



Submission to the Public Consultation on the draft revised Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) Guidelines

SANE Australia is a national charity helping Australians affected by mental illness lead a better life through the provision of support, training and education. SANE works closely with people with lived experience of mental illness to build better services, policies, and programs.

Mental ill health affects a large number of Australians:

- Twenty per cent of the population aged 16-85 experience a mental health problem every year.
- In 2013-14, 34 million prescriptions for mental health-related medications were dispensed, accounting for 12% of all prescriptions.
- These prescriptions for mental health-related medications were provided to around 3.8 million individuals.

From these statistics it is clear that access to appropriate, safe and affordable medicines is a key part of a holistic approach to supporting the millions of Australians who experience mental ill health every year.

As users of medicines, consumers have knowledge, perspectives and experiences that are unique and directly relevant to the PBAC process. However, SANE Australia notes that the steering committee for the revision of the Guidelines does not include a consumer representative, and the revised draft Guidelines reflect a limited role for consumers in the PBAC process.

SANE Australia is concerned that the revision process is missing an opportunity to enable the consumer voice to be heard throughout the PBAC process in a comprehensive, clear and systematic way. To this end, SANE Australia supports the issues and solutions outlined by the Consumers Health Forum of Australia in its Submission to the Review of Items included in the PBAC Guidelines Review that closed on 14 September 2015.

<http://www.pbs.gov.au/reviews/pbac-guidelines-review-submissions/subm-12-consumer-health-forum-of-australia.pdf>

SANE Australia would particularly like to highlight that the current revised draft Guidelines are written largely from a clinical perspective. We believe this focus is too narrow and discounts the importance of improvements in quality of life. Improvements in quality of life can have substantial impacts on the economy, as well as individuals and carers.

For many chronic conditions, including severe mental illness, there is evidence that the provision of affordable and effective medications could be offset by savings in other areas of expenditure. For example, more affordable and effective medications for people experiencing severe mental illness (such as Bipolar Disorder or Schizophrenia) could mean that individuals are able to return or continue to participate in the workforce, with resultant savings in Disability Support Pension payments, carers payments, and/or other relevant income support expenditure. It would therefore seem reasonable from an economic perspective, as well as a consumer perspective, to include a more holistic approach to determining the costs and savings of particular medications, rather than the purely clinical perspective that is contained in the current draft revised Guidelines.

In conclusion

SANE Australia welcomes the Government's commitment to reviewing the PBAC Guidelines and supports the role the PBAC plays in ensuring that new medications are value for money as well as being safe to use and providing good therapeutic outcomes.

SANE Australia would like to see the PBAC Guidelines deliver relevant, fair and equitable outcomes for consumers of medications through the inclusion of consumers throughout the process in a comprehensive, clear and systematic way. In particular, SANE Australia advocates for a more whole-of-system approach to considering the costs and savings of medications in the PBAC deliberation process, particularly in relation to mental health related medications.

SANE Australia stands ready to work with policy makers, governments, health professionals and consumers to improve treatment and health outcomes for people experiencing mental illness.

CONTACT DETAILS

SANE Australia
PO Box 226
South Melbourne VIC 3205
(03) 9682 5933
info@sane.org