

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health, Aged Care and Sport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Hearing Health and Wellbeing in Australia

3 March 2017

Question no: 3

**Topic: Accessing hearing services**

**Type of Question: written**

**Senator: Mr Zimmerman**

**Question:**

At risk populations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the elderly, and people living in rural and regional areas can encounter barriers to accessing hearing services. How are these barriers being addressed for each group.

**Answer:**

The Department of Health's submission to the Senate Inquiry into Hearing Health and Wellbeing of Australia outlines how services are delivered to culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the elderly, and people living in rural and regional areas. Refer to:

Page 6 Current Access and Support;  
Page 8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Specific Measures;  
Page 10 Healthy Ears – Better Hearing, Better Listening Program;  
Page 13 Figure 2: Geographic distribution of Hearing Centres in the Voucher Scheme;  
Page 14 Community Service Obligations

Further to the information provided in the Department of Health's submission, we provide the following detailed information on support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

The Australian Government is providing approximately \$73 million over 2012-13 - 2020-21 to address barriers for Indigenous Australians to accessing hearing services.

\$39.5 million is provided through the Indigenous Australian Health Program over 2013-14 - 2018-19 for a range of targeted ear health activities:

- Clinical ear health services (\$31.3 million over 2013-14 - 2017-18).
  - The Healthy Ears – Better Hearing, Better Listening Program improves access for Indigenous children and youth to outreach hearing health services provided by health professionals such as GPs, nurses, medical specialists, speech pathologists and audiologists. Since commencement in 2013-14, the number of patients accessing care has increased significantly from 7,366 to 42,357 in 2015-16.

- Expediting access to surgery (\$1.9 million over 2014-15 - 2016-17).
  - The Eye and Ear Surgical Support initiative expedites access to ear surgery for Indigenous children who have been on lengthy waiting lists, with a focus on rural and remote locations. Support is provided for the travel and accommodation costs of both the health professional and the patient and their carer. The cost of the surgery is billed to the MBS. Hospitals are providing access to operating theatres and pre and post-operative care.
- Workforce training (\$2.6 million over 2014-15 - 2018-19).
  - Training in ear and hearing assessment is provided nationally, including to clinics in remote locations. Participants include Aboriginal health workers, GPs and nurses. Around 1,500 people have completed training in 81 locations nationally.
- Ear health coordination (\$2.1 million over 2015-16 - 2017-18).
  - In NSW, QLD, SA, VIC and WA ear health coordinators assist with streamlining of referral to other services.
- Provision of ear and hearing health equipment (\$1.4 million over 2016-17 - 2017-18).
  - All Commonwealth funded Aboriginal and Community Controlled health Services and health clinics with a predominance of Indigenous patients have access to the supply and maintenance of ear and hearing assessment equipment. Over 1,000 pieces of ear health equipment is located at 168 sites nationally.
- Clinical guidelines to assist health practitioners in the management of Otitis Media.
  - The Recommendations for Clinical Care Guidelines on the Management of Otitis Media in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations (2001) (the Guidelines) were comprehensively revised in 2010. The Guidelines describe best practice care and can be obtained free of charge through the Department of Health's website.
- Health promotion materials (\$0.15 million over 2016-17 - 2017-18).
  - Under the Care for Kids' Ears campaign, ear health resources were developed for Indigenous children, women's groups, teachers and other carers. Resources include activities to highlight the importance of hygiene and early intervention, and the impact of smoking and nutrition on the ear health of children. These resources can be obtained free of charge from the Care for Kids' Ears website.

\$33.4 million is being provided through the National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI) over 2012-13 to 2021-22 specifically for ear health services in the Northern Territory. The NTRAI provides funding for services that aim to reduce the prevalence of ear disease through audiology services, complex case management and enhanced general hearing health care to infants and their carers.