

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-11, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-337

OUTCOME 11: Mental Health

Topic: SUICIDE PREVENTION

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

The Prime Minister promised to spend \$276 million over the next four years for suicide prevention measures

- a) What work has been done to implement this election commitment?
- b) What action has been taken to boost frontline services as promised by the Prime Minister?
- c) Providing more psychological services under this commitment has been left to Medicare Locals – given that these organisations do not yet exist and are unlikely to be operational for some considerable time – what action is being taken to deliver this commitment?
- d) Experts – among them the former head of Prime Minister Rudd’s mental health advisory council, Prof John Mendoza, who quit because of the Rudd-Gillard Government’s inaction on mental health – have called for development of a National Suicide Prevention Plan – has the department been asked to work on a national plan?

Answer:

As part of the Government’s second term commitment to mental health, the Government has committed to a \$274 million “*Taking Action to Tackle Suicide*” package. Under this strategy, \$274 million will be invested over four years to:

1. Provide more services to those at greatest risk of suicide including psychology and psychiatry services, as well as non-clinical support to assist people with severe mental illness and their carers with their day-to-day needs.
2. Invest more in direct suicide prevention and crisis intervention, including through boosting the capacity of counselling services such as Lifeline and providing funding to improve safety at suicide ‘hotspots’.
3. Provide more services and support to men – who are at greatest risk of suicide, but least likely to seek help.
4. Promote good mental health and resilience in young people, to prevent suicide later in life.

The figure of \$276.9 million for the package announced by the Australian Labor Party as an election commitment differs slightly from the \$274 million package costed under the Charter of Budget Honesty and confirmed through the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook. The announced package was costed at \$276.9 million; the Department of Finance and Deregulation prepared its costings totalling \$274 million under the Charter of Budget Honesty and the Government is bound to implement this package in line with these figures.

a and b)

Eight of the fifteen elements of the “*Taking Action to Tackle Suicide*” package will commence on 1 January 2011, with the remainder commencing in 2011-12. The Department is therefore planning and undertaking the necessary negotiations with providers to implement the measures according to the announced implementation timeframes. Further advice on the implementation approach for the package is currently being prepared for the Minister.

- c) Funding for this element of this measure (\$23.6 million from 2011-12) will be provided to Divisions of General Practice in the first instance, and will transition to Medicare Locals as they become fully operational.
- d) Since 2000, the Australian Government’s National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) has worked to reduce the incidence of suicide and self harm, and to promote mental health and resilience across the Australian population. It has four inter-related components:
- The Living is For Everyone (LIFE) Framework, which sets an overarching evidence-based strategic policy framework for suicide prevention in Australia. The framework has been adopted by all states and territories as the basis for their own suicide prevention policies, frameworks and strategies so that Australia has for the first time a nationally consistent approach.
  - The National Suicide Prevention Strategy Action Framework, which provides a time-limited work plan between the Australian Suicide Prevention Advisory Committee and the Australian Government for taking forward suicide prevention investment.
  - The National Suicide Prevention Program (NSPP), which is the Australian Government’s own funding program, dedicated to suicide prevention activities within the areas of its current roles and responsibilities. It supports broad population health approaches where proven effective and provides targeted assistance to groups identified at higher risk of suicide.
  - Mechanisms to promote alignment with and enhance state and territory suicide prevention activities, particularly through national frameworks such as the COAG National Action Plan for Mental Health 2006-11 and the Fourth National Mental Health Plan 2009-14.

The Commonwealth Government has comprehensively responded to the final report and recommendations from the Senate Inquiry into Suicide in Australia, released on Thursday 24 June 2010. The current multi-faceted approach of the NSPS, as well as the additional investment in the “*Taking Action to Tackle Suicide*” package, is consistent with many of the recommendations in the Senate Committee Report.

Furthermore, the Commonwealth Government is working with jurisdictions to progress Action 13 of the *Fourth National Mental Health Plan: an Agenda for collaborative government action in mental health 2009-2014*, to “*Coordinate state, territory and Commonwealth suicide prevention activities through a nationally agreed suicide prevention framework to improve efforts to identify people at risk of suicide and improve the effectiveness of services and support available to them*”. An implementation strategy for all actions under the Fourth Plan is currently being considered by the Australian Health Ministers’ Conference including the recommendation to endorse the LIFE Framework as the agreed national framework for suicide prevention in Australia.