

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Question: E10-234

OUTCOME 13: Acute Care

Topic: THE NATIONAL HEALTH AND HOSPITALS NETWORK

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

In relation to the National Health and Hospitals Network – National Partnership Agreement on Improving Public Hospital Services:

- a) What is the status of this agreement?
- b) Has this Agreement been signed off by the Commonwealth and States?
- c) Have any states not signed this agreement which is to give effect to the Rudd-Gillard Government's promises to cut elective surgery waiting lists cut emergency department waiting times and provide increased capacity in the hospital?
- d) Is this agreement legally binding on the states to produce results noting the provisions of Clause 10?
- e) If the agreement is not enforceable then what effect does it actually have?
- f) Does it mean that the states do not have to meet the targets supposedly agreed with the Commonwealth?

Answer:

- a) The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) signed a Heads of Agreement on National Health Reform and a revised National Partnership Agreement on Improving Public Hospital Services at its meeting of 13 February 2011.

The Heads of Agreement replaces the previous National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement and reaffirms the commitment of all jurisdictions to strong national standards for public hospital services. These national standards include the four-hour National Access Target to reduce emergency department waiting times, and the National Access Target and National Access Guarantee for elective surgery to help ensure elective surgery patients are treated within clinically recommended times.

The revised National Partnership Agreement provides for an Expert Panel to review the mechanisms through which the Elective Surgery and Emergency Department targets and the National Access Guarantee are to be implemented and applied.

- b) Yes.
- c) No.
- d) No.
- e) The accountabilities under the new Federal Financial Framework rest upon negotiations, policy, implementation and evaluation of the ongoing Agreement. The

Commonwealth needs to comply with the *Financial Management Act 1997* (FMA Act) requirements in respect of financial commitments. States and territories have equivalent responsibilities under State accountability frameworks (for example, to ensure that public funds are spent in an appropriate manner, record keeping is transparent, accounts are audited and government bodies are accountable to the minister). In addition, states and territories are accountable to the public for achieving the objectives, outcomes and outputs specified in the revised National Partnership Agreement.

- f) While the Agreement is not legally enforceable it does not lessen the commitment from the states and territories in meeting the objectives outlined in each of the Schedules of the revised National Partnership Agreement. Reward funding for elective surgery and emergency department is linked to states and territories meeting performance targets.