

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2013-14, 5/6 & 7 June 2013

Question: E13-023

OUTCOME: 1 - Population Health

Topic: Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Crossin

Question:

In November 2012, The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs released their final report on the Inquiry into the prevention, diagnosis and management of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). This report recognised the importance of immediate action noting that: "Essentially Australia's response to FASD is underfunded and uncoordinated" The purpose of this report is not to add to the volume of inquiries into FASD, but to establish a national plan to eliminate FASD" (page 7). The report also noted that: "It is clear that urgent measures must be taken to reduce the incidence of FASD and to better manage those diagnosed with FASD. This parliamentary inquiry and report are long overdue" (page 3).

The Inquiry report made 19 recommendations, of which 11 have set timeframes against them. These include the development of a FASD National Action Plan to be released by 1 June 2013 and the immediate establishment of a FASD Reference Group to oversee the Plan.

However, six months since the report was tabled there has been no response by the Commonwealth Government and no money was allocated for FASD initiatives in the recent 2013-14 Commonwealth Budget. Also within this time period it is estimated that 1,300 babies have been born with FASD. This is devastating for those who caring for people with FASD and needs urgent change.

Further issues of concern are:

- a) That the FASD Diagnostic Instrument for Australia has not yet been publicly released. This is despite the final report being submitted to the Department of Health and Ageing in early 2012.
- b) That no funding has been provided to field test the FASD Diagnostic Instrument for Australia or to disseminate this Instrument to health professionals.

Since the House of Representative Inquiry report was handed down, an estimated 1,300 babies have been born with FASD in Australia. This toll is unacceptable. When is the Commonwealth Government going to respond to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders?

Answer:

The Department of Health and Ageing is currently developing a whole of government response to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), with relevant agencies through an interdepartmental committee and stakeholders including FASD experts, peak bodies and consumer representatives. The next steps on the diagnostic tool are being considered in this context.

The timing of the release of the response is a decision for the Government.