

Inquiry into Australian Government Funding: Audit Report No. 50 (2017-18)
Primary Healthcare Grants under the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

Questions on Notice

Question:

Mr HILL: My question to the department—because the Auditor-General didn't audit the savings issue—is: were those savings of \$41 million achieved?

Mr Roddam: Yes, they were.

Mr HILL: Were all of the savings achieved through funding reduction to antismoking measures, or did some savings land elsewhere?

Mr Roddam: Primarily through antismoking.

Mr HILL: Can you take on notice and give us detail of precisely where those savings landed—antismoking and where else savings may have landed?

Mr Roddam: We can do that.

Mr HILL: Because the Auditor-General didn't. The advice to government didn't contain details of the proposed consolidation. There was a savings requirement. The department said, in a short time frame, if I'm reading this right, 'We'll chunk some stuff together,' but didn't provide any detail. Is that adequate advice for a minister to make a decision on?

Mr Roddam: I think we may need to take that on notice to look at the advice.

Mr HILL: Auditor-General?

Mr Hehir: I think it's a very difficult question to answer. It depends on the scale and the level of information the minister has prior to that. Certainly the department's saying to the minister, 'We think we can do this in this way,' so I don't think we're critical of it in this report.

Mr Hartland: I think we should take it on notice and give you a proper answer about this.

Mr HILL: I'm just reading the words here.

Mr Hartland: We understand. We're not—

Mr HILL: It doesn't sound like the minister was well advised.

Mr Hartland: We'll take it on notice.

Mr HILL: I'm not having a go at the minister here.

Mr Hartland: It's a very fair question. I'm not trying to wriggle out of it. Well, I am trying to wriggle out of it, but I'm not trying to wriggle out of it in a kind of completely untransparent way! It is often the case, when you deal with these difficult things, that you'll give advice in tranches. There'll be a broad proposition, and then you'll come back with the details. I don't know personally whether that was the case here, but we should go away and give you an answer about what this related to and how it was handled.

Mr HILL: Thank you.

Answer:

All savings identified to the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme in the 2014-15 Budget were achieved by the Department.

This was realised through a reduction in activities under the Tackling Indigenous Smoking program. No front line or primary care services were reduced as a result of the savings.