

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2016 - 2017, 1 March 2017

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OUTCOME: 0 - Whole of Portfolio

Topic: Coroners Reports - Suicide

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Senator: Siewert, Rachel

Question:

Senator SIEWERT: Perhaps I can ask then about the coroners data. When this committee did an inquiry several years ago on suicide prevention, some of the issues that came up were the issues around coroners reports. Are the coroners reports now—and I have asked this of another expert, so I will be interested to hear what you say, and if you cannot comment then perhaps you could take it on notice—up to the point at which you are confident of the data that comes through on suicide and in particular veterans? I have heard that sometimes the coroners reports do not indicate whether someone was a veteran.

Mr Sandison: From the team that did the work—and I can take it on notice about the detail they go through with coroners, but we do not question the coroner's report. The coroner's report gives us a statement of the specifics. If the coroner notes that it was death through suicide, we do not go back through other forms of data to see whether or not that is validated, but I will check on that. We accept that the cause of death was suicide when we get a final report with a confirmation from the coroner.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you check both things: whether there is an indication that a person served in the military and, secondly, the issues around the suicide. That would be appreciated.

Mr Sandison: Certainly.

Answer:

Identification of military deaths

- Occupation at time of death is captured on the coroner's report and this may provide enough information to determine military experience in some cases.
- Military service can also be established through the Defence staff and payroll management system (PMKeyS), the National Death Index and supplemented by the Defence Suicide Database. This is the method being used in the current AIHW study.

Determination of suicide death

- The AIHW does not question coronial findings of a suicide death.
- It is our understanding that the ABS considers all available evidence for each suicide death including coronial findings as well as police, autopsy and toxicology reports when coding cause of death.
- The AIHW uses what is coded by the ABS as 'intentional self-harm' to identify suicide deaths.

Jurisdictional differences in coronial reporting

- Each state and territory has their own scope for coronial reporting which could potentially lead to jurisdictional differences in the identification of a death as a military death and when coding suicide.