NATIONAL HEALTH AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2) 1980

Date Introduced: 27 August 1980
House: House of Representatives

Short Digest of Bill

Purpose
To amend the National Health Act 1953 so as to extend eligibility for pensioner health fringe benefits to sickness beneficiaries, to increase benefits payable under the isolated patients' travel and accommodation scheme, and to increase the domiciliary nursing care benefit from $2 to $3 per day.

Background
The Bill implements reforms foreshadowed in the Budget Speech of the Treasurer on the 19th August 1980, and the opportunity is being taken to make minor changes to provisions relating to the pharmaceutical benefits scheme.

Provisions
Clause 3 includes sickness beneficiaries within the definition of "pensioner" in s.4.

Clause 4 amends s.17 by limiting to $20 or such amount as is prescribed by regulations in force at the commencement of the journey, the amount of money to be paid by a patient towards the combined travel costs of the patient and the patient's approved escort or attendant.

Clause 5 amends s.18 so as to increase the accommodation allowance for isolated patients from $15 to $20 per night.

Clause 6 amends s.20 to extend the period within which an application of a person to be approved as eligible for travel and accommodation allowances may be made to the Permanent Head of the Department of Health from 6 months to 12 months after the referral to which the application relates. The Permanent Head may request and consider a written statement by the applicant giving reasons for a delay in applying beyond 12 months. The Permanent Head may excuse the delay if he is satisfied that there are
extenuating circumstances. If he refuses to excuse the delay an application may be made to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal to review that decision (Clause 14, amending section 105AAA).

Clause 8 amends s.58G by increasing the rate of domiciliary nursing care benefit from $2.00 per day to $42 per fortnight (or $3.00 per day). Provision is made in clause 9 for pro-rata payments to be made at the daily rate of $3.00 where necessary and for overpayments to be deducted from subsequent benefit payments.

Clause 10 amends s.58J by providing that the Permanent Head is not required to revoke the approval of a person approved to provide nursing care in a private home when the Permanent Head is satisfied that the approved person is likely to commence, within a reasonable period, to provide domiciliary nursing care for the patient.

Clauses 11, 12, 13 and 14 make formal amendments only in relation to the supply of Pharmaceutical Benefits.

Clause 2 proposes the following dates for the commencement of operation of the various sections:

(i) s.1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10 and 15 - 4 September 1980
(ii) s.4, 5, 6, and 14 - 1 November 1980
(iii) s.11, 12, and 13 - on a date to be fixed by proclamation.

10 September 1980

Education and Welfare Group
LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH SERVICE