SAFE AND BEST PRACTICE DERMATOLOGY, ALLERGY AND IMMUNOLOGY SERVICES

The Australian Government is making changes to Medicare-funded dermatology, allergy and immunology services, following recommendations from the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Taskforce.

What are the changes?
The Government is introducing changes to a wide range of MBS items to improve the safety and quality of dermatology, allergy and immunology services.

Encourage best practice allergy testing
From 1 November, the Government will introduce new restrictions on allergen testing to discourage testing for more than 20 allergens at a time. This aligns with clinical guidelines, which recommend testing for specifically chosen allergens.

Allergen testing items will further be restructured into tests for environmental, food and latex, medication, and anaesthetic-related allergies. This new structure of items will provide clarity and encourage the provision of the most appropriate test.

Other changes
More than 600,000 whole body cabinet phototherapy (light treatment) services were provided in 2016. Evidence shows that excessive exposure to certain light treatment can be harmful to the skin, so the Government is introducing restrictions on how many treatments patients are able to receive each year to ensure safe levels are maintained.

Further amendments will be made to items for the removal of cancerous lesions. The item for the removal of 10 or more lesions will be consolidated to ensure people aren’t receiving unnecessary treatments. As there are very few instances where removing 10 or more lesions are required, this change will promote best practice. A number of other changes are being made to improve the safety and currency of services, including:

- Removing obsolete items for treatment of telangiectases or starburst vessels;
- Remove items for removal of warts, to encourage treatment using current therapies as a part of a standard consultation; and
- Adding a requirement for biopsy proof in the laser vermilionectomy item to ensure patient safety.

Why are these changes being made?
The changes were recommended by the MBS Review Taskforce following an extensive period of consultation.

The Taskforce is conducting a clinician-led review, and makes recommendations to the Government on how the MBS can be modernised to improve patient safety, support equity of access and reduce waste.

What does this mean for patients?
These changes will improve patient outcomes by encouraging best practice of dermatology, allergy and immunology services.

What does this mean for providers?
Providers will benefit from a modern schedule of MBS items that are aligned with best practice.

Providers will receive further information regarding these changes closer to the implementation date of 1 November 2018.