

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Cross Portfolio Indigenous Hearing 2010-11, 22 October 2010

Question: E10-074

OUTCOME 8: Indigenous Health

Topic: INDIGENOUS DENTAL

Written Question on Notice

Senator Scullion asked:

On the subject of dental services, The Federal Government's 2009 Budget announcement, as reported by the Department of Family and Community Services under 'Closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians', outlined, for Indigenous dental services in regional and remote areas:

\$11.0 million will fund dental treatment and preventative services to regional and remote Indigenous communities and assess the effectiveness of transportable dental facilities in communities where dental professionals and infrastructure are scarce.

The measure was reported in the Government's Budget 2009-10:

Budget Initiative: Mobile Dental Services

Poor oral health can affect a person's education and employment and exacerbate other chronic diseases. Indigenous oral health is significantly worse than that of the general population. Indigenous children have twice the rate of tooth decay and are less likely to visit a dentist than other Australian children. Many Indigenous people living in regional and remote Australia do not have access to dental treatment facilities.

The Australian Government is providing \$11.0 million over four years to pilot the use of mobile dental facilities to deliver dental care to regional and remote Indigenous communities.

Improving dental care for all Australians is a policy priority of this Government.

- a) Could you please clarify the term/roll out period for the amount identified by FaHCSIA (\$11.0 million)?
- b) How many mobile dental services are currently in operation?
- c) What areas are they serving?
- d) How many more mobile dental services are planned for the next four years?
- e) Could you please list any other Commonwealth policies or programs other than the 'mobile dental services' to deliver Indigenous oral health services?
- f) How are you assessing the effectiveness of transportable dental facilities in communities where dental professionals and infrastructure are scarce?
- g) How will dental workforce and infrastructure serving Indigenous people be improved?

Answer:

- a) The funding was appropriated for the four years 2009-10 to 2012-13.
- b) State and Territory public dental services have been operating mobile dental services for many years. Under this new Commonwealth-funded program, three projects have been funded to date.
- c) Three projects funded to date will provide mobile equipment to the following areas:
 - Alice Springs, NT dental van: Indigenous communities around Alice Springs including Utopia, Lake Nash, Papunya and Epenarra.
 - Mobile dental equipment for Orange, NSW: the Bila Muuji regional grouping of regional and remote Indigenous communities located in the Greater Western Area Health Service of NSW, which extends throughout Western NSW.
 - Narooma dental van: Indigenous communities on the NSW South Coast between Narooma and the Victorian border.
- d) A further 13 potential projects have been identified at this stage, but the actual number implemented will depend on the outcome of negotiations with potential service providers.
- e) In the 2009-10 Budget, \$131.1m was provided over three years under the **Closing the Gap – Northern Territory – Indigenous health and related services** measure which includes \$10.7m over three years for dental follow-up targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in prescribed areas of the NT.
- f) The effectiveness of these facilities will be assessed through a formal evaluation using performance data collected throughout the life of the projects, in accordance with funding agreements with service providers including State and Territory Governments. For the projects funded to date, the NSW and NT governments have agreed to provide data on the number and type of services provided and the oral health and other characteristics of patients.
- g) The provision of new mobile facilities and equipment will supplement and support dental workforce and infrastructure.