

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-11, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-012

OUTCOME 11: Mental Health

Topic: RURAL MENTAL HEALTH WORKFORCE

Written Question on Notice

Senator Siewert, Rachel

- a) Has the Department done any modelling for developing a rural and regional mental health workforce for effective outreach capacity in rural towns and remote communities?
- b) If yes, is there benefit in such a workforce?

Answer:

- a) The Department of Health and Ageing has been involved, together with all states and territories, in national modelling of workforce requirements using a macro supply and demand modelling tool developed under the auspices of the National Health Workforce Taskforce. This work to date has focused on, at the broad national level, the four major health workforces in Australia: medicine, nursing and midwifery, dental and allied health.

No specific work has been undertaken by the Department or nationally on the rural and regional mental health workforce.

The National Health Workforce Taskforce has been subsumed by Health Workforce Australia, which will continue this modelling work under its program of work agreed by Health Ministers. This includes the completion of specific projects in relation to the physician, acute care nursing, aged care nursing, anaesthetic, emergency medical specialist and intensive care medical workforces.

- b) Outreach can often be the most practicable and effective means of getting health services to people in rural and remote communities, particularly where communities are highly dispersed and could not sustain or warrant, in terms of their size, their own services. However, outreach services are not the only mechanism for providing services in these rural and remote communities. GPs and allied mental health workers are dispersed in these areas and are able to provide mental health services under the *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule* (Better Access) initiative, the Access to Allied Psychological Services program and the Mental Health Services in rural and Remote Areas program.