protective equipment held in the National Medical Stockpile (masks, gloves, aprons, protective eyewear). Further information on the funding measures the Government is undertaking is available at: www.health.gov.au.

The new temporary MBS telehealth items also continue support patients and practitioners by enabling continued access to essential Medicare rebated consultation services. The temporary items can also be used to support the provision of existing MBS services via telehealth where clinically appropriate, including Level 2 sleep studies. As of 30 March 2020, the new telehealth items became general in nature and have no relation to diagnosing, treating or suspecting COVID-19. As of 20 April 2020, specialist and allied health service providers were no longer required to bulk bill the new telehealth items. Further information on the temporary items is available on the fact sheet page of the MBSOnline website at: www.mbsonline.gov.au.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Greg Hunt', written over a white background.

Greg Hunt