

Senate Community Affairs Committee
ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO
Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 30/31 May 2011

Question: E11-112

OUTCOME 0: Whole of Portfolio

Topic: DATA INTERPRETATION ISSUES

Written Question on Notice

Senator Boyce asked:

Please outline any other areas [that is, other than 'child neglect'] where the AIHW believes the lack of a standard national definition presents data interpretation issues?

Answer:

Wherever approved national data standards do not exist, there is the risk that data definition, collection, recording, analysis and reporting practices may vary between data providers in ways that create challenges in interpreting the resulting data.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) has legislated responsibility for the development of specialised statistical standards and classifications relevant to health and welfare services, in consultation with the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It works closely with data providers and other stakeholders to help establish and encourage adherence to national data standards which enable comparison of performance across jurisdictions.

National standard data definitions can be found in the National Health Data Dictionary, the National Community Services Data Dictionary and the Housing and Homelessness Data Dictionary. These repositories are maintained by AIHW on its on-line metadata management system (METeOR).

Data standards are created through systematic and collaborative development (or updating) of agreed definitions of data concepts and attendant data elements. This work is usually led by AIHW and incorporates input from a range of experts and stakeholders such as jurisdictions. AIHW ensure, as far as possible, that data definitions are aligned with relevant international standards such as those promulgated by the World Health Organization and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

The specifications are endorsed by the appropriate sub-committees of the Australian Health Ministers' Conference, the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Conference and the Housing Ministers' Conference and, where they relate to a National Minimum Data Set (NMDS), this endorsement creates the requirement to collect and report data to AIHW against the standard data definitions.

In many instances support is given to data providers, including jurisdictions and service agencies, to collect data accurately against the definitions. Once data is received it is validated to ensure that it complies with data collection standards – thereby further reducing the risk of there being non-comparable data. Where data is believed to be non-comparable

between data providers this is noted in AIHW releases and, where possible, the nature and likely effect of non-comparability on the ability to interpret the data is made clear.

There is a range of ongoing work being undertaken by the AIHW to ensure standard national definitions. During 2010–11, a national minimum dataset was developed for the AIHW's new Specialist Homelessness Services data collection. In the coming year, work is being undertaken in collaboration with national information committees on development of national datasets for disability services, radiotherapy waiting times and private hospitals.

Substantial data development work currently being undertaken by the AIHW will contribute to improved standard national definitions for hospitals and health data, including priority data development to support national COAG performance reporting, enhancements to the National Perinatal Data Collection, and development work related to a primary care national minimum data set, and the statistical underpinning for e-health standards.

Under the COAG National Indigenous Reform Agreement, the AIHW is working with stakeholders and the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH) on national primary health care Key Performance Indicators for Indigenous- specific primary health care services. The first cycle for reporting in 2010–11 will be restricted to OATSIH funded services. This will become a national collection by 2013–14.