

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018, 30 May 2017

Ref No: SQ17-000883

OUTCOME: 2 - Health Access and Support Services

Topic: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funding

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: McCarthy, Malrindirri

Question:

At Budget estimates, a Department official confirmed there was no specific additional funding for mental health and suicide prevention initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait (ATSI) Islander people. Can the Department provide any reasons why there was no funding for ATSI people given the mental health and suicide prevention need that exists across many communities? Can the Department detail the funding that is allocated specifically for ATSI mental health and suicide prevention programs since 2013 and across the forward estimates to 2020-21?

Can the Department provide an explanation regarding how the 2017-18 Budget initiatives are culturally appropriate for ATSI people? This includes the telehealth initiative for regional, rural and remote areas. Can the Department provide details regarding how ATSI people were taken into consideration in relation to this Budget measure? Given the Department has confirmed that funding allocated to three organisations as part of the \$15 million provided in the Budget can be used for infrastructure costs, can the Department provide details in relation to how this will enable better research outcomes for ATSI people?

Answer:

In response to the National Mental Health Commission Review of Mental Health Services, the Government announced a package of reform commencing in 2016/17 to achieve a more efficient, integrated and sustainable mental health system.

Funding for Indigenous-specific suicide prevention activity is an ongoing component of Commonwealth suicide prevention investment, as part of the renewed direction in suicide prevention outlined in the Government's response to the National Mental Health Commission Review.

The funding previously allocated to the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy* is now an ongoing funding commitment, and in 2016-17 equates to approximately \$6.3 million per annum with approximately \$5.6 million per annum allocated to the Primary Health Network (PHN) flexible funding pool and \$0.7 million per annum for Indigenous-specific national activity.

The following allocations have been provided through previous budgets and through the 2016 election commitments and MYEFO processes:

- \$84.75 million over three years commencing 2016-17 to improve access to

culturally sensitive mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people under the Indigenous Health Programme;

- \$34 million over three years commencing 2016-17 for the implementation and evaluation of 12 national suicide prevention trials, with each site receiving \$3 million over 3 years. The two sites of the Kimberley and Darwin have been selected to focus specifically on Indigenous suicide prevention. It is anticipated that selected other sites may also target activity that will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their region.

While no specific additional measures for mental health and suicide prevention initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait (ATSI) Islander people were allocated in the 2017-18 Budget, the broader 2017-18 budget measures relating to mental health and suicide prevention services include:

- \$9.1 million telehealth initiative which will enable Australians who live in rural and regional Australia to access psychological services via more contemporary technology;
- Investment of \$11.1 million over 3 years to help to prevent suicide in specific locations – hotspots – where suicide incidents repeatedly occur; and
- Investment of \$15 million over two years to support mental health research within Australia, by increasing research capacity for early intervention and prevention that will help improve the mental health and wellbeing of Australians.

These measures will deliver flow on benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as the general population. The telehealth measure in particular was developed in recognition of the need of people living in regional and remote areas, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to be able to access psychological services.

In regard to the mental health research funding, the \$5 million to Orygen for infrastructure provides the foundation needed to conduct research for the benefit of young Australians, including young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Infrastructure projects in hotspot locations will be negotiated and delivered through a National Partnership Agreement with states and territories, and subject to negotiations, may support indigenous communities.