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No $8 billion Medicare fraud Senate Estimates hears

Claims made in some media outlets of Medicare fraud have been shown to be vastly inflated and have once again been refuted by senior health department officials.

Department of Health and Aged Care Secretary, Professor Brendan Murphy has told a Senate Estimates hearing in Canberra there is no evidence to back the media claims.

The hearing heard internal departmental reviews commissioned by Health Minister Mark Butler in the wake of the media claims have been completed, but not made public.

Senior departmental officials told the hearing a PhD by Dr Margaret Faux, which was the basis of the media allegations, had been reviewed.

Officials outlined that while the PhD talked about potential non-compliance, it was of a much smaller estimate, and was attributed to issues such as Medicare requirements often not being easily understood.

“So, the narrative in the media is quite different to what is actually in the PhD, Senator,” said a senior official in response to questions by opposition health spokeswoman Senator Anne Ruston.

Dr Murphy said the media claims had not been “backed by any evidence that we’ve seen that the issue is that large”.

Senator Ruston told the inquiry she’d heard the media allegations had a “significant impact” on medical practitioners especially GPs, and the Department committed to investigating this issue further and reporting back to the Committee.

Meanwhile AMA President Professor Stephen Robson said the “outrageous claims” made in certain sections of the media should now be put to bed once and for all.

“This trial by media has led to increased doctor distress at a time when the profession is under continued pressure. What has been completely overlooked is the incredible amount of unpaid work doctors do due to the underfunding of Medicare, and the immense benefit this goodwill provides to the community and the health system,” Professor Robson said.

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