

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-11, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-353

OUTCOME 5: Primary Care

Topic: PRACTICE NURSES

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

- a) Has the department done any further financial modelling to assess the impact of these changes on general practices and what did this modelling show, particularly in terms of the impact on general practices that currently employ one or more practice nurses?
- b) Could some general practices be worse off under these changes?
- c) If so, what type of practices and what kinds of locations would this apply to?
- d) What does the Government's modelling show in this regard?
- e) Has the Department consulted with stakeholders on this budget measure? If yes, who and when?
- f) What consultation processes does the Department intend to undertake to ensure that this measure does not disadvantage general practices?

Answer:

The Practice Nurse Incentive Program is a national program that will provide incentive payments to accredited practices to employ a practice nurse. Directing the incentive to accredited practices supports the Government's view that accreditation is a key mechanism for ensuring access to high quality primary health care services.

The new program recognises the skills and full scope of practice nurses working in general practice and replaces:

- the existing Practice Incentive Program (PIP) practice nurse incentive, which is restricted to rural areas and urban areas of workforce shortage; and
- a number of Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) practice nurse items, which have a narrow task focus.

The funding from the above two sources will be redirected to the new program along with an additional \$390.3 million over four years.

Many practices may already be using practice nurses in a broad and flexible role, others will need to change the way in which they utilise their practice nurses to fully benefit from the program.

- a) The Department estimates that the vast majority of practices currently employing a practice nurse will benefit financially as a result of the new funding arrangements.

- b) A small number of practices (mainly non-accredited practices) may be disadvantaged under the new arrangements at the commencement of the program. Many of these practices will become eligible for the incentive once they have achieved accreditation.
- c) A small number of practices (mainly non-accredited practices).
- d) There is significant variability in MBS practice nurse billing activity between practices of a similar size. This results in practices of a similar size and location being impacted differently by the new arrangements.
- e) The Department convened an initial meeting with the key GP groups on 23 September 2010 to outline the consultation process for implementing the new program. This group included:
- Australian Medical Association;
  - Royal Australian College of General Practitioners;
  - Rural Doctors Association of Australia; and
  - Australian General Practice Network.
- f) The Department intends to consult with key stakeholders on the implementation arrangements for the new program through a Technical Working Group (TWG). The TWG comprises representatives from:
- Australian Nursing Federation;
  - Australian Practice Nurses Association;
  - Royal College of Nursing Australia;
  - Australian General Practice Network;
  - Rural Doctors Association of Australia;
  - Australian Medical Association;
  - Australian Association of Practice Managers;
  - Royal Australian College of General Practitioners;
  - National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation;
  - National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association;
  - Health Care Consumers' Association; and
  - Department of Veterans' Affairs.

The TWG will meet on a number of occasions over the coming months, with the first meeting scheduled for late November 2010.