

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2014 - 2015, 02 June 2014

Ref No: SQ14-001030

OUTCOME: 5 - Primary Health Care

Topic: After Hours Servicing

Type of Question: Hansard Page 115, 2 June 2014

Senator: Moore, Claire

Question:

Senator MOORE: I am looking at the fact that one of the key issues was looking at out-of-standard-hours servicing across the board. I am looking at what the government has done around out-of-hours, particularly when we had that earlier link with Medicare locals which was looking at that issue in particular. What is the government's position on the statement on after-hours servicing?

Senator Nash: I will come back to you on that. I may need to take some advice on it.

Prof. Halton: Is your question whether out-of-hours servicing in primary care is supported? The answer is yes, it is.

Senator MOORE: Yes, but my particular question about this is to do with rural servicing. It was identified quite clearly in our inquiry that it was a particular issue in rural areas.

Prof. Halton: I can confirm that there is no lesser commitment in relation to that aspect than there is in terms of urban services. I think there is a generalised view—certainly one I share—that the out-of-hours arrangements have been suboptimal, and that applies across the board. Some places it works, but a lot of places it does not. That is certainly something that I have raised with Mr Booth and Ms MacDonald ad nauseam in relation to this. I think you can take it that we are exercised by that issue, but where it is going we cannot answer yet. I can assure you it is something which is a focus.

Senator MOORE: Under which box is it being considered?

Prof. Halton: It is under Mr Booth.

Senator MOORE: The reason I am asking it here is to do with the rural component.

Prof. Halton: It fits under primary care.

Senator MOORE: The rural aspects of that, and I would like a response on notice about exactly how, from the perspective of rural health, it is looking at it. It is actually a personal thing, as a minister with the rural health responsibility.

Senator Nash: I appreciate that and I know there was a lot of discussion at the time, particularly around the appropriateness of moving it into the previous government's Medicare local structure, so I will certainly be very happy to take it on notice for you.

Answer:

Current after hours service provision occurs via Medicare Locals nationally. However in response to the Review of Medicare Locals and the recommendations, a review of current after hours arrangements will be conducted in 2014-2015.

The Government is aware of issues surrounding access to after hours services in rural and remote Australia. It is anticipated the review will consider the delivery challenges in these regions and the most appropriate and effective delivery strategies, taking into account current and available mechanisms. Relevant stakeholders will be consulted as part of this review.