

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2011-2012, 15 February 2012

Question: E12-289

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ON DRUG STRATEGY

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

Further to the answer which was provided in response to Question E11-323 re the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS):

- a) Please provide the name of those people consulted?
- b) In paragraph F) the department has answered that it does not know the questions that were used to form the basis of the report. Given that the department spent approximately \$200,000 on this report and that it has adopted recommendations from it, could you please provide this fundamental information?

Answer:

- a) The names of the organisations consulted in the development of the COAG Efficiency Review of the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy (MCDS) are provided in Question E12-288. The report has been released under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*. The names of the individuals interviewed during the consultation of the report have been redacted under Section 47F – Public Interest conditional exemption – Personal privacy under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982*.
- b) The report cost \$196,338 (GST inclusive). The research was commissioned by the MCDS not by the Department of Health and Ageing. The report was funded by the MCDS with contribution from the Australian Government and all states and territories. The questions that formed the basis of the report can be found at Appendix C of the report (copy attached)

Appendix C Research questions

The following table outlines the range of questions that have been used to guide our review and to make an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the MCDS and its supporting structures.

Table 6: Research questions

Key theme Questions to be addressed

Efficiency

- When was the last review of the MCDS conducted and what were the findings?
- Have any issues/findings raised in previous reviews of the MCDS been addressed? Have changes resulted in positive outcomes or more efficient processes?
- What was the extent of funding required (by financial year) to continue the work of the MCDS (including secretariat costs, travel costs, meeting costs, etc)?
- Have the MCDS and associated structures been fiscally prudent with funding received? What accountability measures have been put in place to ensure efficient use of funds?
- How many meetings of MCDS and the IGCD were held?
- Were MCDS meetings held with the location being determined with regard to the economy, convenience and relevance to the matters being discussed?
- Do the roles and responsibilities of the MCDS, IGCD and the ANCD overlap? What are the areas of overlap?
- Could the objectives of the MCDS be achieved more efficiently through an amalgamation with another Council?

Effectiveness

- Were the MCDS work plan tasks in line with the objectives of the Council? Is there a focus on items of strategic national significance?
- Have the objectives of the MCDS been realised? If so, to what extent have they been realised?
- Of decisions taken by the MCDS, how many have been successfully implemented? Have they been implemented across all jurisdictions?
- Were relevant State and Territory outcomes in line with the policies set by the Council? Were State and Territory outcomes coordinated, integrated and collaborative? Were the relevant portfolios represented by each State and Territory?
- Have frameworks been used to guide decisions taken by the MCDS?
- What is the impact of the ANCD on the outcomes of the MCDS?
- If there was work that overlapped with another Council, has the MCDS worked with that Council collaborative to achieve work plan objectives?

Appropriateness

- Does the original rationale for the formulation of the MCDS remain valid?
- Do the objectives of the MCDS and IGCD continue to be in line with government priorities and licit and illicit drug policies?
- Was the field of coverage of the MCDS clearly defined?
- Should the Stated objectives of the MCDS be revised in any way?
- Do States and Territories support the continuation of the MCDS?
- Was there overlap between the work of the MCDS and any other Council?

Governance

- Were all jurisdictions represented at MCDS meetings/teleconferences?
- Were all jurisdictions represented at IGCD meetings/teleconferences?
- Did the MCDS Secretariat arrangements meet the needs of the Council?
- How many groups of officials and working parties support the MCDS?
- Does the IGCD and working parties have continued relevance to the work of the MCDS? Do the meetings meet the needs of the MCDS?
- Are current chairing arrangements appropriate and meet the needs of the MCDS?

Accountability

- Had MCDS work been progressed out of session?
- How were decisions taken by the MCDS communicated to the public?
- How were decisions taken by the MCDS communicated to other councils?
- How were outcomes of the IGCD meetings recorded and distributed?

Research questions

Efficiency Review of the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy and its supporting structures

PwC 43

- Were meeting outcomes and annual reports submitted to PM&C?
- When is it appropriate to review the MCDS again?

Process

- Were agenda items circulated with adequate time for consideration?
- Does the MCDS have a website? Does it require one? Is the website up to date?
- Were meetings of the IGCD held with appropriate frequency and well in advance?

Secondary research questions

MCDS and IGCD meeting schedule:

Two MCDS meetings are scheduled each year (usually in May and November). The IGCD also meet twice a year (usually in February and September) – They also hold a strategic workshop (usually in July). The schedule and status of meetings for 2010 is as follows:

- 23 and 24 March – IGCD meeting
- 25 March – Joint Executive meeting between IGCD and ANCD
- May – MCDS meeting, postponed to July
- 16 and 17 June – IGCD strategic workshop
- 30 July – MCDS meeting, cancelled because of Federal caretaker
- 25 and 26 October – IGCD meeting scheduled
- 10 December – MCDS meeting scheduled.

The notional planning of IGCD meetings in February and September, and MCDS meeting in May and November should allow adequate time for preparation. In reality, the amount of time between meetings sometimes does not allow enough time to progress implementation of decisions/policy or other agreed actions before the time comes to prepare for the next meeting.

Further, for both MCDS and IGCD meetings the agenda is finalised 5 weeks prior to the meeting date, and the agenda papers are lodged 3 weeks before the meeting. Often the timeframe for agenda papers is not met and often papers are lodged late (up to a week before the meeting). Members have commented that this does not provide adequate time for consideration of the issues.

The locations of the MCDS meetings are chosen on a rotational basis, to equally distribute meetings around each capital city and Alice Springs. The locations are not generally determined based on the economy, convenience or relevance to matters being discussed.

Communication of MCDS decisions and IGCD resolutions

During each MCDS meeting a communiqué is drafted and agreed to. The communiqué is then lodged by the secretariat on the National Drug Strategy website (www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au). The media are often advised that an MCDS meeting is occurring. Occasionally, following a meeting a short media conference takes place. The ANCD often disseminate the MCDS communiqué through 'Update' (an AOD email subscription posting site). Resolutions from MCDS meetings are in-confidence to the Council and are not publicly released. Resolutions from the MCDS are not disseminated to other councils. However, where a resolution from a meeting includes liaising/communicating with another council, then the specific issues are raised with the relevant council through an exchange of letters between the Chairs.

As with MCDS meetings, minutes are not recorded from IGCD meetings – Instead resolutions are recorded by the secretariat against each agenda item. The resolutions are disseminated to IGCD members for endorsement after the meeting. Once endorsed, they are then placed on the MCDS/IGCD secure website. The secure site is embedded within the NDS website. No outcomes from IGCD meetings are communicated to the public or other stakeholders.

Progression of work out of session

Work of the MCDS is predominately dealt with at face-to-face meetings. Where this is not possible (often due to an MCDS meeting being cancelled) items are progressed out-of-session via email. This process usually involves the IGCD Executive agreeing to seek out-of-session consideration of the MCDS; the MCDS Chair (via the Secretariat) sends a letter to all MCDS members asking for their consideration of items which are attached as out-of-session agenda item papers. Often items progressed out-of-session are issues that require the MCDS to review and endorse a report etc. Over recent times, no major policy debates/views have been sought out-of-session