

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-11, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-302

OUTCOME 4: Aged Care and Population Ageing

Topic: COMPLAINTS INVESTIGATION SCHEME

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

- a) The budget allocated approximately \$50 million over four years in response to the Walton Report on the CIS. Has any progress been made on implementing the reforms recommended by Professor Walton?
- b) How many staff are now employed by the CIS?
- c) How many investigators are employed?
- d) What is the budget of the CIS?
- e) Can the CIS demonstrate any systemic improvement in quality outcomes in the aged care program?
- f) In the October 2009 Review of the Aged Care Complaints Scheme, the reviewer recommended that the government establish a new Aged Care Complaints Commission as a separate statutory authority. Does the Government intend implementing this measure and if so, when?

Answer:

- a) Funding for the development and implementation of improvements to the CIS commenced from 1 July 2010. The majority of the development work is scheduled to occur in the 2010-11 financial year, with effect from 1 July 2011.

The CIS has already taken steps to improve the operation of the scheme, and ensure the delivery of quality services in line with the Walton recommendations, including:

- Commenced consultation with peak bodies regarding the implementation of alternative options for resolving complaints, including early resolution through the approved provider, conciliation and mediation options.
- Designing a more robust risk assessment tool to enhance the CIS capacity to prioritise concerns based on the potential risk to the safety and well-being of care recipients.
- Implementing a national recruitment process for additional CIS officers to support more timely resolution of care recipients' concerns.
- Implementing a mechanism to provide additional clinical expertise across the CIS to support more effective decision making and complaints resolution of concerns raising complex clinical issues.

- Implementing revised CIS processes and procedures to further improve the quality of decisions, enhance the communication with all relevant parties during an investigation process, and to support more effective selection of a resolution options to allow for more appropriate outcome for all parties.
 - Deploying an enhanced training program which provides CIS officers with improved tools, knowledge and experience to more effectively manage complaints.
 - Enhancing the capacity of the Office of the Aged Care Commissioner to support timely access to an independent review of decisions and handling processes.
- b) As at 9 November 2010, there are approximately 240 staff working in the CIS nationally. CIS staff in state and territory offices work as investigation officers and/or manage investigation staff. Central office staff are engaged to manage national CIS training and recruitment, CIS procedural and policy development and advice, the CIS information management system and CIS stakeholder engagement.
- c) There are 198 CIS officers involved with the investigation process nationally.
- d) The CIS is one of a number of programs funded from departmental expenses under Program 4.3 in the Portfolio Budget Statements. The total departmental funding under Program 4.3 for 2010-11 is \$61.906 million.
- e) The primary role of the CIS is to respond to individual concerns raised by care recipients, their representatives and others regarding the quality of care or services provided through Australian Government subsidised aged care services.

The CIS forms part of a broader quality framework for aged care, acting as a “safety net” by responding to matters brought to its attention which may have occurred outside the formal systemic monitoring regimes which are undertaken by the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency for residential care or by the Department through Quality Reporting for community care.

Where the CIS identifies concerns that may indicate systemic shortfalls in the quality of service or care these are referred to the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency or an appropriate area of the Department for action.

- f) The Government announced in April 2010 that priority would be given to implementing those recommendations which will have the greatest effect on enhancing the operation of the CIS.

The Government has asked the Productivity Commission to conduct a public inquiry into the aged care system which will set out the path for further structural reforms in the aged care sector, including the setting and regulation of quality of care.

Associate Professor Walton’s recommendation on structural changes to the aged care complaints system has been referred to the Productivity Commission for consideration as part of its inquiry.