

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: E12-030

OUTCOME 12: Health Workforce Capacity

Topic: Complexity and Fragmentation of Incentive Programs for the Rural Health Workforce

Type of Question: Written

Number of pages: 2

Senator: Senator Boyce

Question:

- a) Many health incentives and schemes for rural health professionals in Australia are fragmented, complex and difficult to navigate. With regards to incentive programs for the rural workforce, there is little coherence between state and federal levels and health professionals struggle to understand what incentives exist and whether they are eligible for them. What steps is the government taking to ensure this information is compiled and presented in an accessible and user friendly way so health professionals can immediately know what is and is not available to them?
- b) Do you accept the view that many health professionals could be missing out on incentives because its so difficult to work out what they're eligible for and this may prevent them from moving to rural areas because they don't have the information readily available to make informed decisions?

Answer:

- a) The existing Rural and Regional Health Australia website (www.ruralhealthaustralia.gov.au) is a portal for health and aged care program information and provides links to other programs with a regional focus. This includes explanations of Government programs and easy to use tools to work out eligibility for incentives, including links to the Doctor Connect locality maps and search function.
- b) No. The Department of Health and Ageing provides a range of options for doctors to access information, for instance through the Rural and Regional Health Australia website, the Department's own website, the Doctor Connect website, through help lines operated by the Department of Human Services (eg 1800 010 550), through email inboxes (eg GPRIP@health.gov.au) and through funding student and professional organisations to provide support to their members.

The *Rural Health Workforce Strategy* (RHWS) contains new and enhanced incentives to encourage medical practitioners to work in rural and remote areas of Australia. A communications campaign was developed to promote, educate and inform health professionals, stakeholders and consumers including:

- the Rural Health Champions program which consists of health professionals providing an insight into rural practice through discussions at conferences, events and a dedicated blog site;
- the Doctor Connect website, which provides information to medical practitioners about incentives;
- Conference kits and fact sheets, which are distributed at all major conferences and events; and
- the Go Rural program, which provides an opportunity for urban health professionals to gain further insight into the benefits of rural practice.