

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 3 June

Question: E11-467

OUTCOME 13: Acute Care

Topic: CLOSURE OF QUEENSLAND HEALTH TB CLINICS IN THE TORRES STRAIT

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Senator Boyce asked:

- a) When did the department learn that they [TB clinics in the Torres Strait] were going to be closed on 30 June?
- b) At whose urging was it that these clinics be closed?
- c) I would also like a response from the department on whether you consider this to be a state issue or a federal issue.
- d) Can you tell me how you are planning to transition from closing down clinics in the Torres Strait on 30 June, starting a program in PNG on 1 July and continuing to suggest that Queenslanders' health initially and Australians' health eventually is not jeopardised by this?

Answer:

a), b), c) and d)

The Department first learned that Queensland Health was proposing to cease the TB clinics by 30 June 2011 at a meeting between Queensland Health and Australian Government agencies held on 23 March 2011 in Canberra.

Both the Australian and Queensland governments are playing an active role in seeking to put in place arrangements which develop capacity within PNG and improve outcomes for PNG nationals, whilst at the same time ensuring that the level and nature of services provided in Australian facilities is appropriate and sustainable. The Australian Government continues to provide a contribution to Queensland towards the cost of providing emergency care to PNG nationals in the Torres Strait, and through its aid programs is working to improve services in PNG. Queensland is concurrently making its own decisions on the nature, design and management of its services in the Torres Strait and the clinical management of individual patients.

AusAID is investing \$43 million this year in partnership with PNG to help improve PNG's health services across the country. This includes a focus on improved TB services in Western Province so that PNG locals can get the healthcare they need in their own country instead of crossing the border.

Queensland Health met with PNG health officials, together with the department and AusAID, on 17 June 2011 to discuss handover arrangements for the current cohort of PNG nationals being treated for TB in the Queensland TB clinic. Arrangements for the clinical handover of PNG TB patients (around 60) currently being treated by Queensland Health are being finalised by Queensland Health in consultation with PNG authorities.