

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2011-2012, 15 February 2012

Question: E12-328

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: UNIVERSAL NEWBORN HEARING SCREENING

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

In a joint press release by Kevin Rudd, Nicola Roxon and Bill Shorten dated 29 June 2009 the Prime Minister advised that the Government would seek a commitment from States and Territories to deliver newborn hearing screening for all Australian babies from 1 January 2011. Please advise:

- a) What has happened since then
- b) Does the Department have any idea what percentage of newborns in Australia are presently screened for hearing?

Answer:

- a) At the Council of Australian Governments' meeting on 2 July 2009, all Australian Governments agreed to ensure that by the end of 2010 every child born in Australia has access to screening for congenital hearing impairments.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) was commissioned to produce a discussion paper titled Data requirements to support a national approach to neonatal hearing screening, which was produced in April 2010.

In November 2010, the Neonatal Hearing Screening Working Group (a working group established under the Screening Sub-Committee of the Australian Population Health Development Principal Committee) provided draft National Guidelines for Neonatal hearing screening to the Screening Sub-Committee for consideration. This committee endorsed them in December 2010, noting that some further work was needed.

On 9 March 2011, the Australian Population Health Development Principal Committee (APHDPC) endorsed the draft National Guidelines for Neonatal Hearing Screening, subject to further discussions with jurisdictions regarding the Guidelines' proposed indicators.

The AIHW was commissioned to produce a discussion paper titled Proposed national performance indicators for neonatal hearing screening in Australia, which was produced in September 2011.

In April 2012, the Child Health and Wellbeing Sub-Committee of the Australian Population Health Development Principal Committee considered the proposed performance indicators and agreed that they be forwarded, with the draft Guidelines, to the Community Care and Population Health Principal Committee for their consideration.

- b) In 2009, the Australasian Newborn Screening Committee reported that 84 per cent of children born in Australia annually are screened for hearing impairment at birth.

There is no national repository for data relating to neonatal hearing screening. Each state and territory operates and manages a separate neonatal hearing screening data management system.