

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

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

Question: E13-119

OUTCOME: 11 – Mental Health

Topic: Early Intervention in Rural and Remote Areas

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Fierravanti-Wells

Question:

To what extent does the Department accept that awareness and early interventions in rural and remote Australia can save lives, families, money and reduce the ever-growing demand on scarce clinical services?

Answer:

The importance of increasing awareness and early intervention in reducing the effects of mental illness are the focus of several programs managed by the Department of Health and Ageing that focus on raising community awareness, reducing stigma associated with mental illness and providing support for Australians experiencing mental health issues before they progress to mental illness. A number of these are national programs (as outlined in E13-118) which benefit all Australians. In addition to these, the Mental Health Services in Rural and Remote Australia and the Access to Allied Psychological Services programs provide services to people with mild to moderate mental illness before the illness becomes more severe.

E-mental health programs can also be of particular benefit for those who have difficulty accessing face to face services, such as rural and regional Australians. A single online mental health portal, *mindhealthconnect*, was established in July 2012 to provide access to authoritative information and online therapies. These online therapies are funded through the Telephone, Counselling, Self Help and Web-based Support Programmes measure, which provides telephone and online mental health services for individuals with common mental health disorders and those in psychosocial crisis. In December 2012, MindSpot (mindspot.org.au) commenced providing free real-time cognitive behavioural therapy with a counsellor either on the phone or online. People can use the clinic through self-referral or through referral by a health professional.