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4 April 2024

A Mckee

By email: fyi-request-25871-5f92bdc2@requests.fyi.org.nz
Ref: H2024036621

Tēnā koe A Mckee

Response to your request for official information

Thank you for your request under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act) to the Ministry of Health – Manatū Hauora (the Ministry) on 25 February 2024 for information regarding the co-payment for prescription medicine. You requested:

“...Please provide copies of any communication between the Ministry of Health and the Pharmaceutical Council, Health New Zealand or Auckland District Health Board on the subject of discount pharmacy operators, Chemist Warehouse or Woolworths / Countdown between 2013 and 2023.”

On 5 March 2024, you were contacted by the Ministry and asked to refine the time period of your request as it would likely require a substantial amount of time to collate. On the 6 March 2024, you narrowed the time period of your request for information from 2017 to 2020.

The Ministry has conducted a search for information within scope of your refined request which returned with 138,152 items of correspondence. Even when the Ministry filtered the search results with key words like ‘*Chemist Warehouse, Countdown and discount*’ the search returned with 13,009 items.

As such, collating this information is not possible without it interfering with the day-to-day operations of the relevant team. I have considered whether charging or extending the time to compile the information would enable us to respond. However, I do not believe it is in the public interest to do so. Therefore, your request is refused under section 18(f) of the Act, as the information requested cannot be made available without substantial collation or research.

It is important to note that from 2017 to 2020, it was Government policy to allow co-payment for prescriptions, with the maximum charge for those written by approved prescribers being \$5.

The Ministry is aware of concerns in the pharmacy sector about the effects this discounting may have on local businesses and on the valuable services community pharmacies provide. However, discounting the prescription co-payment for customers is a business decision and the Commerce Commission has signalled that is not allowing discounting of the co-payment would be anti-competitive.

The policy approach to reintroducing prescription co-payments is currently being considered in line with the Government’s election commitment. The Ministry believes that access to medicines and pharmacy services an essential part of local primary and community health care.

If you wish to discuss any aspect of your request with us, including this decision, please feel free to contact the OIA Services Team on: oiagr@health.govt.nz.

Under section 28(3) of the Act, you have the right to ask the Ombudsman to review any decisions made under this request. The Ombudsman may be contacted by email at: info@ombudsman.parliament.nz or by calling 0800 802 602.

Please note that this response, with your personal details removed, may be published on the Manatū Hauora website at: www.health.govt.nz/about-ministry/information-releases/responses-official-information-act-requests.

Nāku noa, nā



Emma Prestidge
**Group Manager, Family and Community Health Policy
Strategy, Policy and Legislation | Te Pou Rautaki**