

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2011-2012, 15 February 2012

Question: E12-352

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: PREVENTION AND COMMUNITY HEALTH COMMITTEE

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

The Gazettal notice of 25 March 2009 which details the functions of the PCHC tasks the committee to "provide the NHMRC with advice on issues in community and public health, and prevention".

- a) What advice has been provided by the PCHC to the NHMRC since its creation? Please provide copies of all advice.
- b) Is the NHMRC happy with advice provided by the NHMRC to date?
- c) Is the Government happy with the job being done by the PCHC?

Answer:

- a) The Prevention and Community Health Committee (PCHC) provided formal advice to the Council of National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) with regards to:
  1. Establishing A Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) in Obesity Policy,
  2. Improving access to data as a precondition for design, conduct and evaluation of good quality intervention research,

Attachment A has more details on the:

- PCHC advised CRE in Obesity Policy, advertised in December 2011, and
- December 2010 NHMRC Council agenda paper on alcohol data.

PCHC additionally discussed a range of issues during the triennium, including reducing alcohol related harm in the under 25 cohort; opt out consent for public monitoring and surveillance; interventions to address obesity; the *Labelling Logic* Report, and NHMRC's draft Dietary Guidelines.

- b) The NHMRC is satisfied with advice provided by the PCHC.
- c) The NHRMC is not in a position to comment on behalf of the Government.

## Advice to NHMRC:

### 1. Obesity Policy Centre of Research Excellence

*The following is the PCHC advised recommended funding scheme for NHMRC Research Committee to consider and advise NHMRC Council and CEO. This was accepted and the CRE was advertised late in 2011.*

Overweight and obesity is now a greater contributor to Burden of Disease in Australia than smoking, and a major contributing factor to chronic disease, one of the NHMRC's identified major health issues for the 2010-2012 period. NHMRC's support and identification of the highest quality research, researchers and research translation activities will assist in the NHMRC delivering against its Strategic Plan.

A Centre of Research Excellence (CRE) in Obesity Policy is required to develop a focussed and coordinated strategy to facilitate research translation and effectively build research capacity in the field of public health policy. The CRE would develop research on the upstream drivers of obesity, exploring the social, economic, environmental and political factors affecting food intake and physical activity.

This CRE should collaborate with policy and decision-makers and a broad range of stakeholders from diverse fields of research, developing a coordinated, innovative research agenda that addresses:

- a number of sectors (e.g. government, industry, health and related professions, education and workplace);
- differing levels (e.g. national, regional, community, individual); and
- a broad range of areas such as nutrition, food supply, energy outputs, urban development, infrastructure, social marketing and mass media, and clinical treatment where this is relevant to public health policy.

In undertaking this collaborative approach to research and research translation, partnerships and consortia from a range of disciplines is encouraged to enhance research capacity in public health policy related to obesity. The establishment of partnerships with end users of research (i.e. policy makers and health service providers) as well as other researchers is crucial in establishing ongoing capacity and sustainability of research translation in this field.

A specific focus will be placed upon:

- Research translational methods and evaluation
- Establishment of a consortium
- Collaboration and coordination of research activities with policy makers and health service providers
- Capacity building across a broad field of research

It is essential that examination of policy extend beyond the health sector and consideration must be given to how environmental and societal influences impact on the creation of positive environments that support healthy lifestyles and dietary choices. Research should

focus on translation of evidence with the aim of information policy formulation that impacts on the drivers of obesity.

## **2. Alcohol Data.**

*Below is the PCHC advised agenda paper that was provided to the Council of NHMRC on 8 October 2010.*



### **COUNCIL**

**183<sup>rd</sup> Session**

**8 October 2010**

### **Data Access for Research Policy Framework**

**Action Required: For consideration and advice**

#### **Background:**

At its July 2010 meeting, subsequent to agreement with the NHMRC CEO to have as its priorities obesity, alcohol related harm and tobacco control, PCHC held a committee workshop to advise NHMRC on how to address two of the major public health issues: obesity and alcohol. Members considered, in particular, possible intervention research, and evaluation of these interventions. To develop intervention research on reducing alcohol-related harm focusing on the under 25-year old age group, PCHC members emphasized the importance of improving access to data as a precondition for design and conduct good quality intervention research.

#### **Current Status:**

Administrative data and related surveys are indispensable for population health and health services research in general. For example, data extractions are frequently required from death registrations, hospital and other health-service records, health insurance files, cancer and other disease registries, and previously funded research databases, including those from large cohort studies. Population health and health services research are directly relevant to health

policy development and review, and to health service planning and evaluation. Such research provides a strong evidence base for the operation and reform of health systems.

With respect to alcohol research, PCHC members advised that, in particular, survey data held by the jurisdictions' police and hospital emergency department records would provide necessary data to build the case for third party effects of alcohol abuse among the under-25s..

Members are asked to discuss the support that could be provided by jurisdictional colleagues in the relevant sectors to improve access to this data for researchers. Three primary targets for action recommended by PCHC and relevant experts for building the evidence-base for the effects of alcohol abuse on others and for this to provide the background data for strong interventions include:

1. Timely release of existing survey data,
2. Ready access to hospital emergency department records with attention to accuracy of recording, and
3. Facilitation of access to relevant police records.

### **Recommendation:**

That Members agree to consult within their jurisdictions to facilitate access to data to allow improved quality of intervention research on reducing alcohol-related harm focused on the under-25s.