



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**BILLS**

**National Health Amendment  
(Pharmaceutical Benefits) Bill 2014**

**Consideration in Detail**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 16 July 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 16 July 2014  
**Page** 8191  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Neumann, Shayne, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr NEUMANN** (Blair) (17:39): This is a \$1.3 billion increase in health costs to Australian households. The COAG Reform Council, abolished by this government in their budget of broken promises and betrayal, revealed that Indigenous people are 36.6 per cent less likely than non-Indigenous people to actually fill a prescription. This is what this government are going to do. If they use a price signal to raise costs and make it harder for Indigenous people and others across the country to fill a script, people are less likely to fill the script or they are likely to delay it. There will be worse health outcomes for the country.

On *Sky News - Agenda*, in November 2012, the health minister referred to the PBS as 'tracking sustainably'. What happened? Somewhere along the line the ERC program across there actually got hold of him and said, 'You have to make some cuts.' So, instinctively, like the Liberal Party always do, because it is in their DNA, they hurt the vulnerable, those who are sick, those who are less fortunate, the disabled, those who come from low-socioeconomic regions and those who come from rural and regional areas as well. That is what they have done here.

Where are the members from marginal seats—the people from the LNP in Queensland? They are very happy to ask questions in question time, one after another—Petrie, Bonner, Brisbane, Forde. One after another they get up and ask questions in question time, but they do not have the political courage to come in here and speak on these types of bills, because they know in their heart of hearts that this will go down badly back in Queensland in their marginal seats. They know this will increase costs for households in Brisbane, in Logan, in Ipswich, in Beenleigh, in Rockhampton, in Townsville and in Cairns—all across those areas.

This is almost like one of the scripts of *The Hollowmen*. In fact, we have seen Rob Sitch referring to this. He appeared in *The Hollowmen* and his production company Working Dog created and produced the program. At the Melbourne Press Club recently he remarked on the striking similarity between the government's proposed medical research fund and the events of an episode of *The Hollowmen* that I happen to like. My youngest daughter, Jacqui, also likes it and we often play it. Rob Sitch said, 'When the budget came out it was like they had watched the show and said, "That is actually a really good idea."' As in *The Hollowmen*, I have a sneaking suspicion that the government's medical research fund was a late inclusion in the budget.

Chief Scientist Ian Chubb revealed on the ABC that even he had not been consulted about the fund. So it was all cooked up in Treasury and Finance. I wondered if you could come up with something better in the Working Dog production catalogue. The plan for the second Sydney airport was ripped out of the plot of *The Castle*. Or there could be a sequel to *The Dish* in which the CSIRO scientists struggle to keep the observatory running between the savage cuts of the Abbott government. Or we could have a version of *Thank God You're Here* in which the member for Wentworth would come back and save the Liberal Party.

But this is a serious issue for the Australian public, because across the country we will see people having worse health outcomes. Those opposite say that it is just a small amount, but it rises again and again and the number of prescriptions rises again and again before you hit the threshold. So, people across this country will have worse outcomes.

They say that Labor did nothing about it. But we did. There is \$1.8 billion in savings via the accelerated price disclosure provisions, going up to about \$20 billion across the forward estimates and beyond. We made serious attempts to get the PBS under control, and we had it under control. In November 2013, even the health minister said that it was tracking sustainably. So what is the difference? He has been rolled by the Treasurer and the Minister for Finance. That is what has happened, and Australians will suffer because of it. The vulnerable, the sick and the disabled will suffer. It is so typical of the Liberals, the Nationals and the LNP to do this, because in their heart of hearts there is a big divide, and we can see on their faces and in their voting records every day what they think about the poor, the disadvantaged and the sick, and this bill is typical of it.