

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**

**ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO**

Budget Estimates 2012-2013, 30 & 31 May and 1 June 2012

**Question:** E12-00357

**OUTCOME 12: Health Workforce Capacity**

**Topic:** Aboriginal Health Workers

**Type of Question:** Hansard Page 30, Friday 1 June 2012

**Number of pages:** 2

**Senator:** Senator Siewert

**Question:**

- a) Are support services provided to Aboriginal Health Workers being monitored to see if they are being taken up and if people are going to be able to meet requirements by 1 July?
- b) Could you take on notice what the uptake has been? The support services and scholarships (Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme)

**Answer:**

- a) Yes. There is a three-year transition period in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers (ATSIHWs) seeking to become registered practitioners can undertake up-skilling to Certificate IV. During this period, up-skilling and training will be monitored through the normal VET sector monitoring processes through National Centre for Vocational Education and Research, and agreed recognition of prior learning structures.

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency will be monitoring registration numbers and the quality of training organisations.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Registered Training Organisation National Network reported that there were 49 assessors working to assist with recognition of prior learning assessments for ATSIHWs at the local level. Health Workforce Australia is funding the up-skilling of ATSIHWs in an urban/rural context, and will be working with the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to fund remote up-skilling and support.

In addition, NACCHO has secured funding from DEEWR to work with Recognition First, a large registered training organisation. The aim is to develop traineeships for ATSIHWs and potential ATSIHW Practitioners. In addition, Employer Incentive Grants to support ATSIHWs and ATSIHW Practitioners in their training will be provided.

- b) Since 1 July 2012, 270 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners have registered with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board, mostly from the Northern Territory. The Department of Health and Ageing funds a number of organisations and programs that are supporting ATSIHWs to meet the requirements of registration.

The Department funds the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Registered Training Organisation National Network (ATSIHRTONN) to support and coordinate registered training organisations (RTOs) and community controlled sector training and assessing of ATSIHWs. There are 18 member organisations of ATSIHRTONN.

ATSIHRTONN report that there are 341 students currently enrolled and studying towards a qualification in Certificate IV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care within an Aboriginal community-controlled registered training organisation. The Department provides funding to five of these registered training organisations. In addition, the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council report that there are over 500 students studying for the same qualification with the vocational education and training sector.

A total of 139 ATSIHW students studying Certificate IV Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care have received a scholarship through the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme (PHMSS) since its inception in 2002. Of these, 33 are studying in the 2012 academic year.

The Department is funding the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association (NATSIHWA), which has over 150 ATSIHWs and Practitioners as members. NATSIHWA provides mentoring and support to students and practitioners working in state and territory health authority services and Aboriginal community-controlled medical and health services.

Health Workforce Australia (HWA) is working with DEEWR to develop a project to undertake a skills recognition and upskilling process to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers to reach the level of qualification required for registration as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner. HWA and DEEWR must first consult employer groups. Once this has occurred, the upskilling program will be in place.