

Dear [Your Local MP],

My name is [Your Name], and I am a constituent of your electorate and a natural therapies practitioner who provides quality, complementary healthcare to members of your community.

I am interested to hear your views on complementary medicine, as I have grave concerns about ongoing legislative and bureaucratic decisions which are increasingly restricting access to natural therapies while so-called “rigorous” reviews fail to accurately and fairly assess evidence of efficacy, effectiveness, safety and cost-effectiveness.

I am concerned anti-complementary medicine interest groups are influencing government to:

- Stop universities teaching complementary therapy courses
- Mislead the public with biased and flawed reviews
- Have private health insurance rebates for complementary medicine abolished
- Deny the existence of good quality, scientific evidence showing the health and cost benefits of complementary medicine healthcare options
- Have homeopathic and other products banned from sale in pharmacies
- Introduce drastic TGA regulatory policy change to remove complementary medicines from therapeutic goods legislation, compromising public safety.

Practitioners, like myself, provide healthcare to millions of families across Australia who choose to use complementary and natural medicine to manage chronic disease, common illness and/or assist with preventative healthcare. My services complement (but do not replace) conventional care. Research shows that when patients use complementary healthcare services alongside conventional care health outcomes improve, often with economic benefits (e.g. reduced reliance on drugs).

Two in every three Australians now regularly use a natural therapy or healthcare product and usage is increasing. By 2017-2018 complementary medicines in Australia will be worth \$4.6 billion and be responsible for employing an estimated 45,000 people.

As practitioners, we are bound to a high standard of ethical and professional conduct through adherence to practitioner accreditation standards, Codes of Ethics and Codes of Practice.

We want to trust that reviews by publicly funded government agencies into the complementary medicine therapies we practice are conducted to the highest standards, using accepted research methods, irrespective of whether they are considered (by some) to be “controversial”.

For example, homeopathy. One million Australians choose to use homeopathy but high quality, clinical research studies showing positive results were ignored by the 2015 National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Review.

Freedom of Information documents show the NHMRC engineered the outcome of the Review by modifying the research protocol post-hoc, resulting in the results of 97 per cent of the studies being dismissed from any consideration in the findings.

FOI documents have also revealed that the NHMRC even conducted the review twice, but the first “missing” report, its findings and public expenditure was never made public.

Now, the 2015 Review, which is the subject of a Commonwealth Ombudsman complaint for maladministration and research misconduct, is being held up as evidence to support yet another attempt at restricting consumer choice with a recommendation to ban homeopathic medicines from being sold in pharmacies.

Sixteen other complementary and natural therapies were also reviewed by the NHMRC as part of the Review of the Australian Government Rebate on Private Health Insurance for Natural Therapies – all were similarly flawed.

As practitioners we know the public is being misled. I wish to express my concern over slipping standards of research integrity and ethical public administration by the Federal Health bureaucracy towards the complementary medicines sector, which it appears is being increasingly influenced by anti-complementary medicine advocacy groups – working against the public interest.

In our practices we regularly see improvements in patient reported health outcomes. Studies into the targeted use of complementary medicines show considerable savings to the hospital system through reductions in avoidable hospitalisations and presentations to emergency departments.

For example, according to a 2014 Frost & Sullivan report commissioned by the Australian Self Medication Industry, women taking Vitamin D and calcium for osteoporosis would save the healthcare system \$922 million over the five years from 2015 to 2020.

In addition, natural medicine practitioners support and complement continuity of care with conventional doctors, with an increasing focus now on providing patient-centred integrated care.

In short, complementary and natural medicine must be protected so I am asking you to support:

1. A Senate Inquiry into bias against complementary medicine. Specifically, the “scientifically and administratively flawed” NHMRC Review of homeopathy (March 2015) and reviews of 16 other natural therapies as part of the Australian Government Rebate on Private Health Insurance for Natural Therapies Review (November 2015).
2. Publicly release the “missing” NHMRC review and its findings - ‘A Systematic Review of the Evidence on the Effectiveness of Homeopathy’ (Final Draft Report, August 2012).
3. Protect consumer access to the private health insurance rebates for natural therapies.
4. End bias and conflicts of interest in the Federal Health bureaucracy that seek to restrict consumer access to accurate information, complementary medicine, education, services and products.
5. Develop proactive policies to strengthen the role complementary medicine plays in contributing to community health, as per the Australia’s obligations under the ‘World Health Organisation Traditional Medicine Strategy 2014–2023’.

I support this Your Health, Your Choice campaign to protect patients' rights because I have seen how regulatory changes, reviews and recommendations are restricting their right to equitable access to healthcare of their choice.

I call on you to support me as a healthcare practitioner.

Please reply to this email outlining your position on this important issue.

You can read more about Your Health, Your Choice at:

<http://yourhealthyourchoice.com.au/>

Thank you in advance.

[Your Name]