Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce

Draft report from the Pain Management Clinical Committee

2018
Important note

The views and recommendations in this review report from the clinical committee have been released for the purpose of seeking the views of stakeholders.

This report does not constitute the final position on these items, which is subject to:

- Stakeholder feedback;

Then

- Consideration by the MBS Review Taskforce;

Then if endorsed

- Consideration by the Minister for Health; and

- Government.

Stakeholders will be given an opportunity to provide comment via the targeted consultation process.

Confidentiality of comments:

If you want your feedback to remain confidential please mark it as such. It is important to be aware that confidential feedback may still be subject to access under freedom of information law.
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1. Executive summary

1.1 Introduction

The Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Taskforce (the Taskforce) is undertaking a program of work that considers how more than 5,700 items on the MBS can be aligned with contemporary clinical evidence and practice and improve health outcomes for patients. The Taskforce will also seek to identify any services that may be unnecessary, outdated or potentially unsafe.

The Taskforce is committed to providing recommendations to the Minister for Health (the Minister) that will allow the MBS to deliver on each of these four key goals:

- Affordable and universal access.
- Best-practice health services.
- Value for the individual patient.
- Value for the health system.

The Taskforce has endorsed a methodology whereby the necessary clinical review of MBS items is undertaken by clinical committees and working groups.

1.2 Review of the pain management items

The Pain Management Clinical Committee (the Committee) was established in 2018 to make recommendations to the Taskforce on MBS items in its area of responsibility, based on rapid evidence review and clinical expertise.

The Committee reviewed 62 MBS items, five of which were later referred to other clinical committees for review as they more closely related to the work of those committees.

In 2016/17, the 62 items accounted for approximately 626,129 services and $49.8 million in benefits. Over the past five years, service volumes for these items have grown at 75.9 per cent, and the cost of benefits has increased by 90.8 per cent. The growth of approximate 76 per cent is not reflective of a comparative growth in the number of people with chronic pain.

The pain-related items of the MBS can be used by a wide number of providers (incl. physicians, allied health professionals and nurse practitioners). Given this widespread use it is unlikely that there is any single reason for this growth. Reasons for this growth may reflect an increase in use that may not have been in accordance with the original intention of the item, or alternatively, be part of a move towards minimising long term opioid use.
1.3 Key Issues

Pain management is a field which touches most areas of medical practice, be it physical injury, disease, surgery or psychologically based. The specialty of pain medicine is a recent development, emerging to meet the needs of the increasingly complex world of today’s medical practitioner and their patients. Diagnosis and treatment of pain is not straightforward and relies on an understanding of multiple interactions across the fields of biopsychosocial knowledge and practice.

As the specialism of pain management matures it is clear that the structures that support it also mature. The Committee’s recommendations seek to assist the MBS to reflect this new environment. The recommendations cover:

- changes to the current pain management items to reflect best practice and increasing targeted use of the MBS through better clarity of descriptions and explanatory notes,
- deletions of outdated items and referrals to other clinical committees to ensure thorough and appropriate review,
- suggested new areas of coverage that would provide significant benefits to patient health and improve value for money across the health system, and
- where it’s seen that the complete medical service could include imaging as part of clinical best practice, the Committee is of the opinion that MBS descriptors should be updated to reference this inclusion and the fee should be increased to support the consolidation of imaging options with the respective item.

1.4 Key recommendations

The Committee has made some 32 recommendations across three major areas – recommendations for change, deletion and referrals and new items.

The key recommendations from each area are outlined below:

1.4.1 Recommendations for change

- Removal of co claiming of nerve blocks for the diagnosis and management of chronic pain with surgical items, in keeping with the philosophy of a complete medical service.
- Revision of descriptors for spinal injections for management of chronic pain to bring greater clarity about clinical practice and also to differentiate them from radiological diagnostic procedures, which have their own item numbers.
- Addition of explanatory notes to guide best practice use of implanted devices for the management of chronic pain.
1.4.2 Recommendations for deletions and referrals

- The Committee identified a small number of obsolete items that were not reflective of current or best practice – refer to Recommendation 23.

- The Committee also identified a number of items worth reviewing over the coming years, mostly due to continuing changes in best practice or technology. Most of these are referred to within the recommendations for change. Only one was identified as requiring future review around co-claiming – refer to Recommendation 24.

- The Committee also referred five items to two other clinical committees as usage of those items was predominately in their specialist areas – refer to Recommendation 25.

1.4.3 Recommendations for new items

- The Committee recommends that the MBS support high value care of chronic pain, including non-cancer pain, through the support of multidisciplinary approaches including planning, monitoring and review through consultations, group pain management and telehealth. These recommendations recognise the emerging and established best practice of multidisciplinary approaches, for example Mental Health Care Planning.

1.4.4 Recommendations for future review

- The Committee recommends a number of items be further reviewed as part of a future or ongoing review process for various reasons such as:
  - to ascertain the impact of recommendations made by the PMCC,
  - to review new evidence or guidelines currently being developed/researched, and
  - to review certain items in line with themes which are overarching across the MBS as a whole, such as, the consideration to items forming, where possible, a complete medical service.

1.5 Consumer impact

All recommendations have been summarised for consumers in Appendix B – Summary for consumers. The summary describes the medical service, the recommendation of the clinical experts and the reasoning behind the recommendations. A consumer impact statement is available in Section 6.

The Committee believes it is important to find out from consumers if they will be helped or disadvantaged by the recommendations—and how and why. Following targeted
consultation with the Consumer's Health Forum, the Committee will assess the advice in order to make sure that all the important concerns are addressed. The Taskforce will then provide the recommendations to Government.

Both patients and clinicians are expected to benefit from these recommendations because they address concerns regarding patient safety and quality of care, and because they take steps to simplify the MBS and make it easier to use and understand. In addition, the Committee's recommendations promote the provision of higher value medical care, which can reduce unnecessary medications, procedures and related out-of-pocket fees for patients, while supporting access to modern effective procedures.

1.6 Next Steps

The recommendations from the Committee are released for stakeholder consultation. The Committees will consider feedback from stakeholders then provide recommendations to the Taskforce in a finalised Review Report.

The Taskforce considers the Review Reports from clinical committees and any stakeholder feedback before making recommendations, if required, to the Minister for Health, for consideration by Government.
2. About the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review

2.1 Medicare and the MBS

2.1.1 What is Medicare?

Medicare is Australia’s universal health scheme. It enables all Australian residents (and some overseas visitors) to have access to a wide range of health services and medicines at little or no cost.

Introduced in 1984, Medicare has three components:

- Free public hospital services for public patients.
- Subsidised drugs covered by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).
- Subsidised health professional services listed on the MBS.

2.2 What is the MBS?

The MBS is a listing of the health professional services subsidised by the Australian Government. There are more than 5,700 MBS items, which provide benefits to patients for a comprehensive range of services, including consultations, diagnostic tests and operations.

2.3 What is the MBS Review Taskforce?

The Government established the MBS Review Taskforce (the Taskforce) as an advisory body to review all of the 5,700 MBS items to ensure they are aligned with contemporary clinical evidence and practice and improve health outcomes for patients. The Taskforce will also modernise the MBS by identifying any services that may be unnecessary, outdated or potentially unsafe. The MBS Review (the Review) is clinician-led, and there are no targets for savings attached to the review.

2.3.1 What are the goals of the Taskforce?

The Taskforce is committed to providing recommendations to the Minister that will allow the MBS to deliver on each of four key goals:

- Affordable and universal access — the evidence demonstrates that the MBS supports very good access to primary care services for most Australians, particularly in urban Australia. However, despite increases in the specialist
workforce over the last decade, access to many specialist services remains problematic, with some rural patients being particularly under-serviced.

- **Best practice health services** — one of the core objectives of the MBS Review is to modernise the MBS, ensuring that individual items and their descriptors are consistent with contemporary best practice and the evidence base when possible. Although the Medical Services Advisory Committee (MSAC) plays a crucial role in thoroughly evaluating new services, the vast majority of existing MBS items pre-date this process and have never been reviewed.

- **Value for the individual patient** — another core objective of the MBS Review is to support the delivery of services that are appropriate to the patient’s needs, provide real clinical value and do not expose the patient to unnecessary risk or expense.

- **Value for the health system** — achieving the above elements of the vision will go a long way to achieving improved value for the health system overall. Reducing the volume of services that provide little or no clinical benefit will enable resources to be redirected to new and existing services that have proven benefit and are underused, particularly for patients who cannot readily access those services currently.

### 2.4 The Taskforce’s approach

The Taskforce is reviewing existing MBS items, with a primary focus on ensuring that individual items and usage meet the definition of best practice. Within the Taskforce’s brief, there is considerable scope to review and provide advice on all aspects that would contribute to a modern, transparent and responsive system. This includes not only making recommendations about adding new items or services to the MBS, but also about an MBS structure that could better accommodate changing health service models.

The Taskforce has made a conscious decision to be ambitious in its approach, and to seize this unique opportunity to recommend changes to modernise the MBS at all levels, from the clinical detail of individual items, to administrative rules and mechanisms, to structural, whole-of-MBS issues. The Taskforce will also develop a mechanism for an ongoing review of the MBS once the current review has concluded.

As the Review is clinician-led, the Taskforce decided that clinical committees should conduct the detailed review of MBS items. The committees are broad-based in their membership, and members have been appointed in an individual capacity, rather than as representatives of any organisation.
The Taskforce asked the committees to review MBS items using a framework based on Professor Adam Elshaug’s appropriate use criteria (Elshaug, 2016). The framework consists of seven steps:

1. Develop an initial fact base for all items under consideration, drawing on the relevant data and literature.

2. Identify items that are obsolete, are of questionable clinical value,¹ are misused² and/or pose a risk to patient safety. This step includes prioritising items as “priority 1”, “priority 2” or “priority 3”, using a prioritisation methodology (described in more detail below).

3. Identify any issues, develop hypotheses for recommendations and create a work plan (including establishing working groups, when required) to arrive at recommendations for each item.

4. Gather further data, clinical guidelines and relevant literature in order to make provisional recommendations and draft accompanying rationales, as per the work plan. This process begins with priority 1 items, continues with priority 2 items and concludes with priority 3 items. This step also involves consultation with relevant stakeholders within the committee, working groups, and relevant colleagues or colleges. For complex cases, full appropriate use criteria were developed for the item’s explanatory notes.

5. Review the provisional recommendations and the accompanying rationales, and gather further evidence as required.

6. Finalise the recommendations in preparation for broader stakeholder consultation.

7. Incorporate feedback gathered during stakeholder consultation and finalise a clinical review report, which provides recommendations for the Taskforce.

All MBS items will be reviewed during the course of the Review. However, given the breadth of the review and its timeframe, each clinical committee has to develop a work plan and assign priorities, keeping in mind the objectives of the review. Committees use a robust prioritisation methodology to focus their attention and resources on the most important items requiring review. This was determined based on a combination of two standard metrics, derived from the appropriate use criteria (Elshaug, 2016):

- Service volume.

¹ The use of an intervention that evidence suggests confers no or very little benefit on patients; or where the risk of harm exceeds the likely benefit; or, more broadly, where the added costs of the intervention do not provide proportional added benefits.

² The use of MBS services for purposes other than those intended. This includes a range of behaviours, from failing to adhere to particular item descriptors or rules through to deliberate fraud.
The likelihood that the item needed to be revised, determined by indicators such as identified safety concerns, geographic or temporal variation, delivery irregularity, the potential misuse of indications or other concerns raised by the clinical committee (such as inappropriate co-claiming).
3. About the Pain Management Clinical Committee

The Pain Management Clinical Committee (the Committee) was established in June 2018 to make recommendations to the Taskforce on MBS items within its remit, based on rapid evidence review and clinical expertise.

3.1 Pain Management Clinical Committee members

The Committee consists of 17 members, whose names, positions/organisations and declared conflicts of interest are listed in Table 1.

Table: Pain Management Clinical Committee members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/organisation</th>
<th>Declared conflict of interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Chris Hayes</td>
<td>Director of Hunter Integrated Pain Service; specialist pain medicine physician; immediate past Dean, Faculty of Pain Medicine, Australia and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists.</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Lindy Roberts</td>
<td>Specialist anaesthetist and specialist pain medicine physician; former President, Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists.</td>
<td>Part-time employee (8hrs/week) of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/Prof Carolyn Arnold</td>
<td>Specialist Pain Medicine Physician and also in Rehabilitation Medicine; past President, Australian Pain Society.</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Marc Russo</td>
<td>Specialist pain medicine physician; founding member and current Secretary of the Australian Chapter of the International Neuromodulation Society.</td>
<td>Managing director of a pain clinic in Newcastle, NSW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Tim Semple</td>
<td>Anaesthetist and specialist pain medicine physician; past President Australian Pain Society; board member Painaustralia; current President, Australian Pain Relief Association.</td>
<td>Previously on the board of Australian Pain Society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Andrew Zacest –</td>
<td>Consultant neurosurgeon; Clinical Associate Professor, University of Adelaide; board member, Faculty of Pain Medicine (ANZCA).</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj/Prof Richard Chye-</td>
<td>Pain and palliative medicine physician; Director,</td>
<td>Currently a Fellow at the Pain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pain Management Clinical Committee, 2018
### Conflicts of interest

All members of the Taskforce, clinical committees and working groups are asked to declare any conflicts of interest at the start of their involvement and reminded to update their

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Position/organisation</th>
<th>Declared conflict of interest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Graham Rice</td>
<td>Specialist pain medicine physician, psychiatrist and anaesthetist; foundation board member, Faculty of Pain Medicine (ANZCA).</td>
<td>On the Australian Pain Society board and helped develop the Queensland Work Cover guidelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Michael Nicholas</td>
<td>Professor and clinical psychologist, Pain Management Research Institute, University of Sydney at Royal North Shore Hospital.</td>
<td>Author, Manage Your Pain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Ian Thong</td>
<td>Specialist pain medicine physician and former GP; Medical director of Persistent Pain Services, Gold Coast University hospital.</td>
<td>Director of Pain Services at Gold Coast Hospital and a former rural GP.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Gus Ferguson</td>
<td>Interventional and general radiologist.</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr John Stubbs</td>
<td>Member, Medical Services Advisory Committee (ESC); consumer representative.</td>
<td>Developing cancer pain guidelines with the Cancer Institute of Australia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Lesley Brydon</td>
<td>Founding CEO of Painaustralia; consumer representative.</td>
<td>Founding CEO of Painaustralia, Executive Director of the National Pain Summit and long term pain patient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Marilla Druitt</td>
<td>Gynaecologist Obstetrician, Persistent Pelvic Pain Clinic University Hospital Geelong.</td>
<td>Obstetrician specialising in laparoscopic surgery and endometriosis; works at a public pain clinic. Affiliations with the Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia and International Pelvic Pain Society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Lee Gruner</td>
<td>Immediate past President of the Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators, Taskforce ex officio.</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Michael Besser</td>
<td>Neurosurgeon, Taskforce surgical ex officio.</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/Prof Tillman Boesel</td>
<td>Specialist pain medicine physician with expertise in neuropathic pain, and interventional pain therapies.</td>
<td>Medical Director of pain management practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 3.2 Conflicts of interest

All members of the Taskforce, clinical committees and working groups are asked to declare any conflicts of interest at the start of their involvement and reminded to update their
declarations at the beginning of each committee or working group meeting. A complete list of declared conflicts of interest can be viewed in Table 1 above.

It is noted that the majority of the Committee members share a common conflict of interest in reviewing items that are a source of revenue for them (i.e. Committee members claim the items under review). This conflict is inherent in a clinician-led process and, having been acknowledged by the Committee and the Taskforce, it was agreed that this should not prevent a clinician from participating in the review of items.

3.3 Areas of responsibility of the Committee

The Committee reviewed 62 MBS items, five of which were later referred to other clinical committees for review as they more closely related to the work of those committees.

Many of the items assigned to the Committee are predominantly utilised by specialty groups beyond pain medicine including diagnostic radiologists, neurosurgeons, GPs, general surgeons, anaesthetists, cardiothoracic surgeons, orthopaedic surgeons, ENT specialists, haematologists, ophthalmologists, plastic and reconstructive surgeons, vascular specialists and rehabilitation specialists.

The items allocated to the Committee to review were determined with consideration of advice from the Faculty of Pain Medicine of the Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists (ANZCA).

In financial year 2016/17, the 62 items accounted for approximately 626,129 services and $52.7 million in benefits. Over the past five years, service volumes for these items have grown at 75.9 per cent, and the cost of benefits has increased by 90.8 per cent. The growth of approximate 76 per cent is not reflective of a comparative growth in the number of people with chronic pain.

The pain related items of the MBS are not only used by medical practitioners but also by other practitioners including allied health professionals and nurse practitioners. Given this widespread use it is unlikely that there is any single underlying reason for rising service costs; rather the growth may reflect the significance of pain across many areas of medical practice. There is the possibility that some of the growth may be part of a move towards minimising long term opioid use. However, it is also possible that some of the increase in use may not have been in accordance with the original intention of the item number and may not reflect best practice.
Figure 1: Drivers of pain management item growth - 2011/12–2016/17

Percentage increase represents the average compound annual growth rate.
Source: Publicly available data from Department of Human Services and Australian Bureau of Statistics. All items in the Pain Management Clinical Committee scope, 2011-12 and 2016-17, by date of processing. The graph covers all 62 items reviewed prior to 5 items being referred.

3.4 Summary of the committee’s review approach

The Committee completed a review of its items across five full committee meetings (two teleconferences and three in-person meetings). There were three working groups formed to consider specific areas of the MBS grouped by the type of procedures:

- nerve block and spinal injections,
- surgical co-claiming, and
- implanted devices.

Members self-nominated by area of interest and expertise, with membership of each working group outlined in the table below. Each working group had one meeting and provided draft recommendations to the committee for the items within their remit.
Table 2: Working Group Memberships and Items Considered

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEMS</th>
<th>Working Group</th>
<th>Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14209, 18213, 18222, 18225, 18230, 18240, 18242, 18248, 18250, 18256, 18258, 18260, 18268, 18274, 18276, 18282, 18284, 18286, 18290, 18292, 18294, 18296, 18298, 39013, 39100, 39115, 39118, 39121, 39124, 39323</td>
<td>Nerve Blocks and Spinal Injections</td>
<td>Dr Gus Ferguson, Dr Marc Russo, Dr Andrew Zacest, Assoc Prof Tillman Boesel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18228, 18232, 18234, 18236, 18238, 18244, 18252, 18254, 18262, 18264, 18266, 18270, 18272, 18278, 18280, 18288</td>
<td>Surgical Co-Claiming</td>
<td>Dr Lindy Roberts, Dr Marilla Druitt, Dr Tim Semple, Dr Ian Thong, Dr Andrew Zacest, Assoc Prof Tillman Boesel, Dr Marc Russo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14218, 14221, 39125, 39126, 39127, 39128, 39130, 39131, 39133, 39134, 39135, 39136, 39137, 39138, 39139</td>
<td>Implanted Devices</td>
<td>Prof Michael Nicholas, Assoc Prof Tillman Boesel, Assoc Prof Caroline Arnold, Dr Andrew Zacest, Dr Marc Russo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendations and rationales contained in this report were developed during these meetings.

The review drew on various types of MBS data, including:

- data on utilisation of items (services, benefits, patients, clinicians and growth rates),
- service provision (type of clinician, geography of service provision),
- patients (demographics and services per patient),
- co-claiming or episodes of services (same-day claiming and claiming with specific items over time), and
- additional clinician and patient-level data, when required.

The review also drew on data presented in the relevant literature and clinical guidelines, all of which are referenced in the report. Guidelines and literature were identified through medical journals and other sources, such as professional societies.
In addition, the Committee and its relevant stakeholder groups agree that persistent pain is a chronic illness and treatment should focus on management and functional gains rather than treating the pain alone (Wan, August 2014). Consultations with specialist pain medicine physicians, and allied health professionals, as well as the development of multidisciplinary care plans and treatment pathways, are central to effectively managing chronic pain. This broad approach is equally applicable to cancer related pain and in preventing the progression of acute pain to chronicity. Consultation items, including multidisciplinary care and care planning items have been allocated to other clinical committees, working groups or reference groups of the Review. The Committee believes these elements are consistent with the terms of reference of the Review as a whole.

### 3.5 No change

The Committee’s examination indicated a number of items where there were no concerns regarding safety, access, value or contemporary best practice.

Also, the Committee determined that there was continuing best practice use of certain items for rare conditions even if usage was identified as low.

The items identified by the Committee for no change are listed below in Table 3.

**Table 3: Items identified as requiring no change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Schedule fee</th>
<th>Services FY2016/17</th>
<th>Benefits FY2016/17</th>
<th>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18240</td>
<td>RETROBULBAR OR PERIBULBAR INJECTION of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$93.60</td>
<td>9641</td>
<td>$805,730</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18242</td>
<td>GREATER OCCIPITAL NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$37.65</td>
<td>5658</td>
<td>$195,475</td>
<td>77.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18248</td>
<td>PHRENIC NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$67</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18250</td>
<td>SPINAL ACCESSORY NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>$955</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18256</td>
<td>SUPRASCAPULAR NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>3,036</td>
<td>$152,369</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18268</td>
<td>OBTURATOR NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>$8,604</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18298</td>
<td>CERVICAL OR THORACIC SYMPATHETIC CHAIN, destruction by a neurolytic agent</td>
<td>$176.00</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>$9,869</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Descriptor</td>
<td>Schedule fee</td>
<td>Services FY2016/17</td>
<td>Benefits FY2016/17</td>
<td>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39121</td>
<td>PERCUTANEOUS CORDOTOMY (Aaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$631.75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39124</td>
<td>CORDOTOMY OR MYELOTOMY, partial or total laminectomy for, or operation for dorsal root entry zone (Drez) lesion (Aaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$1,616.80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Recommendations for change

4.1 Nerve Blocks and Spinal Injections

Table 4: Nerve Blocks and Spinal Injections items considered by working group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Schedule fee</th>
<th>Services FY2016/17</th>
<th>Benefits FY2016/17</th>
<th>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14209</td>
<td>INTRAARTERIAL INFUSION or retrograde intravenous perfusion of a sympatholytic agent</td>
<td>$88.70</td>
<td>873</td>
<td>$72,229</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18213</td>
<td>INTRAVENOUS REGIONAL ANAESTHESIA of limb by retrograde perfusion</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>399</td>
<td>$29,350</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18222</td>
<td>INFUSION OF A THERAPEUTIC SUBSTANCE to maintain regional anaesthesia or analgesia, subsequent injection or revision of, where the period of continuous medical practitioner attendance is 15 minutes or less</td>
<td>$37.65</td>
<td>28107</td>
<td>$87,9078</td>
<td>4.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18225</td>
<td>INFUSION OF A THERAPEUTIC SUBSTANCE to maintain regional anaesthesia or analgesia, subsequent injection or revision of, where the period of continuous medical practitioner attendance is more than 15 minutes</td>
<td>$50.05</td>
<td>21186</td>
<td>$869,251</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18230</td>
<td>INTRATHECAL or EPIDURAL INJECTION of neurolytic substance (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$238.45</td>
<td>5290</td>
<td>$1,052,630</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18240</td>
<td>RETROBULBAR OR PERIBULBAR INJECTION of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$93.60</td>
<td>9641</td>
<td>$805,730</td>
<td>-4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18242</td>
<td>GREATER OCCIPITAL NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$37.65</td>
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<td>77.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>18248</td>
<td>PHRENIC NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>$67</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18250</td>
<td>SPINAL ACCESSORY NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>$955</td>
<td>-1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Descriptor</td>
<td>Schedule fee</td>
<td>Services FY2016/17</td>
<td>Benefits FY2016/17</td>
<td>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18256</td>
<td>SUPRASCAPULAR NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>3,036</td>
<td>$152,369</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18258</td>
<td>INTERCOSTAL NERVE (single), injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>$21,925</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18260</td>
<td>INTERCOSTAL NERVES (multiple), injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>4,719</td>
<td>$320,622</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18268</td>
<td>OBTURATOR NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>$8,604</td>
<td>22.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18274</td>
<td>PARAVETEBRAL, CERVICAL, THORACIC, LUMBAR, SACRAL OR COCCYGEAL NERVES, injection of an anaesthetic agent, (single vertebral level)</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>63,985</td>
<td>$4,816,805</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18276</td>
<td>PARAVETEBRAL NERVES, injection of an anaesthetic agent, (multiple levels)</td>
<td>$124.85</td>
<td>18,668</td>
<td>$1,888,203</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18282</td>
<td>CAROTID SINUS, injection of an anaesthetic agent, as an independent percutaneous procedure</td>
<td>$100.80</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>$2,139</td>
<td>25.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18284</td>
<td>STELLATE GANGLION, injection of an anaesthetic agent, (cervical sympathetic block) (Aaes.)</td>
<td>$147.65</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>$13,750</td>
<td>-1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18286</td>
<td>LUMBAR OR THORACIC NERVES, injection of an anaesthetic agent, (paravertebral sympathetic block) (Aaes.)</td>
<td>$147.65</td>
<td>2,289</td>
<td>$353,964</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18290</td>
<td>CRANIAL NERVE OTHER THAN TRIGEMINAL, destruction by a neurolytic agent, not being a service associated with the injection of botulinum toxin (Aaes.)</td>
<td>$249.75</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>$1,199</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18292</td>
<td>NERVE BRANCH, destruction by a neurolytic agent, not being a service to which any other item in this Group applies or a service associated with the injection of botulinum toxin except those services to which item 18354 applies (Aaes.)</td>
<td>$124.85</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>$35,939</td>
<td>14.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Descriptor</td>
<td>Schedule fee</td>
<td>Services FY2016/17</td>
<td>Benefits FY2016/17</td>
<td>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18294</td>
<td>COELIAC PLEXUS OR SPLANCHNIC NERVES, destruction by a neurolytic agent (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$176.00</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>$9,862</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18296</td>
<td>LUMBAR SYMPATHETIC CHAIN, destruction by a neurolytic agent (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$150.55</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>$14,103</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18298</td>
<td>CERVICAL OR THORACIC SYMPATHETIC CHAIN, destruction by a neurolytic agent (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$176.00</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>$9,869</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39013</td>
<td>INJECTION UNDER IMAGE INTENSIFICATION with 1 or more of contrast media, local anaesthetic or corticosteroid into 1 or more zygo-apophyseal or costo-transverse joints or 1 or more primary posterior rami of spinal nerves (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$109.15</td>
<td>54,495</td>
<td>$4,706,643</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39100</td>
<td>INJECTION OF PRIMARY BRANCH OF TRIGEMINAL NERVE with alcohol, cortisone, phenol, or similar substance (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$237.60</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>$20,522</td>
<td>-41.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39115</td>
<td>PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY of posterior divisions (or rami) of spinal nerves by any method, including any associated spinal, epidural or regional nerve block (payable once only in a 30 day period) (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$75.30</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>$4,190</td>
<td>-11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39118</td>
<td>PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY for facet joint denervation by radio-frequency probe or cryoprobe using radiological imaging control (Anaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$297.85</td>
<td>68,808</td>
<td>$7,289,868</td>
<td>19.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39121</td>
<td>PERCUTANEOUS CORDOTOMY (Anaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$631.75</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39124</td>
<td>CORDOTOMY OR MIELOTOMY, partial or total laminectomy for, or operation for dorsal root entry zone (Drez) lesion (Anaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$1,616.80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39130</td>
<td>EPIDURAL LEAD, percutaneous placement of, including intraoperative test stimulation, for the management of chronic intractable neuropathic pain or pain from refractory angina pectoris, to a maximum of 4 leads (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$674.15</td>
<td>3,337</td>
<td>$1,226,087</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Descriptor</td>
<td>Schedule fee</td>
<td>Services FY2016/17</td>
<td>Benefits FY2016/17</td>
<td>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39323</td>
<td>PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY by cryotherapy or radiofrequency lesion generator, not being a service to which another item applies (Anaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$276.80</td>
<td>17,417</td>
<td>$1,807,800</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.1 **Recommendation 1 – Clarifying item 18213 - intravenous regional anaesthesia**

The Committee recommends:

a. Deleting item number 14209

b. Amending item 18213 descriptor to:

**Item 18213**

INTRAVENOUS REGIONAL ANAESTHESIA of limb by retrograde perfusion of local anaesthetic agent.

4.1.1.1 **Rationale 1**

The items 14209 and 18213 provide for intra-arterial infusion or retrograde intravenous perfusion of a sympatholytic agent and intravenous regional anaesthesia of limb by retrograde perfusion respectively.

This recommendation focuses on ensuring best practice based on scientific evidence and increasing clarity. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee considered that item 14209 was no longer required as current scientific evidence does not support the use of a sympatholytic agent as described in 14209. With the removal of “sympatholytic agent” from the item descriptor, this item becomes redundant. The Committee were of the opinion that the item may be being inappropriately used for regional anaesthetic of a limb which is covered by item number 18213.

- The Committee believes it’s more appropriate for providers to use item 18213, for retrograde intravenous perfusion as the use of local anaesthetic for pain management has benefit in select cases.
The Committee believes that item 18213 remains as contemporary clinical best practice in select cases and that the descriptor change will clarify that other agents are not supported by the evidence.

4.1.2   Recommendation 2 – Clarifying items 18222 and 18225 - continuous infusion by catheter

The Committee recommends amending the item descriptors to (additions in bold):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 18222</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuous</strong> infusion <strong>by catheter</strong> of a therapeutic substance <strong>(not contrast agent)</strong> to maintain regional anaesthesia or analgesia, subsequent injection or revision of, where the period of continuous medical practitioner attendance is 15 minutes or less.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 18225</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Continuous</strong> infusion <strong>by catheter</strong> of a therapeutic substance <strong>(not contrast agent)</strong> to maintain regional anaesthesia or analgesia, subsequent injection or revision of, where the period of continuous medical practitioner attendance is more than 15 minutes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.1.2.1   Rationale 2

This recommendation focuses on increasing the clarity of its intended use of the items and ensuring value for the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee was of the opinion that these items are at times being used when injecting contrast in diagnostic radiology procedures despite this not providing regional anaesthesia and when there are adequate numbers available for those procedures.
- The Committee considers that amending the descriptors will ensure that these items are not used for diagnostic radiology purposes.

4.1.3   Recommendation 3 – Clarifying item 18230 - intrathecal or epidural injection of neurolytic substance

The Committee recommends amending the item descriptor to (additions in bold):
4.1.3.1 Rationale 3

This item provides for intrathecal or epidural injection of neurolytic substance.

This recommendation focuses on increasing the clarity of its intended use and ensuring greater value for the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee are of the opinion that amending the descriptors will ensure the use of this item is not for diagnostic radiology procedures that use contrast. The item should not be used for diagnostic radiology purposes as adequate item numbers already exist for that practice and contrast is not a neurolytic substance.

- It is expected that diagnostic radiology procedures removed from item 18230 will be absorbed by the revised item 18232 (covering epidural injection of contrast) – refer to Recommendation 4.

- Intrathecal injection of contrast is already adequately covered by myelography item numbers (56219, 56259, 59724, 59725). Item 18232 has a lower fee which is justified by the Committee as they consider this is the appropriate item number for non-neurolytic epidural injection.

- In amending the descriptor, the Committee have added additional information in relation to route and treatment in order to better clarify the item scope and encourage appropriate claiming.

---

4.1.4 Recommendation 4 – Clarifying item 18232 - intrathecal or epidural injection of non-neurolytic substances

The Committee recommends:

a. expanding this descriptor to include epidural injection with local anaesthetic and steroid, specifically including the transforaminal route (additions in bold):

Item 18232

INTRATHECAL or EPIDURAL INJECTION, (including translaminar and transforaminal approaches), of non-neurolytic substance(s) including anaesthetic, steroid and contrast, not being a service to which another item in this Group applies (Anaes.)

b. amending item 18230 (removing contrast) may result in epidural contrast injection being absorbed by revised item 18232. There is a decrease in fees associated with this absorption which is justified by the Committee as they consider this is the appropriate item number for this portion of the procedure. The Committee estimates that there will be a 10% increase in claims for item 18232 as a result of this absorption, and

c. deletion of item 39140 and for claiming to be absorbed by item 18230.

Note: see also Recommendation 24 for further recommended changes

4.1.4.1 Rationale 4

This recommendation focuses on increasing the clarity of its intended use and ensuring greater value for the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee consider that amending the descriptors for items 18232 (and 18230 – refer to Recommendation 3) will provide item numbers that clearly incorporate the high volume service of transforaminal epidural injection that is currently being claimed by some practitioners under item 18230.

- Currently there is not a clear item number for the use of performing transforaminal epidural injections. By making this item descriptor clear (item 18232), and modifying other items to exclude usage for this purpose, clarity is provided about the type of service and a more appropriate fee applied.
4.1.5 Recommendation 5 – Recognising best practice in item 18276 - paravertebral nerves

The Committee recommends:

a. the deletion of item 18274 with any services currently claimed under item 18274 to be absorbed by item 18276,

b. changing the item 18276 descriptor to (additions in bold):

```
Item 18276
Paravertebral nerves including medial branch of primary posterior rami, injection of an anaesthetic agent, under image guidance.
```

c. the fees for item 18276 ($124.85) be reduced to $109.15 as the item is being amalgamated with 18274 which has a fee of $88.65, and

d. item 18276 be reviewed in two to five years to ascertain the impact.

4.1.5.1 Rationale 5

This recommendation focuses on best practice, clarifying appropriate use of items, and ensuring greater value for the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee recommends the deletion of item 18274 as it has been determined that a multi-level injection is required to block the nerve supply to even a single facet joint.
- This recommendation expands the item number specifically for the high use service of diagnostic medial branch block, improving access.
- The intention is that current claiming under item 39013 for medial branch blocks will be absorbed under item 18276. This will allow item 39013 to be used exclusively for intra-articular lumbar zygapophyseal joint blocks – refer to Recommendation 10.
4.1.6  Recommendation 6 – Clarifying item 18284 - sympathetic chain (including stellate ganglion)

The Committee recommends amending the descriptor to (additions in bold):

```
Item 18284
Cervical or thoracic sympathetic chain injection of an anaesthetic agent (Anaes.)
```

4.1.6.1  Rationale 6

This recommendation focuses on clarifying intended use to reflect practice across items. It is based on the following assessment:

- This change brings the local anaesthetic items into alignment with the neurolytic sympathetic chain blocks.
- The clinical opinion of the Committee is that thoracic sympathetic chain local anaesthetic blocks are currently already being claimed under item 18284 as the stellate ganglion sits in the cervicothoracic region. This reflects the comparable technical difficulty of the procedure at cervical and thoracic levels.
- The recommended change will simply provide a more accurate description of current practice.

4.1.7  Recommendation 7 – Clarifying item 18286 - pelvic sympathetic blocks

The Committee recommends amending the item descriptor to (additions in bold):

```
Item 18286
LUMBAR or PELVIC SYMPATHETIC CHAIN, injection of an anaesthetic agent (Anaes.)
```

4.1.7.1  Rationale 7

This recommendation focuses on clarifying appropriate use of items, and ensuring greater value for the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The clinical opinion of the Committee is that the pelvic region is already currently being claimed under this item number and doesn’t anticipate any increase in claiming practices as a result of this recommendation.
• The Committee are aware that pelvic sympathetic blocks are already claimed under item 18286 due to there not being another appropriate item number for use.

• Pelvic sympathetic blocks are considered to have the same evidence base for utility as other sympathetic blocks

• This suggested change will bring the local anaesthetic items into alignment with the neurolytic sympathetic chain blocks.

4.1.8 Recommendation 8 – Reflecting best practice in items 18290 -18294 - neurolytic agent treatment

The Committee recommends amending the item descriptors to (additions in bold):

**Item 18290**
CRANIAL NERVE OTHER THAN TRIGEMINAL, destruction by a neurolytic agent *(under image guidance)*, not being a service associated with the injection of botulinum toxin

and

**Item 18292**
NERVE BRANCH, destruction by a neurolytic agent *(under image guidance)*, not being a service to which any other item in this Group applies or a service associated with the injection of botulinum toxin except those services to which item 18354 applies (Anaes.)

and

**Item 18294**
NERVE BRANCH, destruction by a neurolytic agent *(under image guidance)*, not being a service to which any other item in this Group applies or a service associated with the injection of botulinum toxin except those services to which item 18354 applies (Anaes.)
4.1.8.1  Rationale 8

This recommendation focuses on recognising current best practice in the items. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee considers adding ‘under image guidance’ to the item numbers will improve safety for patients as it is currently accepted best practice to perform these procedures under image guidance (Mercadante, et al., 2015).

4.1.9  Recommendation 9 – Clarifying item 18296 - pelvic region of the sympathetic chain

The Committee recommends amending the item descriptor to (additions in bold):

Item 18296
LUMBAR OR PELVIC SYMPATHETIC CHAIN, destruction by a neurolytic agent (Anaes.)

4.1.9.1  Rationale 9

This recommendation focuses on recognising current best practice in the items. It is based on the following assessment:

- There is currently no item number which provides access to the pelvic region of the sympathetic chain for neurolytic injection. The Committee considers it is likely that pelvic sympathetic chain neurolytic blocks are currently being performed using this item number.

- This change will reduce confusion with billing practices and is not expected to change the number of claims per year.

- Pelvic sympathetic chain destruction by a neurolytic agent is considered to have the same evidence base for utility as other sympathetic blocks (Gunduz & Kenis-Coskun, 2017).
4.1.10 Recommendation 10 – Reflecting best practice in item 39013 - intra-articular injection

a) The Committee recommends amending the item descriptor to (additions in bold):

**Item 39013**

INJECTION UNDER IMAGE GUIDANCE with 1 or more of contrast media, local anaesthetic or corticosteroid into 1 or more lumbar zygapophyseal joints. (Anaes.)

b) The Committee recommends amending the explanatory notes for item 39013 to include the following statement “Where intra-articular zygapophyseal joint injection provides a short term effect that is repeatedly observed, consideration should be given to longer lasting pain management techniques.”

4.1.10.1 Rationale 10

This recommendation focuses on recognising current best practice and improving patient safety. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee recommends deleting ‘1 or more primary posterior rami of spinal nerves’ and replacing ‘under image intensification’ with ‘under image guidance’. This will make the item number applicable only to intra-articular injection.

- There is currently widespread claiming of this item number for diagnostic medial branch blocks which the Committee considers is better suited to item 18276. These changes will restrict diagnostic medial branch blocks to item 18276. As a result use of item 39013 is expected to decrease.

- The Committee recommends deleting ‘or costo-transverse’ from the item descriptor as this relates to the thoracic vertebral region therefore restricting this item to the lumbar region of the spine only as the evidence suggests facet injections have little utility and considerable technical difficulty at cervical and thoracic levels. (Celik B, 2011) Facet injections at lumbar level may have utility in selected cases particularly where medial branch procedures are not technically possible or where radiofrequency neurotomy is contra-indicated (Kawu AA, Olawepo A, Salami AO, 2011).

- The Committee is of the opinion that adding ‘under image guidance’ will improve safety for patients. Co-claiming data reflects that in 80% of cases imaging is being performed when undertaking this procedure, therefore it is currently accepted best practice to perform these procedures under image guidance.
• The Committee considered restricting use of CT guidance with this item (due to concerns about safety and radiation exposure) however it determined that there was sufficient evidence to support the safety and efficacy of CT guidance. The Committee recommends that this item be reviewed in 2 years.

4.1.11 Recommendation 11 – Clarifying item 39100 - trigeminal nerve

The Committee recommends amending the item descriptor to (additions in bold):

```
Item 39100
INJECTION OF A PRIMARY BRANCH OF TRIGEMINAL NERVE (ophthalmic, maxillary or mandibular branches) with alcohol, steroid, phenol, or similar substance (under image guidance) (Anaes.)
```

4.1.11.1 Rationale 11

This recommendation focuses on improving patient safety and reflects best practice. It is based on the following assessment:

• The recommendation’s intention is to provide clarity around what is considered as a ‘primary branch’ of the trigeminal nerve as there are three major branches.

• The committee recommends amending the word ‘cortisone’ to ‘steroid’ for consistency with other item numbers.

• The Committee were of the opinion that adding ‘under image guidance’ to the above item number to improve safety for patients.

• The Committee also considers that use of image guidance is current best practice (Zakrzewska J.M., 2011).

4.1.12 Recommendation 12 – Clarifying item 39118 - percutaneous neurotomy

The Committee recommends:

a. removing the assistant fees associated with this item,

b. change wording from ‘facet’ to ‘zygapophyseal’ joint to achieve consistent wording with item 39013,

c. five additional new items be created covering the:

- Three regions of the spine (cervical, thoracic, lumbar) and,
- Left and right sides of the body,

d. a restriction of three episodes per year for each region of the spine and side of the 
   body, whereby an individual could potentially claim up to 18 episodes per year in 
   total across the left and right sides of the body and the spinal regions,

e. an increase in MBS fee for the cervical region of the spine due to the risk and 
   complexity involved in performing this procedure in that area of the spine being 
   greater than that of other areas, and

f. the new item descriptors be (additions in bold):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 39118</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **LEFT CERVICAL PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY** for zygapophyseal joint denervation by 
  radio-frequency probe or cryoprobe using radiological imaging control (Anaes.) |

and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **RIGHT CERVICAL PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY** for zygapophyseal joint denervation by 
  radio-frequency probe or cryoprobe using radiological imaging control (Anaes.) |

and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **LEFT THORACIC PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY** for zygapophyseal joint denervation by 
  radio-frequency probe or cryoprobe using radiological imaging control (Anaes.) |

and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **RIGHT THORACIC PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY** for zygapophyseal joint denervation 
  by radio-frequency probe or cryoprobe using radiological imaging control (Anaes.) |

and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **LEFT LUMBAR PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY** for zygapophyseal joint denervation by 
  radio-frequency probe or cryoprobe using radiological imaging control (Anaes.) |
g. The Committee considered restricting use of CT guidance with this item (due to safety and radiation exposure) however it determined that there was not strong enough evidence against CT to continue with this recommendation, as such, the Committee recommends that this item be reviewed in 2 years.

4.1.12.1 Rationale 12

This recommendation focuses on improving patient safety, reflects best practice and effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee does not consider that an assistant is needed for this procedure and patient safety will be maintained without it.
- The new items would result in five new item numbers being created (including the original number, the total for this procedure would be 6 item numbers).
- The Committee has noted the claiming practices of this item and determined that claiming is occurring which could be the result of unnecessary treatments being performed, or not performed correctly initially. If performed correctly thermal RF should last at least 5 or 6 months, therefore the Committee maintains that it is not justified to repeat the procedure inside a timeframe of less than 4 months. Pulsed radiofrequency neurotomy has a limited role in medial branch denervation nerve but is still the procedure of choice in carefully selected situations, which will still be enabled under the recommended changes.
- The surgical three-item rule may encourage procedures to be performed over multiple days, therefore the Committee recommendation is to restrict claiming for this procedure to three episodes in a calendar year for a specified pain region of the spine to encourage quality patient experience and safety and ensuring that the MBS aligns with best practice professional standards.
- For the purposes of communicating the intent of the term ‘episodes’, in the context of the Committee and this report, the Committee uses the term ‘episodes’ to mean ‘a treatment or related multiple treatments administered by a physician during a single visit for a diagnosed condition’.

New Item

RIGHT LUMBAR PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY for zygapophyseal joint denervation by radio-frequency probe or cryoprobe using radiological imaging control (Anaes.)
4.1.13 Recommendation 13 – Reflecting best practice in item 39323 - percutaneous neurotomy

The Committee recommends:

a. removing the assistant fees for this item

b. restricting access to 6 episodes of care for a given nerve in a calendar year, and

c. amending the descriptor to (changes in bold):

| Item 39323 |
| PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY (excluding medial branch nerve) by cryotherapy or radiofrequency lesion generator, not being a service to which another item applies (Anaes.) |

4.1.13.1 Rationale 13

This item provides for percutaneous neurotomy by cryotherapy or radiofrequency lesion generator.

This recommendation focuses on improving patient experience, reflects best practice and effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee considers the change to the descriptor will encourage quality patient experience and ensure that the MBS aligns with professional standards.

- The Committee is of the opinion that item 39323 should be restricted to six episodes for a given nerve in a calendar year. Both thermal and pulsed radiofrequency have current clinical applications in this setting. The technical demands for pulsed radiofrequency are less than those required for thermal radiofrequency lesioning of the medial branches supplying a given zygapophyseal joint, hence the higher fee for item 39118\(^4\).

- The Committee does not consider that an assistant is needed for this procedure and patient safety will be maintained without it.

- It is not clinically appropriate for item 39323 to have a recommendation for restricting CT guidance.

\(^4\) Refer to Table 4 of this report
### 4.2 Implanted Devices

#### Table 5: Implanted Device items considered by working group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Schedule FY2016/17</th>
<th>Services FY2016/17</th>
<th>Benefits FY2016/17</th>
<th>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14218</td>
<td>IMPLANTED INFUSION PUMP REFILLING OF reservoir, with a therapeutic agent or agents, for infusion to the subarachnoid or epidural space, with or without re-programming of a programmable pump, for the management of chronic intractable pain</td>
<td>$97.95</td>
<td>1,866</td>
<td>$149,224</td>
<td>-8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14221</td>
<td>LONG-TERM IMPLANTED DEVICE FOR DELIVERY OF THERAPEUTIC AGENTS, accessing of, not being a service associated with a service to which item 13945 applies</td>
<td>$52.50</td>
<td>140,084</td>
<td>$5,778,204</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39125</td>
<td>Intrathecal or epidural SPINAL CATHETER insertion or replacement of, and connection to a subcutaneous implanted infusion pump, for the management of chronic intractable pain (Anaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$298.05</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>$3,242</td>
<td>-8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39126</td>
<td>INFUSION PUMP, subcutaneous implantation or replacement of, and connection of the pump to an intrathecal or epidural catheter, and filling of reservoir with a therapeutic agent or agents, with or without programming the pump, for the management of chronic intractable pain (Anaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$361.90</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>$15,808</td>
<td>-11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39127</td>
<td>SUBCUTANEOUS RESERVOIR AND SPINAL CATHETER, insertion of, for the management of chronic intractable pain (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$473.65</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>$6,032</td>
<td>-11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39128</td>
<td>INFUSION PUMP, subcutaneous implantation of, AND intrathecal or epidural SPINAL CATHETER insertion of, and connection of pump to catheter, and filling of reservoir with a therapeutic agent or agents, with or without programming the pump, for the management of chronic intractable pain (Anaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$659.95</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>$25,466</td>
<td>-1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39130</td>
<td>EPIDURAL LEAD, percutaneous placement of, including intraoperative test stimulation for</td>
<td>$674.15</td>
<td>3,337</td>
<td>$1,226,087</td>
<td>28.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Descriptor</td>
<td>Schedule fee</td>
<td>Services FY2016/17</td>
<td>Benefits FY2016/17</td>
<td>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the management of chronic intractable neuropathic pain or pain from refractory angina pectoris, to a maximum of 4 leads (Anaes.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39131</td>
<td>ELECTRODES, epidural or peripheral nerve, management of patient and adjustment or reprogramming of neurostimulator by a medical practitioner, for the management of chronic intractable neuropathic pain or pain from refractory angina pectoris - each day</td>
<td>$127.80</td>
<td>5,401</td>
<td>$566,384</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39133</td>
<td>Removal of subcutaneously IMPLANTED INFUSION PUMP OR removal or repositioning of intrathecal or epidural SPINAL CATHETER, for the management of chronic intractable pain (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$159.40</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>$3,752</td>
<td>-4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39134</td>
<td>NEUROSTIMULATOR or RECEIVER, subcutaneous placement of, including placement and connection of extension wires to epidural or peripheral nerve electrodes, for the management of chronic intractable neuropathic pain or pain from refractory angina pectoris (Anaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$340.60</td>
<td>1,332</td>
<td>$188,120</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39135</td>
<td>NEUROSTIMULATOR or RECEIVER, that was inserted for the management of chronic intractable neuropathic pain or pain from refractory angina pectoris, removal of, performed in the operating theatre of a hospital (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$159.40</td>
<td>414</td>
<td>$34,191</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39136</td>
<td>LEAD, epidural or peripheral nerve that was inserted for the management of chronic intractable neuropathic pain or pain from refractory angina pectoris, removal of, performed in the operating theatre of a hospital (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$159.40</td>
<td>1,314</td>
<td>$89,274</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39137</td>
<td>LEAD, epidural or peripheral nerve that was inserted for the management of chronic intractable neuropathic pain or pain from refractory angina pectoris, removal of, performed in the operating theatre of a hospital (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$605.35</td>
<td>308</td>
<td>$113,272</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Descriptor</td>
<td>Schedule fee</td>
<td>Services FY2016/17</td>
<td>Benefits FY2016/17</td>
<td>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39138</td>
<td>PERIPHERAL NERVE LEAD, surgical placement of, including intraoperative test stimulation, for the management of chronic intractable neuropathic pain or pain from refractory angina pectoris, to a maximum of 4 leads (Aaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$674.15</td>
<td>2,667</td>
<td>$932,760</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39139</td>
<td>EPIDURAL LEAD, surgical placement of one or more by partial or total laminectomy, including intraoperative test stimulation, for the management of chronic intractable neuropathic pain or pain from refractory angina pectoris (Aaes.) (Assist.)</td>
<td>$905.10</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>$55,111</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**4.2.1 Recommendation 14 - Clarifying item 14218 - infusion pump refilling**

The Committee recommends amending the item descriptor to (changes in bold):

**Item 14218**

IMPLANTED INFUSION PUMP REFILLING OF reservoir with therapeutic agent(s) for infusion to the subarachnoid space or accessing the side port to assess catheter patency, with or without pump re-programming, for the management of chronic pain, including cancer pain.

**4.2.1.1 Rationale 14**

This recommendation focuses on effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:
The amendments to the descriptor are intended to provide clarity around claiming practices and appropriate use of the item numbers.

Currently, Specialist Pain Medicine Physicians use item 14221 occasionally to allow side-port access to assess catheter patency. This is a procedure that is considered of equivalent technical difficulty to item 14218. Both side port access and pump refill (this item) relate to a device infusing into the subarachnoid space. Item 14221 is generally used for the accessing of less complex devices infusing into the venous circulation. Therefore adding the infrequently used side port access and so including this procedure in item 14218 is considered appropriate despite the increase in fee.

There is expected to be a small decrease (estimated 5%) in the number of claims against item 14221 and an equivalent rise in item 14218.

The epidural route of drug administration is no longer used for implanted infusion pumps due to inconsistent spread of infusate and the higher risk of catheter tip fibrosis.

4.2.2 Recommendation 15 – Clarifying items 39125 to 39128 and items 39133 and 39323 - infusion pump

The Committee recommends:

a. amending the item descriptors to (changes in bold):

**Item 39125**
Intrathecal or epidural SPINAL CATHETER insertion or replacement of, and connection to a subcutaneous implanted infusion pump, for the management of chronic pain, including cancer pain (Anaes.) (Assist.)

and

**Item 39126**
INFUSION PUMP, subcutaneous implantation or replacement of, and connection of the pump to an intrathecal or epidural catheter, and filling of reservoir with a therapeutic agent or agents, with or without programming the pump, for the management of chronic pain, including cancer pain (Anaes.) (Assist.)

and
and

Item 39128
INFUSION PUMP, subcutaneous implantation of, AND intrathecal or epidural SPINAL CATHETER insertion of, and connection of pump to catheter, and filling of reservoir with a therapeutic agent or agents, with or without programming the pump, for the management of chronic pain, including cancer pain (Anaes.) (Assist.)

and

Item 39133
Removal of subcutaneously IMPLANTED INFUSION PUMP OR removal or repositioning of intrathecal or epidural SPINAL CATHETER, for the management of chronic pain including cancer pain (Anaes.)

and

Item 39323
Removal of subcutaneously IMPLANTED INFUSION PUMP OR removal or repositioning of intrathecal or epidural SPINAL CATHETER, for the management of chronic pain, including cancer pain (Anaes.)

and

b. these item numbers be reviewed in 2 years as recommendations for clinical use are changing and because of the development of new therapeutic agents that may use these routes of delivery.

4.2.2.1 Rationale 15

This recommendation focuses on effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The amendments are intended to provide clarity around claiming practices and appropriate use of the item numbers. While cancer related pain is not currently excluded by these descriptors, there is confusion in some minds about if they are
applicable. Use of these procedures in the treatment of selected cancer pain (Davies, 2018) cases is considered best practice (Zheng, et al., 2017) (Smith, et al., 2002).

Note: Additional changes are suggested for several of these item numbers – see below.

4.2.3 Recommendation 16 – Clarifying items 39131, 39134, 39135, 39136, 39137 and 39139 - neurostimulator

The Committee recommends amending item descriptors to (changes in bold):

**Item 39131**
ELECTRODES, epidural or peripheral nerve, management of patient and adjustment or reprogramming of neurostimulator by a medical practitioner, for the management of chronic neuropathic pain or refractory ischaemic pain - each day

and

**Item 39134**
NEUROSTIMULATOR or RECEIVER, subcutaneous placement of, including placement and connection of extension wires to epidural or peripheral nerve electrodes, for the management of chronic neuropathic pain or refractory ischaemic pain (Anaes.) (Assist.)

and

**Item 39135**
NEUROSTIMULATOR or RECEIVER, that was inserted for the management of chronic neuropathic pain or refractory ischaemic pain, open surgical removal of, performed in the operating theatre of a hospital (Anaes.)

and

**Item 39136**
LEAD, epidural or peripheral nerve that was implanted for the management of chronic neuropathic pain or refractory ischaemic pain, open surgical removal of, performed in the operating theatre of a hospital (Anaes.)

and
4.2.3.1 Rationale 16

This recommendation focuses on effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- Adding ‘open surgical removal’ or ‘open surgical repositioning’ and “implanted” instead of “inserted” emphasises the open surgical nature of these procedures and prevents the items from being inappropriately claimed when removing or repositioning leads percutaneously, which is a much simpler and quicker procedure.

- The word ‘intractable’ is poorly defined and the Committee considers that it does not add clarity to these descriptors.

- The Committee recommends amending the wording to ‘refractory ischaemic pain’ as refractory angina restricts the procedure to only the chest region. Ischaemic pain can also occur in the lower limbs.

4.2.4 Recommendation 17 – Clarifying items 39130 and 39138 – Lead placement

The Committee recommends:

a. Amending the item descriptors to (changes in bold):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39130</td>
<td>EPI DURAL LEAD, percutaneous placement of, including intraoperative test stimulation, for the management of chronic neuropathic pain or refractory ischaemic pain (Anaes.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39137</td>
<td>LEAD, epidural or peripheral nerve that was implanted for the management of chronic neuropathic pain or refractory ischaemic pain, open surgical repositioning to correct displacement or unsatisfactory positioning, including intraoperative test stimulation, not being a service to which item 39130, 39138 or 39139 applies (Anaes.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>391379</td>
<td>EPIDURAL LEAD, surgical placement of one or more by partial or total laminectomy, including intraoperative test stimulation, for the management of chronic neuropathic pain or pain from refractory ischaemic pain (Anaes.) (Assist.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and

**Item 39138**
PERIPHERAL NERVE LEAD, surgical placement of, including intraoperative test stimulation, for the management of chronic neuropathic pain or refractory ischaemic pain where the leads are intended to remain in situ long term (Anaes.) (Assist.)

- adding explanatory notes to restrict use to appropriately trained practitioners.

**New Explanatory Notes – Items 39130 and 39138**
Access to Items 39130 and 39138 are restricted to use by appropriately trained practitioners

### 4.2.4.1 Rationale 17

This recommendation focuses on effective use of the health system and patient safety. It is based on the following assessment:

- The amendments are intended to provide clarity around claiming practices and appropriate use of the item numbers.
- The word ‘intractable’ is poorly defined and the Committee considers that it does not add clarity to these descriptors.
- The three item rule currently being considered at the Principles and Rules Committee will supersede the ‘maximum of 4 leads’ rule.
- The addition of ‘where the leads are intended to remain in situ long term’ to item 39138 is designed to clarify the intended use of the item and seek to stop the item being inappropriately claimed, e.g. for Percutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation procedure (placement of an electrode for 20-30 mins with pulsed therapy delivered and then leads removed).
- The Committee recommends amending the wording to ‘refractory ischaemic pain’ as refractory angina restricts the procedure to only the chest region. Ischaemic pain can also occur in the lower limbs. There is good evidence to support the use of these procedures for refractory ischaemic limb pain in select cases (Mekhail, et al., 2018). The Committee is aware that this item is already being claimed for these rare situations. It is thought that this change is will only lead to a slight increase in claims, if any.
4.2.5 Recommendation 18 – Further review of item 14221 - devices infusing into the venous system

The Committee recommends that item 14221 be further reviewed noting the issues are outside the remit of the Committee.

Note: Currently, Specialist Pain Medicine Physicians use item number 14221 occasionally to allow side-port access to assess catheter patency. This is a procedure that is considered of equivalent difficulty to item 14218 – refer to Recommendation 14.

4.2.5.1 Rationale 18

The item 14221 is currently being used for a variety of purposes across a number of areas, including oncology, haematology and pain management.

This recommendation focuses on effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee determined that there may be an overuse of item 14221. The intended use of this item relates mainly to devices infusing into the venous system and its use is outside the remit and scope of the Committee.

- The Committee notes that some compliance modelling was completed in relation to item 14221 and its use for insulin pump uploads. Compliance determined that this use is inconsistent with the current descriptor as it uses the word ‘implanted’, which is intended for devices that are inserted into the body under the skin. Insulin pumps are not implanted.

- Item 14221 is used by oncology for the access of a chemotherapy device. There is no item for heparin locks that provide maintenance of patency, antibiotic administration or sampling of blood etc. The use of 14221 for these purposes appears to be inappropriate with the current descriptor of 14221.

- The Committee determined that it was not qualified to identify concerns regarding safety, access, value or contemporary best practice with the Oncology or infectious disease use of this item.

- Whilst reviewing item 13945 the Oncology Clinical Committee (OCC) recommended to ‘remove item 13945 from the MBS, remove the reference to item 13945 from item 14221, and prevent use of item 14221 where the service is provided in conjunction with the administration of anticancer therapy. This recommendation recognises that use of long-term vascular access devices with anticancer therapy is part of the standard of care and does not represent a separate, distinct service. The recommendation also addresses highly irregular and
variable patterns of use for item 13945 across providers, thereby improving value for the patient and the health system’.

- Both the OCC and the Committee note there are additional aspects on the usage of item 14221 (outside of medical oncology or pain management) that warrant further investigation potentially as part of an ongoing review mechanism.

- Further review of this item would best take place in consultation with oncologists, haematologists, Specialist Pain Medicine Physicians, palliative care physicians and nurses.

### 4.2.6 Recommendation 19 – Better explanation of the use of implanted devices (Items set out in Table 5)

The Committee recommends:

a. adding explanatory notes for all implanted device items considered by the Committee,

#### New Explanatory Notes – Implanted device items.

As with all interventions, implant procedures should be performed in the context of clinical best practice. This is of particular importance given the high cost of the devices. Current clinical best practice for use of these item numbers includes:

- All procedures being performed in the context of a comprehensive pain management approach with an appropriately qualified multidisciplinary team.

- Patients should be appropriately selected for the procedure, including, but not limited to assessment of physical and psychological function prior to implantation with findings documented in the medical record.

- Outcome evaluation using validated measures pre and post implantation.

- Appropriate follow up and ongoing management of implanted medical devices should be ensured.

Implantable devices require ongoing monitoring and management. If the person providing the implantation service is not the ongoing physician manager of the device, they are responsible for ensuring that ongoing management has been arranged by an adequately trained professional.

b. adding reference to the Faculty of Pain Medicine guidelines (currently starting development) when available, and
c. due to evolving evidence regarding what population groups benefit from these procedures, these item numbers be reviewed in 2 years to ensure ongoing evidence based applicability.

4.2.6.1 Rationale 19

The pain management items of the MBS cover a wide variety of treatment options including implanted devices. The use of these devices is an area of ongoing development in effective practice.

This recommendation focuses on clarifying service provision best practice and effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- Implantable devices may be an effective and cost effective pain management intervention in a very select patient population. There is a high risk of poor outcomes and lack of cost effectiveness with inadequate patient selection and follow up (International Neuromodulation Society, 2017). It is difficult to modify the descriptors to contain all the criteria needed for a good patient outcome and this is not generally included in a descriptor. In addition, evidence continues to evolve regarding patients who may benefit from these procedures.

- Clinical guidelines for implantable devices for pain management are currently under development by the Faculty of Pain Medicine and should be incorporated in the notes when available.

- It was considered that outlining high level best clinical practice in the notes would be helpful in guiding clinical practice and patient selection.

- Due to evolving evidence, it is recommended that these item numbers be reviewed in 2 years to ensure ongoing evidence-based applicability.

4.2.7 Recommendation 20 – Reflecting best practice in items 39130, 39134, 39135, 39136 and 39137 – use of assistants

The Committee recommends that items 39130, 39134, 39135, 39136 and 39137 be considered for use of an assistant fee, noting that the assistant fee is currently being discussed by the Principles and Rules Committee for restructuring around the mechanisms for claiming.
4.2.7.1 Rationale 20

These items pertain to more complex procedures for the implantation of devices.

These procedures are considered to be two person procedures and there is a higher rate of complications when insertion is performed alone. Therefore, for safety reasons an assistant support item is recommended.
### 4.3 Surgical Co-claiming

#### Table 6: Surgical Co-claiming items considered by working group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Schedule fee</th>
<th>Services FY2016/17</th>
<th>Benefits FY2016/17</th>
<th>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18228</td>
<td>INTERPLEURAL BLOCK, initial injection or commencement of infusion of a therapeutic substance</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>$11,997</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18232</td>
<td>INTRATHECAL or EPIDURAL INJECTION of substance other than anaesthetic, contrast or neurolytic solutions, not being a service to which another item in this Group applies (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$189.90</td>
<td>34385</td>
<td>$5,444,264</td>
<td>11.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18234</td>
<td>TRIGEMINAL NERVE, primary division of, injection of an anaesthetic agent (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$124.85</td>
<td>13888</td>
<td>$1,442,771</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18236</td>
<td>TRIGEMINAL NERVE, peripheral branch of, injection of an anaesthetic agent (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>47237</td>
<td>$2,467,760</td>
<td>22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18238</td>
<td>FACIAL NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent, not being a service associated with a service to which item 18240 applies</td>
<td>$37.65</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>$13,202</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18244</td>
<td>VAGUS NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$100.80</td>
<td>428</td>
<td>$34,084</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18252</td>
<td>CERVICAL PLEXUS, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$100.80</td>
<td>6159</td>
<td>$470,355</td>
<td>19.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18254</td>
<td>BRACHIAL PLEXUS, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$100.80</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>$42,814</td>
<td>29.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18262</td>
<td>ILIO-INGUINAL, ILIOHYPOGASTRIC OR GENITOFEMORAL NERVES, 1 or more of, injection of an anaesthetic agent (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>13,319</td>
<td>$658,079</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18264</td>
<td>PUDENDAL NERVE and or dorsal nerve, injection of anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$100.80</td>
<td>33,571</td>
<td>$2,614,048</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18266</td>
<td>ULNAR, RADIAL OR MEDIAN NERVE, MAIN TRUNK OF, 1 or more of, injection of an anaesthetic agent, not being associated with a brachial plexus block</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>6648</td>
<td>$323,641</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Item</td>
<td>Descriptor</td>
<td>Schedule fee</td>
<td>Services FY2016/17</td>
<td>Benefits FY2016/17</td>
<td>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18270</td>
<td>FEMORAL NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>4,927</td>
<td>$983,487</td>
<td>26.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18272</td>
<td>SAPHENOUS, SURAL, POPLITEAL OR POSTERIOR TIBIAL NERVE, MAIN TRUNK OF, 1 or more of, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>14,665</td>
<td>$1,702,775</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18278</td>
<td>SCIATIC NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>400</td>
<td>$28,169</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18280</td>
<td>SPHENOPALATINE GANGLION, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$124.85</td>
<td>5,418</td>
<td>$507,387</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18288</td>
<td>COELIAC PLEXUS OR SPLANCHNIC NERVES, injection of an anaesthetic agent (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$147.65</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>$18,105</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3.1 **Recommendation 21 – Restriction of items 18228, 18232, 18238, 18244, 18252, 18254, 18262, 18264, 18266, 18280 and 18288 - diagnosis and management of chronic pain**

The Committee recommends:

a. these items should not be co-claimed with a surgical procedure and should be restricted to use in the diagnosis and management of chronic pain,

b. the appropriate surgical and anaesthetic committees be informed that these item numbers will no longer be available for co-claiming and the procedural fee or anaesthetic item listing should be adjusted if appropriate,

c. amending the descriptors to include (changes in bold):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items 18228, 18232, 18238, 18244, 18252, 18254, 18262, 18264, 18266, 18280 and 18288</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Add:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘not to be co-claimed with any surgical procedures, including those performed under local anaesthesia’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d. (where required) descriptors be amended to:
4.3.1.1 Rationale 21

The pain management items of the MBS cover a wide variety of treatment options including pain treatment in conjunction with surgical procedures.

This recommendation focuses on clarifying service provision best practice and effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee agreed that many of the pain management items under consideration are being inappropriately co-claimed with a surgical procedure. This is happening across different specialties and includes:
  - Claiming these items when a regional nerve block is required as part of the procedure for either analgesia or immobilisation.
  - Claiming these items for local infiltration of local anaesthesia or “blind” peripheral nerve or field blocks during open surgery – a much less difficult procedure that is not equivalent to a regional nerve block for chronic pain.
  - Claiming regional nerve blocks when infiltration of local anaesthesia is used for procedures such as vasectomy, varicose sclerotherapy and removal of skin lesions where a proper regional nerve block is not appropriate.

Note: For item 18232 please refer to recommendation 4 for further recommendations.
The Committee considers that this is unintended practice which goes against the spirit of the MBS and that the principle of providing ‘complete medical services’ should be encouraged where possible.

There was broad agreement across the Committee that the pain management items should not be co-claimed with a surgical procedure when intraoperative analgesia should be an integral part of the surgical procedure.

The Committee noted that the data identifying co-claiming practices where pain management items were being claimed 80% of the time with the surgical procedure suggested that the analgesia was a requirement of the surgery and therefore should form part of a ‘complete medical service’.

The Committee supports the retention of stand-alone items in cases where the items are still used for chronic pain or cancer pain or, in limited cases, acute pain outside the operating theatre and that the relevant descriptors should be amended to support this use only.

4.3.2 Recommendation 22 – Clarifying items 18234 and 18236 - trigeminal nerve

The Committee recommends that items 18234 and 18236 should not be co-claimed with each other and that the descriptor be amended to (changes in bold):

**Item 18234**

TRIGEMINAL NERVE, primary division of, injection of an anaesthetic agent and **should not be co-claimed with any surgical procedures, including those performed under local anaesthesia** (Anaes.)

and

**Item 18236**

TRIGEMINAL NERVE, peripheral branch of, injection of an anaesthetic agent **and should not be co-claimed with any surgical procedures, including those performed under local anaesthesia** (Anaes.)

4.3.2.1 Rationale 22

Items 18234 and 18236 provide for treatment of the trigeminal nerve via primary division or peripheral branch injection of an anaesthetic agent respectively.
This recommendation focuses on clarifying service provision best practice and effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- In nearly all identified situations, it is only appropriate to claim one of the item numbers.
- The Committee identified the possibility of a limited number of cases where there may be contributions to facial pain from both primary and peripheral trigeminal branches. In such cases both a primary and peripheral injection of anaesthetic agent may be warranted and 18234 could be claimed with 18236.
- However, this number is thought to be very small and generally only applicable in situations where both items should be part of the surgical procedure.
- The data suggests that items 18234 and 18236 are being co-claimed approximately 15,535 times per year (16/17 year data).

4.3.3 Recommendation 23 – Future review item 18278 – sciatic nerve co-claiming

The Committee recommends that item 18278 requires future review.

4.3.3.1 Rationale 23

Item 18278 provides for treatment of the sciatic nerve by injection of an anaesthetic agent. This recommendation focuses on ensuring continuing effective use of the health system into the future. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee identified that item 18278 appeared to be co-claimed with transfusion which the Committee hypothesised was the use of platelet rich plasma for knee pain.
- The use of platelet rich plasma for knee pain is not currently supported by an MBS item number.
- The Committee considered that this issue required further investigation and/or consideration to ensure correct claiming and appropriate MBS inclusion.
5. Recommendations for deletions and/or review

5.1 Deletions

Table 7: Items – Deletions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Schedule fee</th>
<th>Services FY2016/17</th>
<th>Benefits FY2016/17</th>
<th>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18274</td>
<td>PARAVERTEBRAL, CERVICAL, THORACIC, LUMBAR, SACRAL OR COCCYGEAL NERVES, injection of an anaesthetic agent, (single vertebral level)</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>63,985</td>
<td>$4,816,805</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39115</td>
<td>PERCUTANEOUS NEUROTOMY of posterior divisions (or rami) of spinal nerves by any method, including any associated spinal, epidural or regional nerve block (payable once only in a 30 day period) (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$75.30</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>$4,190</td>
<td>-11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39140</td>
<td>Epidural catheter, insertion of, under imaging control, with epidurogram and epidural therapeutic injection for lysis of adhesions (Anaes.)</td>
<td>$292.85</td>
<td>5,407</td>
<td>1,046,392.11</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1.1 Recommendation 24 – Deletion of items 18274, 39115 and 39140 - outdated and not best practice

The Committee recommends the deletion of items 18274, 39115 and 39140.

5.1.1.1 Rationale 24

This recommendation focuses on ensuring continued effective use of the health system into the future. It is based on the following assessment:

- The Committee has determined that item 18274 is not necessary because a multi-level injection is required to block even a single facet joint (Kennedy, et al., 2018).
- The Committee notes that deletion of 18274 will result in an increase in fees associated with item 18276. The Committee considers that is justified because a
multi-level injection is required to block even a single facet joint therefore though
the item will technically be ‘absorbed’ by item 18276, the procedure is already
being performed in line with item 18276 and therefore should attract the
equivalent fee.

- The Committee has determined that item 39115 is an historical number used for
  an outdated procedure and should be deleted as there are more appropriate pain
  management options available. This is supported by data that shows usage has
  continued to decrease by 42% over the 2016/17 to 2017/18 period.

- The Committee is of the opinion that item 39140 be deleted as the epidural lysis of
  adhesions is not evidence based.

- It was predicted that other more appropriate procedures for epidural adhesions
  could be claimed under item 18232.

### 5.2 Referrals to other clinical committees

**Table 8: Items – Referrals to other clinical committees**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Descriptor</th>
<th>Schedule fee</th>
<th>Services FY2016/17</th>
<th>Benefits FY2016/17</th>
<th>Services 5-year annual avg. growth %</th>
<th>Expected change in services due to recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18258</td>
<td>INTERCOSTAL NERVE (single), injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>$21,925</td>
<td>-1.7</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18260</td>
<td>INTERCOSTAL NERVES (multiple), injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>4,719</td>
<td>$320,622</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18270</td>
<td>FEMORAL NERVE, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$88.65</td>
<td>4,927</td>
<td>$983,487</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18272</td>
<td>SAPHENOUS, SURAL, POPLITEAL OR POSTERIOR TIBIAL NERVE, MAIN TRUNK OF, 1 or more of, injection of an anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>$62.50</td>
<td>14,665</td>
<td>$1,702,775</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

5 Item 18232 - INTRATHECAL or EPIDURAL INJECTION of substance other than anaesthetic, contrast or neurolytic solutions, not being a service to which another item in this Group applies (Anaes.)
5.2.1 Recommendation 25 – Referrals of items 18258, 18260, 18270, 18272 and 18282

The Committee recommends:

a. items 18258 and 18260 be considered by the Thoracic Surgery Clinical Committee, with the advice on how specialist pain medicine physicians use these items, and

b. items 18272, 18270 and 18282 be considered by the Vascular Clinical Committee.

5.2.1.1 Rationale 25

This recommendation focuses on ensuring continuing effective use of the health system into the future. It is based on the following assessment:

- Items 18258 and 18260 are not used in volume by Specialist Pain Medicine Physicians.
- Items 18258 and 18260 usage relates to chest trauma (e.g. rib fractures) and there is substantial use associated with thoracic surgery. The items are used by Specialist Pain Medicine Physicians as a diagnostic procedure in the palliative setting in determining whether to proceed to a neurolytic procedure or other intervention, however usage is higher in the thoracic surgery specialty.
- Items 18270 and 18272 are mostly used in the treatment of varicose veins, it is rarely used as a stand-alone item for the treatment of chronic pain.
- The Committee had concerns that a femoral nerve block performed properly would result in motor blockade (essentially a “dead leg”) so that this was not a suitable claim for outpatient procedures as the patient would be unable to ambulate to go home. The hypothesis is that these are being claimed for local infiltration not true femoral nerve block.
- Item 18282 is a low-use item not used by Specialist Pain Medicine Physicians but by vascular surgeons.
6. Recommendations for new items

6.1 Better access to multidisciplinary care for chronic pain management

In its current form, the MBS does not support multidisciplinary, patient-centred approaches (The Australian Pain Society, 2017) (Healthcare Improvement Scotland, 2013) to pain management. Best practice management/treatment for chronic non-cancer pain involves the understanding of and attention to physical, psychological and environmental factors associated with pain (Faculty of Pain Medicine, 2010). There is often a need for an effective multi-modal approach for at-risk individuals with acute pain or individuals who have chronic pain to address both biological and psycho-sociocultural factors that may be contributing.

Effective chronic pain management involves a long-term multidisciplinary management plan (Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2015) which is developed to equip the patient with self-management skills. These skills can be applied for as long as pain persists and may, in themselves, reduce pain intensity over time. Focusing on just one aspect of management (medications, physical therapy or psychological approaches) is unlikely to lead to optimal outcomes such as maximised daily function (Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 2016).

Chronic pain is Australia's third most costly health condition after cardiovascular diseases and musculoskeletal conditions (also associated with chronic pain) (painaustralia, n.d.). The total economic cost of chronic pain in 2007 was estimated at more than $34 billion, including $11 billion in productivity costs and $7 billion in direct health care costs (painaustralia, n.d.).

The following recommendations have been identified by the Committee as being vital to effective chronic pain management in Australia. The Committee believes that these outcomes may be achieved through different options outlined under each recommendation and anticipates that the exact MBS mechanisms for the management of chronic pain will be considered in the deliberations of the Allied Health Reference Group and the General Practice Primary Care Clinical Committee.

The Committee has made five recommendations which seek to provide a framework for a robust, effective and efficient approach to multidisciplinary care for chronic pain management, covering access to multidisciplinary services from planning, supporting its use to reviewing its effectiveness. The framework also enables access via a variety of methods, including face-to-face and group meetings as well as telehealth technologies.
6.1.1 Recommendation 26 – Access to multidisciplinary pain management planning

The Committee recommends the consideration of the following options (one or more):

a. introduce a multidisciplinary Chronic Pain Management Plan item,  
   OR
b. modify the current Chronic Disease Items (items 132 and 133,) to explicitly include chronic pain as a chronic disease,  
   OR
c. allow the current Chronic disease items 132 and 133 to be completed by a specialist pain physician when chronic pain is the disease it is being issued for,  
   OR
d. introduce multidisciplinary assessment and case conferencing items for each member of the treating team.

The Committee also recommends that for each of the options outlined above, the following should apply:

- A form of shared medical record must be used between members of the team for ongoing care of the chronic pain patient to facilitate communication with all members of the multidisciplinary team.
- Allied health participants should be accredited in chronic pain management as determined by the relevant colleges or professional bodies.
- A time and complexity tiered approach should be built in to address the differing levels of need of patients.

6.1.1.1 Explanatory Information on Options

The Committee provides the following further explanation for each of the options outlined above:

Option 26a:

- The Committee recommends the creation of an item that allows a GP with accredited training in pain medicine (a 6 month diploma in pain medicine when it becomes available) or a specialist pain medicine physician to claim for a multidisciplinary management plan to improve access and allow either specialist pain medicine physicians or GPs with pain accreditation to refer to appropriately trained and accredited allied health practitioners.
Completion of the plan would allow eligible patients to access rebates for a number of relevant allied health visits.

Option 26b:
- Chronic pain is recognised as a chronic disease and, as such, it should be listed in MBS material that relates to chronic disease item numbers (to prevent confusion).

Option 26c:
- A precedent for this is set by the better access to mental health items, where a mental health management plan (2700, 2701, 2712, 2713, 2715, 2715 and 2717) can be completed by a GP or a psychiatrist.
- The Committee recognised the need to keep GPs as a key part of the treating team, and as such, would need to receive a copy/have opportunity to input into the plan.

Option 26d:
- Multidisciplinary assessment and input into a management plan would be facilitated by all members of the team being able to access an item that allows initial assessment of a person living with chronic pain and input this into a comprehensive management plan.

6.1.1.2 Rationale 26

This recommendation focuses on ensuring improved patient care, implementing best practice and continuing effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

**Multidisciplinary care** *(NSW Agency for Clinical Innovation, 2015)*

- Access to multidisciplinary teams for assessment, participation in the development of a management plan, and review enables people with chronic pain to learn to self-manage, optimise medical therapy, and be supported through any required rehabilitation or retraining *(cancer.org.au, n.d.).* The ideal team will vary between individuals, determined by the severity and type of their pain, but may include health professionals from general practice, physiotherapy, psychology, exercise physiology, occupational therapy, and pharmacy along with specialist pain medicine physicians.
- The GP mental health plan items (items 2700 to 2717) have provided a structured framework for GPs to undertake early intervention, assessment and management of patients with mental disorders, as well as providing referral pathways to clinical
psychologists, registered psychologists, and appropriately trained social workers and occupational therapists. Appropriate mental health training can help GPs to further develop and improve their skills in diagnosing, treating and referring patients with mental disorders to appropriate services.

- The Committee suggests that a multidisciplinary Chronic Pain Management Plan might be developed founded on the mental health plan items (items 2700 to 2717), enabling a patient with chronic pain greater access to allied health services, such as physiotherapy, psychology and occupational therapy services. Aligning the number of Chronic Pain Management Plan visits with a mental health care plan will better recognise the complex nature of treating pain as part of a comprehensive assessment and treatment program.

- Chronic pain management plans are best developed following multidisciplinary assessment and communication between the members of the treating team (cancer.org.au, n.d.). The introduction of initial assessment and case conferencing items that can be accessed by select allied health prior to the development of a Chronic Pain Management Plan will enable input from relevant team members to provide the most appropriately tailored plan.

- It is important to include the GP in the treating team in a way that streamlines patient access to allied health and supports all team members working toward the same goal. It is believed that this may be achieved by allowing either a specialist pain medicine physician or accredited GP to develop the Chronic Pain Management Plan, while including the other as one of the MDT members, will then allow patient access while encouraging good communication between members of the treating team.

- The type of pain management treatment required by people living with chronic pain depends on the findings of the initial (biopsychosocial) assessment (which should act as a type of triage). GPs and specialist pain medicine physicians would seek assistance from suitably qualified nurse or allied health providers, and couple with psychologists, psychiatrists (or GPs with mental health training) for the psychological and social elements of the assessment.

**Case conferencing and shared medical records**

- Case conferencing allows members of the treating team to summarise progress, discuss issues that have arisen during treatment that can be managed by other members of the team, and problem solve together. Case conferencing item numbers support multidisciplinary care for complex cases. Currently, case conferencing item numbers are limited and either not applicable to the situation or many of the treating team are unable to access them.
Case conferencing item numbers should be flexible enough to incorporate new technologies that allow team communication in ways beyond face to face or teleconferencing. Relying on all members of the team to meet face to face is often an insurmountable barrier when team members are not co-located.

Traditionally, pain management teams have been geographically co-located and state funded, which can provide well-coordinated and tailored care for patients. This model, however, is not always feasible for large scale patient access or in rural or remote areas. If the treating team that carry out the Chronic Pain Management Plan have some form of shared medical record, this will enable each member of the multidisciplinary team to tailor their response based on the needs of the patient and the relevant expertise available in the region/ by telehealth that may or may not be co-located with the treating doctor.

**Tiered multidisciplinary treatment**

- Patients with chronic pain who have mild to moderate levels of distress/disability should reliably respond to less than 10 sessions of targeted multidisciplinary pain self-management treatment. Patients with higher distress/disability will need more sessions.

- Group programs offer efficiencies and can be offered to high and low distress/disability patients. If the case is recent onset (1-8 weeks) the low intensity programs (group or individual) should be sufficient (in the WISE study in NSW, five sessions, on average, with a psychologist, plus physio exercises were enough for sustained return to work, improved mood and function) (Australian Pain Society, n.d.).

- High distress/disability cases will need more comprehensive and longer programs. More intensive interdisciplinary (The Australian Pain Society, 2017) programs (50-100 hrs over 3-5 weeks) have more reliable effects with the high severity cases (Australian Pain Society, n.d.).

**Estimate of need**

- It is estimated that approximately 35,000 people would require access each year to these item numbers. Some of these people would currently be receiving care under the chronic disease management and team care arrangement items or better access for mental health items.
6.1.2 Recommendation 27 – Access to appropriately trained allied health services

The Committee recommends the consideration of the following options (at least one):

a. funded allied health visits available for people with a multidisciplinary Chronic Pain Management Plan item,
   
   OR
   
   b. additional allied health visits to be available in a tiered model under current chronic disease items,
   
   OR
   
   c. Specialist Pain Medicine Physician referrals to allied health.

The Committee also recommends that for each of the options outlined above, the following should apply:

- allied health participants should be accredited in chronic pain management as determined by the relevant colleges or professional bodies, and
- a tiered number of visits according to need.

6.1.2.1 Rationale 27

This recommendation focuses on ensuring improved patient care, implementing best practice and continuing effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- Effective chronic pain management involves a multi-modal approach to treatment including allied health (The Australian Pain Society, 2017). Currently, specialists wishing to refer patients to allied health professionals must send the patient back to a GP, who may not be their regular GP, to ask for referral. This is an added financial and time barrier to the patient. In addition, care can be fragmented when members of the treating team experience poor or delayed communication from other geographically separate team members.

- Currently specialists wishing to refer patients to allied health professionals (with MBS reimbursement) work through the general practitioner or participating nurse practitioner.

- Effective chronic pain management involves a multi-modal approach to treatment including physiotherapy and psychology. From a patient perspective it is often difficult, costly (to the patient and the healthcare system), unnecessary and often ineffective to be seeing a specialist as well as a GP. This fragmented approach can result in untimely, under-treatment of individuals.
The Committee is in agreement that the GP should be kept informed of referrals to allied health and the outcomes of treatment in order to promote GP stewardship and integrated multidisciplinary care.

Access to allied health through current chronic disease items is helpful but at an inadequate evidence based dose for most people with chronic pain.

6.1.3 Recommendation 28 – Access to appropriately spaced multidisciplinary review of the person and of the management plan

The Committee recommends the consideration of the following options (at least one):

a. Multidisciplinary Chronic Pain Management Plan review item,
   
   OR
   
   b. access to case conferencing, available to each member of the treating team.

The Committee also recommends that for each of the options outlined above, the following should apply:

- All participants should be accredited in chronic pain management as determined by the relevant colleges or professional bodies.

- There must be specific communication between members of the pain management team regarding review of progress and recommended future needs.
  - The review mechanism could potentially unlock access to additional relevant allied health rebates if required.
  - Review may or may not require case conferencing, documented communication in a shared medical record between all members of the team regarding progress and future needs would be adequate.

6.1.3.1 Rationale 28

This recommendation focuses on ensuring improved patient care, implementing best practice and continuing effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:

- Review of a case cannot always occur with all members of the treating team present on one occasion or with the patient present. Review items facilitate communication between team members which can take significant time which is currently not rebatable under the MBS.
Case conferencing allows members of the treating team to summarise progress, discuss issues that have arisen during their treatment that can be managed by other members of the team, and problem solve together. Case conferencing item numbers support multidisciplinary care for complex cases. Currently, case conferencing items are limited and either not applicable to the situation or many of the treating team are unable to access them.

Case conferencing items should be flexible enough to incorporate new technologies that allow team communication in ways beyond face to face or teleconferencing. Relying on all members of the team to meet face to face is often an insurmountable barrier when team members are not co-located.

Case conferencing items facilitate geographically separate multidisciplinary care.

Traditionally, pain management teams have been geographically co-located and state funded, which can provide well-coordinated and tailored care for patients. This model, however, is not always feasible for large scale patient access or in rural or remote areas. If the treating team that carry out the Chronic Pain Management Plan have some form of shared medical record, this will enable each member of the multidisciplinary team to tailor their response based on the needs of the patient and the relevant expertise available in the region/ by telehealth that may or may not be co-located with the treating doctor.

6.1.4 Recommendation 29: Access to group therapy for pain management

The Committee recommends:

a. the creation of a new item that would be one of several allied health items that could be accessed following completion of a chronic pain management plan,

b. that it be accessible by accredited medical or allied health practitioners such as nurses, physiotherapists, exercise physiologists, psychologists, or occupational therapists, and

c. With accreditation to be determined by the relevant colleges or peak bodies, for example the Australia Physiotherapy Association which are accrediting specialist ‘pain’ physiotherapists.

6.1.4.1 Rationale 29

This recommendation focuses on ensuring improved patient care, implementing best practice and continuing effective use of the health system. It is based on the following assessment:
Intensive pain management group programs have the highest level of evidence of benefit and efficiency in treating chronic pain, yet this is currently not recognised under the MBS. This would decrease the cost to the individual and the health care system of procedures, medication and medical visits.

Currently patients have difficulty accessing these services because of the limited number of available group pain programs in Australia (most are in public hospital settings).

Medicare currently recognises the value of group treatment programs for psychiatry and diabetes education that are available to eligible people through items 80020 and 81100 to 81125.

Tiered levels of access to group programs in accordance with need could be provided. The NSW guidelines (NSW Cancer Institute, n.d.), which have been adopted as a national standard, provide a template for appropriate care.

The Committee believes this recommendation to be relevant to several reviews across the MBS Review, including the Allied Health Reference Group and Chronic Disease Management Working Group.

6.1.5 Recommendation 30 - Telehealth

The Committee recommends the creation of pain management specific telehealth items for multidisciplinary (medical, nursing and/or allied health professionals) assessment and review for pain management patients.

6.1.5.1 Rationale 30

This recommendation focuses on ensuring continuing effective access to rural and remote patients. It is based on the following assessment (McGeary, et al., 2012) (Pronovost, et al., 2009) (Eccleston, et al., 2014):

- Under the current MBS arrangements telehealth provides a means of accessing specialist services when consumers are located in rural and remote areas not serviced by a local service.

- For patients experiencing pain telehealth provides a means of accessing specialist pain services when consumers are located in rural and remote areas not serviced by a pain clinic locally. Telehealth funding could better support access to complete pain services in regional areas including education for consumers and health practitioners.
The inability to access effective multidisciplinary pain management, especially in rural and remote areas, costs the health system more in the long term and carries a substantial economic burden through lost productivity (Keogh, et al., 2010).

People who live in urban areas and have severely limited mobility may also benefit from telehealth consultations. Telehealth has the potential to enhance the model of care addressing key factors that currently inhibit patient access to tertiary pain management services. This is a highly specialised and tailored patient-centred service.

The advantages of telehealth are that it enables provision of a service with a high level of specialist expertise, but in a mode that is highly accessible without the costs and challenges involved in transport and accommodation (Keogh, et al., 2010).

The creation of telehealth items for the assessment and review of pain management treatment plans would:
- Aid in the triage process and guide planning
- Engage consumers and local primary care services
- Support local staff in modifying a pain management plan
- Be potentially utilised for the purpose of MDT Review (NSW Cancer Institute, n.d.), and
- Maximise the value of face-to-face pain management assessments and consultation.

The Committee notes this is a whole-of-MBS issue, which the Committee hopes will be considered as applicable to the practice of pain medicine.

### 6.2 Access to initial co-morbidity consultation items

Items 132 and 133 relate to a patient with complex disease with two or more morbidities other than complex congenital, developmental and behavioural disorders.

#### 6.2.1 Recommendation 31 – Access to items 132 & 133 - initial co-morbidity consultation

The Committee recommends:

a. that Specialist Pain Medicine Physicians and Palliative Medicine Specialists with the specific qualification of Fellow of the Australasian Chapter of Palliative Medicine (FACHPM):
   i. be granted access to items 132 and 133, or
ii. new items numbers equivalent to items 132 and 133 be established, and
b. if items 132 and 133 are changed to a time-based consultation, that Pain and Palliative Medicine specialists are allowed access to the same items that current Fellows of the Royal Australia College of Physicians (FRACP) access for time based consultations.

6.2.1.1 Rationale 31

This recommendation focuses on ensuring continuing effective use of the health system into the future and enhancing patient care. It is based on the following assessment:

- Chronic pain and palliative care patients have complex bio-psychosocial needs requiring specialist identification, assessment and medication reviews during their specialist appointments. The majority of patients seen by specialist pain medicine physicians and palliative medicine specialists have two or more morbidities; however as specialist pain medicine physicians are not recognised as physicians, use of items 132 and 133 is excluded.

- Currently pain and palliative medicine specialists with a FRACP qualification are using these item numbers for pain specialist consultations (item 132 instead of item 2801 or 3005 and item 133 instead of item 2806 or 3010). These numbers are not universally available unless the provider is registered with the FRACP. Specialist pain medicine physicians are not necessarily recognised members.

- The fees for items 2801 and 2806 are considered inadequate for consulting a patient for one hour and providing specialist opinion and recommendations. In comparison, the Medicare item numbers are 50% of the AMA listed fee.

- As an alternative to accessing items 132 and 133 the Committee recommends creation of new items with equivalent fees, as the fees for items 2801 (and 3005) and 2806 (and 3010) are considered inadequate by comparison.

6.3 Access to Botox for pelvic tension myalgia

Botulinum toxin (Botox) injections are used and recognised by the MBS in a wide range of medical conditions where muscle spasm is present, including migraine, cerebral palsy, torticollis, blepharospasm and detrusor overactivity (items 18350-18379).
6.3.1 Recommendation 32 - Botox for Pelvic Tension Myalgia (MSAC consideration)

The Committee recommends:

a. a new item be considered by MSAC to be added to the MBS, as set out below:

**New Item**

- Botulinum toxin type A for reducing pain and pelvic floor pressure in women with chronic pelvic pain and pelvic floor muscle spasm.
- Botox injection for the treatment of moderate to severe focal spasticity if:
  a. the patient is at least 18 years of age,
  b. she is not pregnant,
  c. the dysfunction is associated with muscle tension of the pelvic floor,
  d. she has consulted a suitably qualified pelvic physiotherapist and standard treatment for the condition (physiotherapy to down-train muscles) has failed
     or the treatment will aid physiotherapy.
- A lifetime limit of 4 injections supported under the MBS at intervals or no less than 6 months between injections
- The procedure is to be performed by an appropriately trained doctor.

and

b. a prospective register be formed to measure efficacy and long term results of the procedure.

6.3.1.1 Rationale 32

This recommendation focuses on ensuring improving value to the patient and instituting best practice. It is based on the following assessment:

- Pelvic pain is estimated to affect between 15% and 25% of women (Grace & Zondervan, 2004) (Mathias, et al., 1996). As with many types of persistent pain, muscle dysfunction may accompany persistent pelvic pain. Mild to moderate cases can be managed effectively with a combination of pelvic physiotherapy to 'down-train' muscles, increased gentle exercise with avoidance of aggravating activities and the use of medications. However, where pain is severe, these treatment options may be impractical or inadequately effective.
Botulinum toxin (Botox) injections are used and recognised by the MBS in a wide range of medical conditions where muscle spasm is present, including migraine, cerebral palsy, torticollis, blepharospasm and detrusor overactivity (items 18350-18379). Injections of Botox to pubococcygeus and obturator internus have been used in the management of the severe pain associated with pelvic muscle spasm with evidence of long term/short term effectiveness.

- Focal Spasticity in adults and children two years and older BOTOX® treatment reduces both the objective signs and subjective symptoms of spasticity. Improvements include reduction in muscle tone, increase in range of motion, reduction in pain and a reduction of spasticity-related functional disability.

- Improvement in pelvic pain for people treated with this procedure/ (or adequately treated for other types of severe pain) led to return to work, decreased use of strong analgesia, improved community participation, decreased use of health services etc. It is estimated that a small percentage of patients (potentially 10% of those who meet the criteria) would trial Botox.

- Botox is listed for muscle spasticity on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods (ARTG).

- To ensure patient safety and effective treatment the procedure should be performed by an appropriately trained doctor.
7. Consumer impact statement

The key recommendations from a consumer perspective are summarised in this section of the Report. It aims to make it easier for the general public to better understand and comment on the report’s recommendations.

Patients and clinicians are both expected to benefit from these recommendations. The recommendations address concerns regarding patient safety and quality of care, and they take steps to simplify the MBS and make it easier to use and understand. Patient access to services was considered for each recommendation. The Committee considered each recommendation’s impact on provider groups to ensure that any changes were reasonable and fair. However, if the Committee identified evidence of potential item misuse or safety concerns, recommendations were made to encourage best practice, in line with the overarching purpose of the MBS Review.

Recommended changes to the pain management items covered in this report predominantly serve to improve the value of the services patients receive.

The Committee reviewed the 62 listed MBS items for pain management procedures and the report contains a detailed explanation of the specific changes that have been recommended. In particular, the Committee agreed that there is merit in revising MBS items where pain management items are being claimed alongside a surgical procedure. The Committee recommended removal of the ability to co-claim nerve blocks (for the diagnosis and management of chronic pain) with surgical items in keeping with the philosophy of a complete medical service. The Committee were of the view that, in most instances, the co-claiming of nerve blocks for the diagnosis and management of chronic pain alongside surgical procedure items went against the spirit of the MBS and that where a surgical procedure is being administered the scheduled fee should include the cost of any pain management incurred during the procedure.

The Committee has made a number of recommendations to amend item descriptors to prevent unintended claiming of incorrect items and ensure that item numbers accurately reflect the service being administered. Changes to explanatory notes have also been recommended to guide best practice use of implanted devices for the management of chronic pain.

In addition to recommendations relating to existing pain management MBS items, the Committee has also recommended that urgent consideration is given to the need for the MBS to better reflect contemporary knowledge about persistent pain and evidence
supporting the need for a biopsychosocial approach to managing this chronic condition, focussing on management and functional improvement, rather than treating the pain alone. This approach is recommended also in relation to cancer pain and to prevent the progression of acute pain to chronicity.

The Committee makes the point that a shift towards best practice, multidisciplinary pain management within the MBS would also reduce reliance on medications (including opioids) and expensive interventions. Equipping patients with the ability to self-manage their condition effectively, supported by allied health professionals, has the potential to reduce costs for both patients and government.

Accordingly, the report includes recommendations and presents a case for changes to the MBS to align with the best practice model of care. The Committee considered there was a case for:

- More appropriate rebates for specialist pain medicine physician consultations that establishes equity with other specialities.
- The ability for a specialist pain medicine physicians to order a Chronic Disease Care Plan for their patient, with referral to suitably trained allied health professionals (currently the MBS stipulates this can only be done by the GP which requires the patient to arrange a separate GP consultation. This is unhelpful to the patient, unnecessary, and adds to MBS and patient costs.)
- An increase in the number of allied health visits for eligible patients with chronic pain under the Chronic Disease Care Plan (currently 5 allied health visits). It is recommended that a Chronic Pain Care Plan which allows up to 10 visits to a physio, psychologist or other allied health professional, depending on the patient individual needs, would potentially achieve a better outcome, given the complex nature of chronic pain.
- New MBS items (rebates) to cover accredited pain programs – programs which enable the patient to better understand their condition and learn a range of strategies to support their ability to self-manage chronic pain.
- New MBS items that allow for multidisciplinary assessment and case conferencing for a multidisciplinary team caring for the patient with chronic pain.
8. References


Australian Pain Society, n.d. [Online].


Faculty of Pain Medicine, 2010. *National Pain Summit Initiative - National Pain Strategy.* s.l., s.n.


NSW Cancer Institute, n.d. *eviQ*. [Online].


Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, 2016. *PM16 - Pain Management Contextual Unit*, s.l.: Curriculum for Australian General Practice.


9. Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Practice</td>
<td>Commercial or professional procedures that are accepted or prescribed as being correct or most effective.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bier’s Block</td>
<td>Intravenous regional anaesthesia (IVRA) or Bier block anaesthesia is an anaesthetic technique for surgical procedures on the body’s extremities where a local anaesthetic is injected intravenously distal to a tourniquet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAGR</td>
<td>Compound annual growth rate or the average annual growth rate over a specified time period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change</td>
<td>When referring to an item, “change” describes when the item and/or its services will be affected by the recommendations. This could result from a range of recommendations, such as: (i) specific recommendations that affect the services provided by changing item descriptors or explanatory notes; (ii) the consolidation of item numbers; and (iii) splitting item numbers (for example, splitting the current services provided across two or more items).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Intractable Pain (IP)</td>
<td>Pain that is excruciating, constant, incurable, and of such severity that it dominates virtually every conscious moment, produces mental and physical debilitation and may produce a desire to commit suicide for the sole purpose of stopping the pain.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Medical Service</td>
<td>A service which provides holistic health care for the patient and their family/carer, which includes, prevention, and treatment for chronic and acute illnesses or disease</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Committees</td>
<td>A committee which is chaired by a clinician practising in the area under review, and comprised of other clinicians, health system experts and consumers. General practitioners participate on all clinical reviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinician</td>
<td>A health care professional that works as a primary care giver of a patient in a hospital, skilled nursing facility, clinic, or patient’s home. A clinician diagnoses and treats patients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer</td>
<td>People who use health services, as well as their family and carers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHF</td>
<td>Consumer Health Forum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic</td>
<td>Concerned with the diagnosis of illness or other problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delete</td>
<td>Describes when an item is recommended for removal from the MBS and its services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Pain Management Clinical Committee, 2018**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MBS</td>
<td>Medicare Benefits Schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBS item</td>
<td>An administrative object listed in the MBS and used for the purposes of claiming and paying Medicare benefits, consisting of an item number, service descriptor and supporting information, schedule fee and Medicare benefits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBS service</td>
<td>The actual medical consultation, procedure or test to which the relevant MBS item refers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MSAC</td>
<td>Medical Services Advisory Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse (of MBS item)</td>
<td>The use of MBS services for purposes other than those intended. This includes a range of behaviours, from failing to adhere to particular item descriptors or rules through to deliberate fraud.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nerve Block(s)</td>
<td>The production of insensibility in a part of the body by injecting an anaesthetic close to the nerves that supply it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neurolytic Procedure</td>
<td>A technique requiring the administration of an agent that is capable of destroying neural structures involved in the perception of pain to promote long lasting analgesia (pain relief).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New service</td>
<td>Describes when a new service has been recommended, with a new item number. In</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
most circumstances, new services will need to go through the MSAC. It is worth noting that implementation of the recommendation may result in more or fewer item numbers than specifically stated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change or leave unchanged</td>
<td>Describes when the services provided under these items will not be changed or affected by the recommendations. This does not rule out small changes in item descriptors (for example, references to other items, which may have changed as a result of the MBS Review or prior reviews).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obsolete services / items</td>
<td>Services that should no longer be performed as they do not represent current clinical best practice and have been superseded by superior tests or procedures.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritisation matrix</td>
<td>Helps rank problems or issues (usually generated through brainstorming or other techniques) by a particular criterion that is important to the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles &amp; Rules Committee</td>
<td>A committee that considers the broader questions about the principles, objectives and boundaries shaping the MBS and its impact in practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RACGP</td>
<td>Royal Australian College of General Practitioners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale</td>
<td>A set of reasons or a logical basis for a course of action or belief.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Services average annual growth</td>
<td>The average growth per year, over five years to 2016/17, in utilisation of services. Also known as the compound annual growth rate (CAGR).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinal Injections</td>
<td>An injection into an area of the spine to help reduce pain and improve function through reducing inflammation (swelling and irritation) and/or nociception.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder</td>
<td>Persons, groups or organisations that have an interest or concern in the outcomes of the MBS Review, and can affect or are affected by those outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgical Assistant(s)</td>
<td>An assistant to the surgeon who provides aid in exposure, haemostasis, closure, and other intraoperative technical functions that help the surgeon carry out a safe operation with optimal results for the patient.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surgical Co-Claiming</td>
<td>Where an item is claimed in conjunction with a surgical procedure item which should form part of that surgical procedure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Committee</td>
<td>The Pain Management Clinical Committee of the MBS Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Taskforce</td>
<td>The MBS Review Taskforce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic</td>
<td>The treatment of disease &amp; and the action of remedial agents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three-item rule</td>
<td>When more than three items are requested in an episode by a general practitioner for an out-of-hospital service, Medicare only pays for the three most expensive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total benefits</td>
<td>Total benefits paid in 2016/17 unless otherwise specified.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zygapophyseal</td>
<td>A set of synovial, plane joints between the articular processes of two (2) adjacent vertebrae.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A  Summary for consumers

This table describes the medical service, the recommendations of the clinical experts and why the recommendations have been made.

Table 9: Summary for Consumers

**Recommendation 1: Clarifying item 18213 - intravenous regional anaesthesia**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14209</td>
<td>Injection into the artery of an arm of leg with a particular medication</td>
<td>Deletion</td>
<td>Pain management specialists would no longer have access to this item. Claims would be made under item 18213</td>
<td>The item is no longer required as a stand-alone item for use by pain management specialists as current scientific evidence does not support the use of a sympatholytic agent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18213</td>
<td>Blocking the feeling in an arm or leg using an injection into a vein</td>
<td>The item be amended to allow for item 14209 to be incorporated</td>
<td>Claims for item 14209 would now be claimed under 18213.</td>
<td>It is more appropriate for pain management specialists to use item 18213</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
infusion or Intravenous regional anaesthesia of limb by retrograde perfusion’

This item remains as contemporary clinical best practice and that the change will clarify that other agents are not supported by the evidence.

**Recommendation 2:** *Clarifying items 18222 and 18225 - continuous infusion by catheter*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18222</td>
<td>Giving medicine continuously to keep a part of the body from having feeling or pain, with the doctor there for 15 minutes or less</td>
<td>Amend item to include ‘<em>not contrast medium</em>’ and ‘<em>continuous infusion by catheter</em>’</td>
<td>The item can no longer be used for diagnostic purposes</td>
<td>The items should not be used for diagnostic purposes because adequate item numbers already exist for diagnostic radiology practice. Edits to the item ensures the use of these items are not for diagnostic purposes, improving the value of care provided by the MBS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18225</td>
<td>Giving medicine continuously to keep a part of the body from having ‘<em>not contrast medium</em>’ and</td>
<td>Amend item descriptors to include ‘<em>not contrast medium</em>’ and ‘<em>continuous infusion by catheter</em>’</td>
<td>The item can no longer be used for diagnostic purposes</td>
<td>The items should not be used for diagnostic purposes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendation 3: Clarifying item 18230 - intrathecal or epidural injection of neurolytic substance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18230</td>
<td>Injection near the spinal cord of a substance that can damage nerves which is used to provide pain relief in chronic pain</td>
<td>Amend the item to ‘INTRATHECAL or EPIDURAL INJECTION of neurolytic substance (not contrast) by any route including transforaminal for the palliative treatment of chronic pain (Anaes.)’</td>
<td>The use of this item is not for diagnostic radiology procedures that use contrast</td>
<td>Amending the item will ensure the use is not for diagnostic radiology procedures that use contrast Additional information in relation to route and treatment clarifies the item scope and encourages appropriate claiming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Recommendation 4: Clarifying item 18232 - intrathecal or epidural injection of non-neurolytic substances

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18232</td>
<td>Injection near the spinal cord of a substance that is not an anaesthetic</td>
<td>Expand to include epidural injection with local anaesthetic and steroid,</td>
<td>Nothing, it is expected that claims are currently</td>
<td>Edits to the item are intended to provide clarity that services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(which causes numbness/stops feeling), contrast (which shows up on scans), or a substance that damages nerves which is used to diagnose a problem or provide pain relief in chronic pain.

### Recommendation 5: Recognising best practice in item 18276 - paravertebral nerves

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18276</td>
<td>Injection near the nerves that come out of the spinal cord to make them go numb</td>
<td>Change to make the item more specific in its use by including diagnostic medial branch blocks To be reviewed in 2 years.</td>
<td>Medial branch blocks would now be claimed under item 18276 rather than item 39013</td>
<td>This will allow 3 item 9013 to be used exclusively for intra-articular zygapophyseal or costo-transverse joint blocks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Recommendation 6: Clarifying item 18284 - ganglion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This will allow 3 item 9013 to be used exclusively for intra-articular zygapophyseal or costo-transverse joint blocks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**18284**

Injection of an anaesthetic substance into the nerves at the bottom and side of the neck.

This may reduce pain, swelling or sweating and may improve movement.

Amend to include to ‘cervical or thoracic sympathetic chain injection of an anaesthetic agent’

Nothing, thoracic sympathetic chain blocks are currently being claimed under this item.

Brings the local anaesthetic items into alignment with the neurolytic sympathetic chain blocks, providing clarity around claiming.

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**Recommendation 7:**  **Clarifying item 18286 - pelvic sympathetic blocks**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18286</td>
<td>Injection of an anaesthetic substance into the nerves in the upper or lower back near the spine (thoracic or lumbar sympathetic chain). This may reduce pain, swelling or sweating and may improve movement</td>
<td>Amend to exclude the thoracic region and include the pelvic region of the sympathetic chain</td>
<td>Nothing, pelvic sympathetic blocks are already claimed under this item</td>
<td>Limits any potential unintentional restriction on this item to areas above the pelvis and brings the local anaesthetic items into alignment with the neurolytic sympathetic chain blocks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Recommendation 8:**  **Reflecting best practice in items 18290 -18294 - neurolytic agent treatment**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18290</td>
<td>Destruction of one of the nerves that come from the brain and go outside the skull to other parts of the body (the cranial nerves). This can be used to treat chronic pain. One of the nerves, the trigeminal, is not covered here. “Botox” injections are not covered by this item.</td>
<td>Amend item to include ‘Under image guidance’.</td>
<td>Must now be performed under image guidance</td>
<td>Improves patient safety, and aligns the MBS to best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18292</td>
<td>Destruction of one of the branches of nerves in the body. This can be used to treat chronic pain. “Botox” injections are not covered by this item.</td>
<td>Amend item to include ‘Under image guidance’</td>
<td>Must now be performed under image guidance</td>
<td>Improves patient safety, and aligns the MBS to best practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18294</td>
<td>Destruction of a network of nerves (coeliac plexus) or particular nerves (splanchnic nerves) in the abdomen This may be done to treat chronic or</td>
<td>Amend item to include ‘Under image guidance’</td>
<td>Must now be performed under image guidance</td>
<td>Improves patient safety, and aligns the MBS to best practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Recommendation 9: Clarifying item 18296 - pelvic region of the sympathetic chain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18296</td>
<td>Injection of an anaesthetic substance into a bundle of the nerves in the lower back near the spine (lumbar sympathetic chain)</td>
<td>Include reference to PELVIC region in item</td>
<td>Nothing, the PELVIC region is currently being claimed under this item.</td>
<td>There is currently no item number which provides access to the pelvic region of the sympathetic chain for neurolytic injection. This change will reduce confusion with billing practices and will not change the number of claims per year</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This may reduce pain, swelling or sweating and may improve movement.

### Recommendation 10: Reflecting best practice in item 39013 - intra-articular injection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39013</td>
<td>Injection of contrast (which shows up on a scan), anaesthetic (which makes</td>
<td>Delete ‘or 1 or more primary posterior rami of spinal nerves’ and ‘or costotransverse’.</td>
<td>Medial branch blocks will now be claimed under item 18276</td>
<td>There is currently widespread claiming of this item number for diagnostic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This will now be claimed under item 18276. The change will reduce confusion with billing practices and will not change the number of claims per year.
it go numb), or corticosteroid (which reduces inflammation) into one or more of the small joints at the side of the spine (zygo-apophyseal joints or costo – transverse joints) or one the nerves that come out of the spinal cord (this description of the nerve pretty loose

 Include ‘under image guidance’ and explanatory notes regarding longer lasting pain management techniques.

This item will only be available to intra-articular injection

Review in 2 years.

medial branch blocks and the Committee considered that claiming for this procedure is better suited to item 18276.

Item will now be restricted to the lumbar region of the spine.

**Recommendation 11: Clarifying item 39100 - trigeminal nerve**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39100</td>
<td>Injection of the nerve that is responsible for feeling in the face, and the muscles used for biting and chewing (the trigeminal nerve), with a substance that will damage the nerve (alcohol or phenol) or a substance that will decrease inflammation (cortisone)</td>
<td>Amend to include that the injection should occur under image guidance and to identify the three specific branches</td>
<td>The procedure must be performed under image guidance</td>
<td>Clarifies what is considered as the ‘primary branch’ of the trigeminal nerve as there are three major branches Adding ‘under image guidance’ improves safety for patients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This is done to treat chronic pain

**Recommendation 12: Clarifying item 39118 - percutaneous neurotomy**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39118</td>
<td>Using radiowaves or freezing directed through needles in the skin to temporarily block the nerves that go to one of the small joints at the side of the spine (facet joints). A scan is done at the same time to guide the procedure. This is used to treat chronic or cancer pain.</td>
<td>Remove assistant fees associated with this item</td>
<td>All new items will be created in order to restrict the level of services able to be performed in a 12 month period to left and right sides of the body, and spinal region (Cervical, Thoracic, Lumbar and Sacral).</td>
<td>The surgical three-item rule is designed to encourage procedures are performed over multiple days, therefore restricting claiming for this procedure to four procedures in a calendar year for a specified pain region will encourage quality patient experience and safety and ensure that the MBS aligns with best practice professional standards. There is little evidence to support that pulsed radio-frequency is of lasting benefit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Review in 2 years.
The Committee does not believe that an assistant is needed for this procedure and patient safety will be maintained without it.

**Recommendation 13:** Reflecting best practice in item 39323 - percutaneous neurotomy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39323</td>
<td>Using radio waves or freezing directed through the needles in the skin to temporarily block nerves</td>
<td>Limit number of repeat procedures to six procedures in a calendar year for a specified pain region</td>
<td>Will only be claimable to a maximum of 6 episodes per year</td>
<td>Restrictions on episodes are for patient safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A scan is done at the same time to guide the procedure. This is used to treat chronic or cancer pain</td>
<td>Exclude ‘medial branch nerve’</td>
<td>An assistant will not be allowed to be claimed as part of this procedure</td>
<td>It is not considered necessary that an assistant is needed for this procedure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendation 14: Clarifying item 14218 - infusion pump refilling**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14218</td>
<td>Refilling the (long term) pump that</td>
<td>Removing ‘epidural’ and including</td>
<td>Accessing the side port</td>
<td>The amended item is intended</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
sits under the skin and delivers medicine to the spinal cord to control chronic or cancer pain

‘including cancer related pain’

Inclusion of “accessing the side port”

can now be claimed under this item rather than item 14221

to provide clarity around claiming practices and appropriate use of items

Side-port access is considered equivalent difficulty to item 14218 therefore claiming will move from item 14221 to this item

**Recommendation 15: Clarifying items 39125 to 39128 and item 39323 - infusion pump**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39125,</td>
<td>Placing a small, thin tube near the spinal cord that carries medicine</td>
<td>The items be amended to include ‘including cancer related pain’</td>
<td>Nothing, cancer related pain is not currently excluded by, although there is confusion in some minds about if they are applicable.</td>
<td>The amended items are intended to provide clarity around claiming practices and appropriate use of the items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39126</td>
<td>from a pump under the skin to that area to control chronic and cancer pain.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39127,</td>
<td>Placing the pump under the skin that can deliver the medicine AND placing a small, thin tube near the spinal cord that carries medicine from the pump AND filling the pump</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39128,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39133</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Used to control chronic and cancer pain

Removal of a pump under the skin or the removal or repositioning of the connected small thin tube that delivers medicine to the spinal cord to treat pain

**Recommendation 16: Clarifying items 39131, 39134, 39135, 39136, 39137 and 39139 - neurostimulator**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39131</td>
<td>Adjustment or reprogramming of mild electrical stimulator placed in the epidural or peripheral nerve space</td>
<td>Delete ‘neuropathic’ and ‘intractable’</td>
<td>Removes restriction of the procedure to only the chest region</td>
<td>The amended items are intended to provide clarity around claiming practices and appropriate use of the item number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amend ‘refractory angina pectoris’ to ‘refractory ischaemic pain’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39134</td>
<td>Placement of mild electrical stimulator or receiver under the skin</td>
<td>Delete ‘neuropathic’ and ‘intractable’</td>
<td>Removes restriction of the procedure to only the chest region</td>
<td>The amended items are intended to provide clarity around claiming practices and appropriate use of the item number.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Amend ‘refractory angina pectoris’ to ‘refractory ischaemic pain’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39135</td>
<td>Removing of mild electrical stimulator in operating theatres</td>
<td>Delete ‘neuropathic’ and ‘intractable’. Amend ‘refractory angina pectoris’ to ‘refractory ischaemic pain’ Add ‘open surgical removal’</td>
<td>Removes restriction of the procedure to only the chest region Prevents the item from being inappropriately claimed when removing or repositioning leads percutaneously Adding ‘open surgical removal’ or ‘open surgical repositioning’ is designed to prevent the item being inappropriately claimed when removing or repositioning leads percutaneously</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39136</td>
<td>Removing of lead from the epidural or peripheral nerve space in an operating theatre</td>
<td>Delete ‘neuropathic’ and ‘intractable’. Amend ‘refractory angina pectoris’ to ‘refractory ischaemic pain’ Add ‘open surgical removal’ Replace ‘inserted’ with ‘implanted’</td>
<td>Removes restriction of the procedure to only the chest region Prevents the item from being inappropriately claimed when removing or repositioning leads percutaneously Adding ‘open surgical removal’ or ‘open surgical repositioning’ is designed to prevent the item being inappropriately claimed when removing or repositioning leads percutaneously</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39137</td>
<td>Repositioning of lead including intraoperative test stimulation.</td>
<td>Delete ‘neuropathic’ and ‘intractable’. Amend ‘refractory angina pectoris’ to ‘refractory ischaemic pain’</td>
<td>Removes restriction of the procedure to only the chest region Prevents the item from being inappropriately</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Adding ‘open surgical removal’ or ‘open surgical repositioning’ is designed to prevent the item being inappropriately claimed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Recommendation 17: Clarifying items 39130 and 39138 – small electrical stimulation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39130</td>
<td>These items refer to Percutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation (PENS) therapy</td>
<td>Deleting ‘neuropathic’</td>
<td>There would no longer be a 4-lead restriction on the items</td>
<td>The three item rule currently being considered at the Principles and Rules Committee will supersede the ‘maximum...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39138</td>
<td>Through the skin, putting a small</td>
<td>Amend ‘refractory angina pectoris’ to ‘refractory ischaemic pain’</td>
<td>Removes restriction of the procedure to only the chest region</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
lead near the spine that can deliver a small electrical stimulation to the area. Used in the treatment of chronic pain.

Using a cut in the skin, putting a small lead near a nerve that can deliver a small electrical stimulation. Used in the treatment of chronic pain.

Deleting ‘to a maximum of four leads’
For item 39138 adding ‘where the leads are intended to remain in situ long term’
Adding explanatory notes to restrict use to appropriately trained practitioners
the procedure to only the chest region
Item 39138 restrict the item being inappropriately claimed, e.g. for Percutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation procedure (placement of an electrode for 20-30 mins with pulsed therapy delivered and then leads removed)
of 4 leads’ rule
To restrict the item being inappropriately claimed.

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**Recommendation 18: Further review of item 14221 - devices infusing into the venous system**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14221</td>
<td>Accessing of a long-term implanted device for the delivery of therapeutic agents</td>
<td>Refer for review</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Further evidence as to the use of this item is required to ensure it is being correctly used</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Recommendation 19: Better explanation of the use of implanted device items**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Implant Device items</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Better explanation to cover: Implant procedures should be performed in the context of clinical best practice. Current clinical best practice for use of these item numbers includes:</td>
<td>Outlining high level best clinical practice in the notes would be helpful in guiding clinical practice and patient selection.</td>
<td>Ensuring that high-value services are performed safely and adequately by appropriate professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• All procedures being performed in the context of a comprehensive pain management program with an appropriately qualified team.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Patients should be appropriately selected for the procedure, incorporating assessment of physical and psychological function prior to implantation with findings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
documented in medical record.

- Outcome evaluation using validated measures pre and post implantation.

- Ensuring appropriate follow up and ongoing management of implanted medical devices.

- Implantable devices require ongoing monitoring and management. If the person providing the implantation service is not the ongoing physician manager of the device, they are responsible for ensuring that ongoing management has been arranged by an adequately trained professional.

- The Committee also recommends adding
reference to the Faculty of Pain Medicine guidelines (currently starting development) when available.

**Recommendation 20 – Reflecting best practice in items 39130, 39134, 39135, 39136 and 39137 – use of assistants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
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<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39130, 39134, 39135, 39136, 39137</td>
<td>Placement, repositioning or removal of neurostimulators, leads or receivers that were inserted for pain treatment.</td>
<td>The items be considered for use of an assistant fee, noting that the assistant fee is currently being discussed by the Principles and Rules Committee for restructuring around the mechanisms of claiming</td>
<td>An assistant would be claimable under the MBS for these procedures.</td>
<td>These procedures are considered to be two person procedures and there is a higher rate of complications when insertion is performed alone. Therefore for safety reasons an assistant support item is recommended.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendation 21: Restriction of items 18228, 18232, 18238, 18244, 18252, 18254, 18262, 18264, 18266, 18280 and 18288 - diagnosis and management of chronic pain**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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18228, 18232, 18238, 18244, 18252, 18256, 18262, 18264, 18266, 18280, 18288.

Various

These items should not be co-claimed with a surgical procedure and restricted for use in the diagnosis and management of chronic pain

Amended to add ‘for the diagnosis or treatment of chronic pain or cancer pain’

For item 18228, this should also include the management of acute chest wall injury (e.g. rib fractures)

For item 18264, this should also include the management of acute pain related to labour/delivery

These items will not be able to be co-claimed with a surgical procedure

Many of the pain management items under consideration are being inappropriately co-claimed with a surgical procedure.

The Committee believes that this is an unethical practice which goes against the spirit of the MBS and that the principle of providing ‘complete medical services’ should be encouraged where possible

The pain management items should not be co-claimed with a surgical procedure when intraoperative analgesia should be an integral part of the surgical procedure

Recommendation 22: Clarifying items 18234 and 18236 - trigeminal nerve
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
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<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18234</td>
<td>Injection of anaesthetic into primary and peripheral branches of the trigeminal nerve.</td>
<td>These two items cannot be co-claimed with each other</td>
<td>These two items can no longer be claimed together or with a surgical procedure</td>
<td>In nearly all identified situations, it is only appropriate to claim one of the item numbers, and generally these items should be claimed as part of the surgical procedure. (see complete medical service definition)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18236</td>
<td></td>
<td>These items cannot be co-claimed with any surgical procedure.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendation 23: Future review item 18278 – sciatic nerve co-claiming**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
<th>Committee recommendation</th>
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<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18278</td>
<td>Treatment of the sciatic nerve by injection of anaesthetic agent</td>
<td>Identified as requiring further future review</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Further investigation is required to ensure correct claiming</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recommendation 24: Deletion of items 18274, 39115 and 39140 - outdated and not best practice**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18274</td>
<td>Injection of a single nerve that comes out of the spinal cord to make it go numb.</td>
<td>Delete as it refers to outdated procedures and is no longer used for pain management</td>
<td>This item will no longer be able to be used</td>
<td>This is not necessary because a multi-level injection is required to block even a single facet joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39115</td>
<td>Temporarily blocking/interrupting by any method the nerves that come out of the spinal cord</td>
<td>Delete as it refers to outdated procedures and is no longer used for pain management</td>
<td>This item will no longer be able to be used</td>
<td>This item is very rarely used, with a decrease of 42% between 2016/2017 and 2017-2018 This item is a historical number used for an outdated procedure and should be deleted to modernise the MBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39140</td>
<td>Inserting an epidural catheter under image control to remove soft scar tissue.</td>
<td>Delete as it refers to outdated procedures and is no longer used for pain management</td>
<td>This item will no longer be able to be used</td>
<td>This item is to be deleted as the epidural lysis of adhesions is not evidence based</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recommendation 25:  Referrals of items 18258, 18260, 18270, 18272 and 18282

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>What it does</th>
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<th>What would be different</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18258, 18260, 18270, 18272, 18282</td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Referral to other clinical committees.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>These items are not used in volume by Pain Medicine Specialists, therefore the committee has referred these items to the Vascular Clinical Committee and the Thoracic Surgery Clinical Committees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>