

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-11, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-336

OUTCOME 11: Mental Health

Topic: BETTER ACCESS

Written Question on Notice:

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

- a) What is the status of negotiations with representative organisations of therapists and social workers regarding this Budget funding cut?
- b) Does the Government intend to publish the review of the Better Access program that is due for completion this year?
- c) When will it be publicly available?

Answer:

- a) The Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon Nicola Roxon MP, and the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, the Hon Mark Butler MP, announced on 12 November 2010 that social workers and occupational therapists will continue to be able to provide Medicare-funded services under the Better Access initiative.

The Department held a forum with representatives from the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) and Occupational Therapy Australia (OT Australia) on 24 June 2010. As a result of the forum the Department, AASW and OT Australia agreed channels for feedback and consultation all of which will continue. These are:

- AASW and OT Australia CEOs appointed to the Better Access Evaluation Project Steering Committee. While members are appointed as individual experts, this will provide a mechanism through which the expertise of the AASW and OT Australia and their members can contribute to and inform the evaluation of the initiative.
- AASW and OT Australia CEOs appointed to the ATAPS Expert Reference Group. AASW, OT Australia and their members will have the opportunity through this Group to inform the implementation of the 2010 ATAPS review recommendations, continuous improvement of the ATAPS program and the design of the flexible care packages announced in the 2010-11 Budget. The Department will undertake further consultations on the design of the flexible care packages in the coming months. These will take place in each jurisdiction with a range of health professionals, including social workers and occupational therapists.

- The Department has set up a dedicated email address for social workers and occupational therapists to provide the Department with their views and experiences, case studies and articles, and relevant surveys and research in relation to the Better Access initiative as well as suggestions on the design and implementation of flexible care packages under ATAPS arrangements.

b) The evaluation of the Better Access initiative is expected to be completed by the end of 2010. The evaluation consists of a number of components which will be incorporated into a summative evaluation for Government consideration. Release of the evaluation report will be a matter for Government.

c) This is a matter for Government.