

The revision of the List of Aids and Articles (AiArL) Status report

Key facts

The Swiss Federal Audit Office (SFAO) examined the progress made on the revision of the List of Aids and Articles (AiArL), in German “Mittel- und Gegenständeliste (MiGeL)”. This examination was in response to a request from the Finance Delegation. The excessively high reimbursement amounts for products on this list were the subject of recent criticism in the media.

The list contains medical equipment for therapeutic and diagnostic use. These are products as diverse as dressings, gauze strips, breathing apparatus, support stockings and blood sugar tests. Health insurance covers products on prescription provided the patient can use or apply them without the assistance of a professional. The Federal Department of Home Affairs (FDHA) sets the acceptance conditions and determines the maximum reimbursement amount, the limit which is borne by health insurers. In 2014, the cost of AiArL products reimbursed insurers amounted to CHF 473 million, which was 7.7% higher than in 2013.

Long-promised revision

The need to fully revise the AiArL is not something new. The Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) has been studying different possible options, including quite simply abolishing the list, since 2006. It finally decided to revise the list within the existing legal framework, i.e. without fundamental change. However, the work has been suspended due to a lack of resources. The FOPH is caught up with other activities considered to be more important. Following an investigation by the Price Supervisor, the FDHA promised that the work would be completed in 2013.

However, the FOPH did not resume its revision of the AiArL until 2014. The following year, it set up a project organisation and prepared a concept. It took care to involve the stakeholders. It designed the concept in two stages. The basic principles first need to be determined before concretely revising each of the items. The FOPH has devoted 1.7 FTEs to this project since 1 June 2016. It is assisted by groups of experts. An advisory group gives its opinion on the results of each stage. For the revision of the different items, the FOPH intends to assign mandates to external offices, but without determining an own fixed budget for the project.

Work which is starting and is planned over the course of several years

The project is only in its infancy. The work on the core issues will be spread out between 2016 and 2017. The actual revision of the products and materials is to start after summer 2016 and be completed in 2019. There are a number of unknown factors and issues to be resolved, including how information can be obtained about the different components of a product's price. Furthermore, the products listed are highly diverse. The SFAO believes that the end of 2016 is a pivotal time for assessing the ability to make progress on this dossier and sticking to the timetable. The FOPH should have the results on the basic principles and start on the actual revision of the list, product by product.

It is difficult to estimate the potential savings resulting from the revision. The FOPH does not have the data for a more detailed assessment. Based on past reductions in AiArL amounts and the results of a study conducted in 2014, the FOPH reckons that the possible savings will amount to a maximum



of CHF 10 million. Other problems complicate the situation. For example, healthcare providers invoice their products and materials according to the AiArL in a non-compliant manner, i.e. these products should be included in fixed prices under other medical tariffs. Alternatively, the products are invoiced according to the maximum amount and not on the basis of the purchase price. Finally, the manufacturers and distributors do not necessarily pass on the reductions decided by the federal authorities. The difference then has to be paid by the insured persons.

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