

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2016 - 2017, 1 March 2017

Ref No: SQ17-000055

OUTCOME: 2 - Health Access and Support Services

Topic: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Scholarships

Type of Question: Hansard Page 81, 1 March 2017

Senator: Kakoschke-Moore, Skye

Question:

Senator KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: Are there any plans to increase the number of scholarships?

Mr Hallinan: No, there are no plans to increase the number of scholarships at this time. There are plans to introduce changed methodology around how to target scholarships in our mainstream scholarships programs from profession specific scholarship streams to a local needs based identification system. Local communities would identify the highest need professions and skill sets for their areas and scholarships would then be targeted on that basis.

Senator KAKOSCHKE-MOORE: On notice, could you provide me with some more information around the number of scholarships and the changes that you are making to a more targeted approach to providing those?

Dr Southern: Yes, of course.

Answer:

The 2015-16 Budget measure, *Streamlining Health Workforce Scholarships*, announced a new scholarship program to provide flexibility to meet changing health workforce needs, particularly in rural, regional and remote Australia. The Health Workforce Scholarship Program (HWSP) will consolidate a range of existing scholarship programs into a single program with a single administrator, and create consistency in the rules and obligations for participants.

The objective of the HWSP is to increase the skills, capacity and/or scope of practice of health professionals committed to rural service. Extensive consultation will be undertaken by the administrator and local stakeholder groups including Primary Health Networks, Local Health Networks, state, territory and local governments to determine workforce gaps and skills shortages in order to best target scholarships to meet community need. A rural return of service obligation will be attached to most scholarship types to provide a greater return on investment.

The number and type of scholarships awarded to health professions will be flexible and in accordance with community need. We anticipate a process to engage an administrator will commence in the second quarter of 2017.

The *Streamlining Health Workforce Scholarships* included a commitment to maintain the number of scholarships aimed at increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce participation without imposing a return of service obligation for these scholarships. Separate Scholarship support continues for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce through the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme and Australian Rotary Health's Indigenous Health Scholarships.