



Mr Martin Costigan  
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Dear Mr Costigan

Thank you for your correspondence of 11 March 2015, regarding the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) review of homeopathy. The Chief Executive Officer of NHMRC, Professor Warwick Anderson, has asked me to respond on his behalf.

Your correspondence raises a number of issues relating to the homeopathy review. Many of these issues are comprehensively addressed in either the *NHMRC Information paper: Evidence on the effectiveness of homeopathy for treating health conditions*, or in the supporting documents for the review, all of which were released on 11 March 2015. In particular, the Frequently Asked Questions document directly addresses many of the issues you raise. These documents are all publically available at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/cam02>.

The following addresses those matters raised in your correspondence that are not covered by the abovementioned documents. Firstly, however, I would like to provide you with an overview of the way in which NHMRC undertakes its activities.

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) is Australia's leading body for supporting health and medical research, developing evidence-based health advice, and setting standards in ethics in health care and research, within a single national organisation. NHMRC has had a statutory obligation in accordance with Section 7(1)(a) of the *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* (the Act) to inquire into, issue guidelines on, and advise the community on matters relating to:

- the improvement of health;
- the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease;
- the provision of health care;
- public health and medical research;
- ethical issues relating to health.

In undertaking evidence reviews, NHMRC uses internationally recognised methods to comprehensively search, identify and collate the relevant scientific literature, under the guidance of an expert committee established by NHMRC. Evidence reviews inform the development of advice such as NHMRC Statements, Information Papers or Guidelines. The methodology applied to the evidence review and the development of related advice is reviewed by independent experts to ensure that the translation of these findings into advice is impartial, robust and based on the best available evidence.

Media coverage of NHMRC's homeopathy review reflects the widespread interest in both the subject matter itself, and the review findings. NHMRC has no control over the way in which media outlets present their stories. Whilst NHMRC may suggest and make available spokespersons for a particular NHMRC project, media outlets will identify their own experts and spokespersons from both sides of a debate. Likewise, NHMRC is unable to comment on documents provided on the Friends of Science in Medicine (FSM) website. The draft NHMRC Information Paper, and associated documents were released publically, on 9th April 2014. NHMRC did not provide FSM with embargoed copies of the documents ahead of this date. Further questions relating to these issues should be directed to the relevant party.

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests received by NHMRC are responded to in accordance with the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act). To date, NHMRC has received two FOI requests specifically pertaining to a contractor originally engaged to undertake the assessment of the evidence for homeopathy. One of these is the current request from your own organisation, which is still being processed following the receipt by NHMRC, of a revised scope in response to a 'request consultation process, in accordance with section 24AB of the FOI Act. The due date for a decision on this request is 2 April 2015. A similar FOI request in December 2014 from another applicant also underwent a request consultation process. As the applicant failed to respond to that process within the statutory timeframe however, the request was taken to be withdrawn.

You have expressed concern that the views of the NHMRC appointed expert reviewers have been ignored and I would like to assure you this is not the case. The purpose of expert review was to assess whether the draft Information Paper provided an accurate interpretation of the evidence base regarding the effectiveness of homeopathy as a treatment for any clinical condition in humans. Based on the feedback of the expert reviewers, revision of the draft Information Paper occurred. As described above, expert review is one of the processes NHMRC undertakes to ensure that advice is impartial, robust and based on the best available evidence. A summary of expert reviewer's comments, and the responses to them, is available at the website identified above and copies of the reports were provided to you on 30 March 2015.

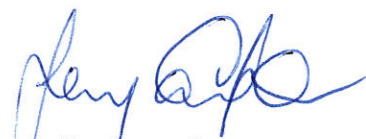
I am not able to comment on the outcomes of the Department of Health's Review of the Australian Government Rebate on Private Health insurance for Natural Therapies. Any questions you may have regarding that review should be addressed to the Department of Health.

With regard to comments made by Professor Anderson, or the position of the World Health Organisation: NHMRC believes that all medicines and treatments should be evaluated for use, based on their effectiveness. People who choose non evidence based products may put their health at risk if they reject or delay treatments for which there is good evidence for safety and effectiveness.

The NHMRC believes that Australians have the right to make their own choices about the health care options they pursue, but that this choice should be informed by the best available evidence.

I trust that the above information is of assistance to you

Yours sincerely



Jennifer Campain  
A/g Executive Director,  
Evidence, Advice and Governance

31 March 2015