

Update from the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee

June 2024

As newly appointed Chair of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC), I would like to take the opportunity to establish a communication with stakeholders which is separate from formal PBAC minutes. This is the first of these communications and I hope this format will give you a wider picture of the Committee and its discussions.

I wish to begin by thanking and acknowledging my predecessor as Chair, Professor Andrew Wilson. Andrew has made a significant contribution to Health Technology Assessment in Australia, and I look forward to building on his work to ensure that the outcomes of the PBAC mean that Australians have access to affordable medicines.

In May we farewelled and thanked Dr Meena Okera for her excellent contribution to the PBAC over the past 7 years. Meena and I had a brief opportunity to serve as fellow committee members on the PBAC about 5 years ago. As a fellow oncologist I was immediately impressed by her diligence, thoughtfulness and the way she placed the patient's needs at the centre of discussions.

In May we held an "Intracycle meeting" – meaning a meeting held between the three main annual PBAC meetings. The purpose of the meeting was to provide an opportunity to address issues which could be completed in advance of the July main meeting. It was very impressive to see how many people from the sub-committees, secretariats and the sponsors had worked diligently to ensure discussions were fruitful. I thank everyone for their input. We were joined by the Chair of ATAGI, Professor Nigel Crawford, who provided advice in relation to the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) maternal vaccine Abrysvo®.

All committee members joined in a general discussion about how best to use immunotherapy for the treatment of cancer. With PBAC submissions for use in the neoadjuvant, adjuvant and metastatic settings, we discussed the importance of understanding the clinical benefit with retreatment and how to best fund a model of care which delivers outcomes for patients. The committee will continue this important discussion at future meetings and will seek input from a broad group of stakeholders so that we can provide clear guidance to applicants.

On administrative matters, I will be on annual leave for July. Jo Watson will chair the PBAC meeting on 10-12 July.

I very much look forward to meeting with people and organisations with an interest in the work of the PBAC in the coming months.

Professor Robyn Ward
Chair, Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee