

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2012-2013, 30 & 31 May and 1 June 2012

Question: E12-171

OUTCOME1: Population health

Topic: NHMRC Guidelines

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Number of pages: 3

Senator: Senator Carol Brown

Question:

- a) What funding is allocated for clinical guideline development over the forward estimates?
- b) How are the decisions determined on which clinical guidelines get funded?
- c) How are the decisions made on the list of essential or priority guidelines? Who makes the decision?
- d) Who has responsibility for ensuring clinical guidelines are well implemented and widely available to those who should be using them to guide their clinical decisions?
- e) Is dedicated funding available to assist guideline developers with implementation?
- f) Has the NHMRC looked at reforming the current approach to guidelines prioritisation, funding and implementation? If so, has there been any external consultation? What has been the result of those deliberations?
- g) What is the average time it takes for guidelines to be approved by the NHMRC?
- h) What is the proportion of clinical guidelines submitted for NHMRC approval?
- i) What measures are being taken to look at the need for 'living' guidelines that can be updated rapidly after new research warrants a change in approach?

Answer:

- a) NHMRC does not have an allocation for clinical guideline development over the forward estimates. NHMRC develops guidelines where specifically funded to do so by another agency (for example, the Department of Health and Ageing) pursuant to section 7 of the *NHMRC Act 1992*.

NHMRC also sets standards for high-quality clinical guidelines in Australia and has a role in approving guidelines developed by other organisations if they seek NHMRC approval under section 14A of the *NHMRC Act 1992*.

- b) This is determined by the funder.
- c) This is determined by the funder.

- d) The funder and/or developer of guidelines are primarily responsible for implementation and dissemination. The NHMRC hosts a public database of clinical guidelines in Australia, and professional groups, consumer advocates and universities also play a role.

Where NHMRC is funded to develop and issue a guideline, it seeks to ensure that it is implementable and disseminated widely.

Where NHMRC has agreed to consider a guideline for approval, it is a mandatory requirement that: a plan for dissemination be submitted with the proposed guideline; and key guideline recommendations that are most likely to lead to improvements in health outcomes are highlighted for consideration in implementation.

- e) This is determined by the funder.

The NHMRC standard for clinical practice guidelines (introduced in 2011) recognises that implementation of guideline recommendations is critical for clinical practice improvement, and that implementation should be considered throughout the development of the guideline.

- f) NHMRC is currently considering this issue following an NHMRC Annual Clinical Practice Guidelines Report (2012), which reports on matters including the extent to which current guidelines meet health priorities and also on the number of different organisations and agencies currently involved in funding and developing guidelines. Consultation with relevant agencies would occur before finalising these considerations.

- g) Once the developer has submitted the final draft guideline, NHMRC aims to provide approval within three months, as set out in the NHMRC standard for clinical practice guidelines. If the guideline developer is required to undertake further work to meet the NHRMC standard, this deadline can be impacted.

- h) The NHMRC maintains a portal that hosts most of the current clinical guidelines in Australia. Only 4% of the 781 guidelines that have been added to this portal since 2005 are NHMRC- approved clinical practice guidelines (under section 14A of the *NHMRC Act 1992*) or NHMRC-issued clinical practice guidelines (under section 7).

Note that many of these 781 guidelines would not be eligible to seek NHMRC approval, for example by virtue of their format (for example, journal articles or websites) or provenance (for example, guidelines developed by state or territory governments exclusively for state or territory use).

- i) The Australian Drinking Water Guidelines, developed by NHMRC, already undergoes rolling revision to ensure it represents the latest scientific evidence on good quality drinking water.

NHMRC will consider this approach for other guidelines where the challenge of maintaining high quality rigorous processes for guideline development can be balanced with producing trustworthy rapid updates, subject to funders' agreement.