

# Consumer Comments in Health Technology Assessment in Australia: How Common and Influential Are They?

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## Objectives

- This research explored factors that may be associated with the inclusion of consumer comments in Health Technology Assessment appraisals conducted by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee in Australia, and assessed if the presence of consumer comments had an impact on Health Technology Assessment decisions.

## Background

- The importance of consumer involvement in healthcare decision-making to provide unique perspectives from physicians, patients and caregivers who have first-hand experience with a disease has been acknowledged by Health Technology Assessment (HTA) agencies around the world.<sup>1</sup> Consumer involvement initiatives undertaken in Australia and the UK are summarised in **Figure 1**.
- In Australia, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC) considers 'consumer comments' in its appraisals to make more informed decisions based on an understanding of how new treatments impact patients' quality of life.<sup>2</sup>
- Previous research has reported the positive influence of consumer comments in decisions made by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), but not the Scottish Medicines Consortium.<sup>3, 4</sup>

## Methods

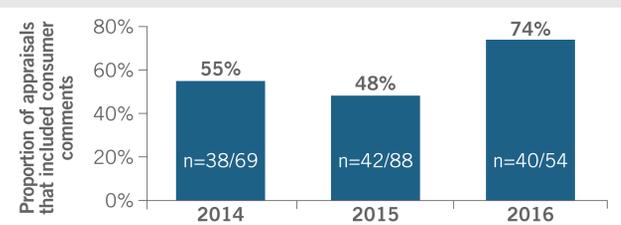
- Public summary documents published by PBAC between March 2014 and November 2016 were searched.
- Only appraisals on major submissions (for new medications or when substantial changes were made to current listings) were reviewed; appraisals informed by minor submissions and resubmissions were excluded.
- For each appraisal, the presence or absence of consumer comments, indication, medication use (vaccine or treatment) and appraisal outcomes were recorded. For those that included consumer comments, the consumers involved and the comments that they provided were also extracted.
- The prevalence of consumer comment inclusion in appraisals for oncology versus non-oncology indications and appraisals for rare-diseases versus non-rare diseases were compared using chi-squared tests.
  - Rare disease was defined as a disease that affects not more than 1 in 2,000 people in the population.<sup>7, 8</sup>
- The number of medications that were recommended and not recommended (rejected or deferred) was compared between appraisals that included consumer comments and those that did not.

## Results

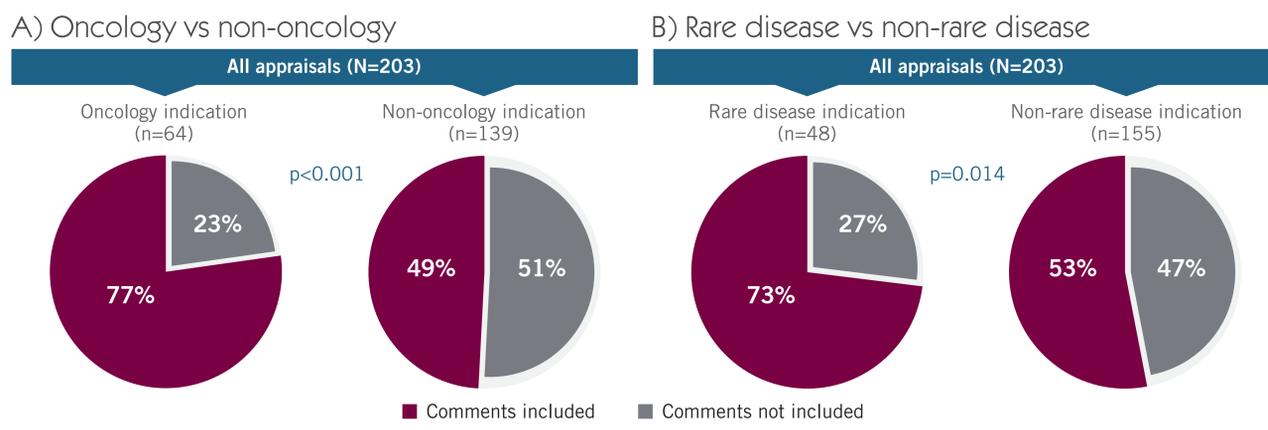
- The search yielded 211 PBAC summary documents, of which 57% (n=120) included consumer comments from patients, healthcare professionals and/or patient organisations.
- The proportion of appraisals that included consumer comments increased by 19% from 2014 to 2016 (**Figure 2**).
- When stratified by indication (excluding 8 submissions relating to vaccinations), there was a statistically significant difference in the prevalence of consumer comments between appraisals of oncology treatments compared to non-oncology treatments (p<0.001) (**Figure 3A**).
- There was also a statistically significant difference in the prevalence of consumer comments between appraisals of rare disease treatments compared to non-rare disease treatments (p=0.014) (**Figure 3B**).

- The majority of the consumer comments highlighted the clinical need for and benefits of the medications, while only two appraisals had comments that expressed consumers' concerns around inappropriate prescribing instructions and/or safe use of the medications.
- Nevertheless, a lower proportion of appraisals that included consumer comments were recommended compared to the appraisals that did not include them (**Figure 4**).

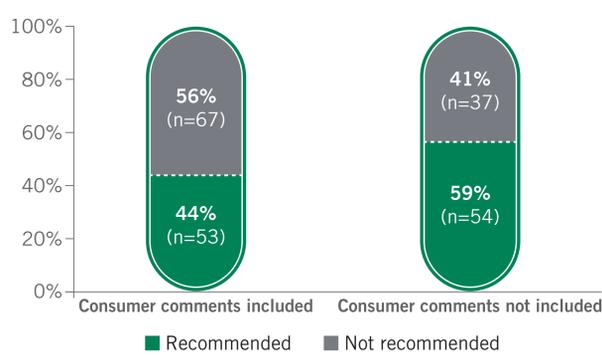
**Figure 2** | Prevalence of consumer comments over time



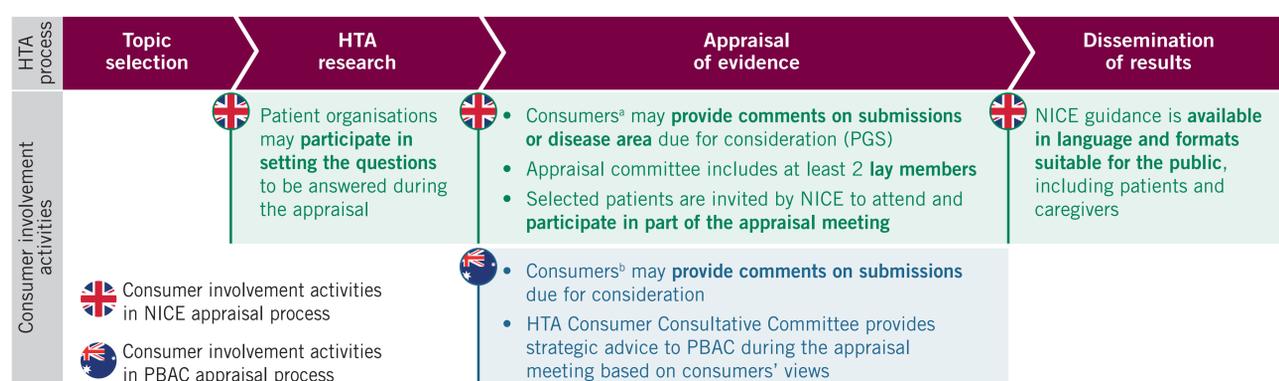
**Figure 3** | Prevalence of consumer comments by indication



**Figure 4** | PBAC decisions on appraisals with and without consumer comments



**Figure 1** | Consumer involvement activities in HTA processes<sup>2, 5, 6</sup>



<sup>a</sup>Consumers include patients, patient organisations, service users and caregivers; <sup>b</sup>Consumers include patients, healthcare professionals and patient organisations. HTA: Health Technology Assessment; NICE: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; PBAC: Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee; PGS: Patient Group Submissions.

## Conclusions

- The higher prevalence of consumer comments included in appraisals for oncology and rare disease medications compared to other therapeutic areas suggests that consumers may be more likely to provide their input in disease areas with a particularly high clinical need.
- Due to the presence of a large number of confounding influences, it is difficult to draw conclusions around the association between the inclusion of consumer comments and subsidy recommendation or non-recommendation. However, our results do not suggest that the presence/absence of consumer comments is a defining feature of appraisals achieving or not achieving a subsidy recommendation.
- Further research may explore a longer period of study as well as the association between the volume of consumer comments in each appraisal and the PBAC decision, in order to better understand the impact of consumer input on PBAC decision-making.

## References

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