

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2016 - 2017, 6 May 2016

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OUTCOME: 2 - Health Access and Support Services

Topic: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Program

Type of Question: Hansard Page 64, 6 May 2016

Senator: Siewert, Rachel

Question:

Mr Cormack: Senator Siewert asked a question about a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide program. The former government committed \$17.8 million over four years, from 2013-14 through to 2016-17, for a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention strategy. That funding has now been provided to PHNs, on an Indigenous population health basis, from 2016-17. This funding is in the forward estimates at \$25 million over the next four years. This is in addition to funding provided through the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, which also funds projects targeted towards Indigenous Australians. This is also separate funding from the \$85 million provided for Indigenous mental health services.

Senator SIEWERT: There was some specific money committed to the Kimberley out of that money. Was that ever spent?

Mr Cormack: There was a pause in expenditure, from that fund, over 2014-15 and 2015-16 in the lead-up to government consideration of the whole of the mental health sector, following on from the work that the Mental Health Commission undertook. That money is still in the system. I will have to look specifically and further to find out what, if any, was spent over the 2014-15 and 2015-16 financial year. I just do not have that to hand, at the moment.

Senator SIEWERT: It was committed in 2013-14, though, you said?

Mr Cormack: That is right.

Senator SIEWERT: Was there any money committed then, in 2013-14, out of the \$17.8 million? I want to be really clear about this.

Mr Cormack: I will have to take that on notice. All I am saying is the money is still there in the forward estimates.

Senator SIEWERT: For what it is worth, could you please take on notice how much was spent in the Kimberley from the original commitment.

Answer:

Background to the funding associated with the implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy

- On 23 May 2013, the former Government launched the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy* (the Strategy), supported by \$17.8m funding over four years through the 2013-14 Budget.
- The funding was committed to support the implementation of key recommendations of the Strategy and was not targeted to a specific geographical area at the time of the announcement.
- On 7 September 2013, the federal election was held which resulted in a change of Government. The incoming Government determined that there would be a pause on expenditure, in the lead up to Government consideration of the whole of mental health sector following on from the National Mental Health Commission's Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services (the Review).
- On 4 February 2014, the then Minister for Health announced the terms of reference for the Review.
- The Government determined that the implementation of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy* and associated funding would be informed by the outcomes of the National Mental Health Commission Review.
- Throughout this period, separate program funding continued to be provided under the former National Suicide Prevention Program and Taking Action to Tackle Suicide program to projects providing suicide prevention activities and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
- On 16 April 2015, the final report of the National Mental Health Commission's *Contributing Lives, Thriving Communities – Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services* was publicly released.
- On 26 November 2016, the Government released its response to the Review, which included refocussed efforts to prevent suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Current funding for Indigenous specific suicide prevention activity

- Funding for Indigenous-specific suicide prevention activity is now an ongoing component of Commonwealth suicide prevention investment, as part of the new direction in suicide prevention outlined in the Government's response to the Review.
- The funding previously allocated to the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy* is now an ongoing funding commitment and equates to approximately \$6.3 million per annum with approximately \$5.6 million per annum allocated to the PHN flexible funding pool and \$0.7 million per annum for Indigenous-specific national activity.
- This equates to approximately \$25.2 million over four years in the forward estimates, commencing 2016-17.
- This ongoing funding is in addition to the \$85 million (over 3 years from 2016-17) specifically earmarked for Indigenous mental health through PHNs.
- As part of their broader role in mental health and suicide prevention, PHNs have a specific requirement to consider the needs of Indigenous people and communities in their

region. This includes identifying high risk communities and supporting the implementation of culturally appropriate activity, guided by the goals and actions identified within the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy*.

Funding for suicide prevention in the Kimberley?

- Funding for suicide prevention in the Kimberley has been allocated through the Country WA PHN as part of the PHN mental health and suicide prevention flexible funding pool.
- Under this arrangement, Country WA PHN has been allocated a portion of the available \$5.6 million per annum for Indigenous suicide prevention, weighted according to Indigenous population.
- In addition, the Government has committed to a suicide prevention trial in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Funding of up to \$1 million per year over three years will be provided to Country WA PHN.