

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 13 & 15 February 2013

Question: E13-040

OUTCOME 0: Whole of Portfolio

Topic: Absence Rate

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Senator Mason

Question:

In the Australian Public Service Commission's State of the Service Report 2011-12, the Professional Services Review (an agency within the Department of Health and Ageing) was identified as the worst-performing agency in the Australian Public Service with respect to unscheduled absences. While the median Australian Public Service sick leave rate in 2011-12 was 8.5 days and the median absence rate was 11.1 days, the Professional Services Review sick leave rate was 10.5 days and the median absence rate was 21.4 days.

- a) What is the explanation for these rates?
- b) Are absences of this magnitude having a negative impact on the Professional Service Review's performance and productivity?
- c) What steps has the Professional Services Review taken to improve these rates?

Answer:

- a) As indicated in the State of the Service Report 2011-12, in a small agency approved long term absence by a small number of staff can have a significant effect on unscheduled absence statistics. For example, if Professional Services review (PSR) excludes one employee who was on long term leave, the annualised rate of unscheduled absences reduces from 21.4 days to 11.6 days per person for the 2011-12 financial year.
- b) PSR experienced a reduced case load during this period and was able to reallocate responsibilities of the employee who was on long term leave and absorb the impact of the absence.
- c) The PSR management team have undertaken a range of activities designed to improve absence rates. These include:
 - monthly reporting and monitoring of leave statistics by the agency executives;
 - implementation of a new Enterprise Agreement which includes guidance regarding unscheduled leave management; and
 - responsibility for PSR manager's to manage and monitor unscheduled leave within their unit. These responsibilities are outlined in manager's performance agreements.