

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 21 October 2011

Question: E11- 000240

OUTCOME 11: Mental Health

Topic: INDIGENOUS SUICIDE

Written Question on Notice

Senator Adams asked:

The \$276.9m Taking Action to Tackle Suicide package is for all Australians not specifically Indigenous communities. It included \$74.3m to invest more in direct suicide prevention and crisis intervention - of that only \$22.4 million was to improve community-led suicide prevention services targeted at groups and communities which are at high risk of suicide, including Indigenous people, men, gay, lesbian and bisexual people - due to commence 1/7/2011. Funding was fully offset over forward estimates (refer Gillard/Roxon media release dated 27/7/2010). On 14/4/2011 in response to the Kimberley suicide spike the government announced that \$6m from the \$22.4m would be fast tracked, i.e. fast-tracked from a 1/7/2011 commencement date to a date between 14/4/2011 and 1/7/2011.

- a) Is the \$6 million originally earmarked for the Kimberley (announced 14/4/2011) now part of a broader suicide spike response? If yes, why has the funding been re-directed?
- b) How many suicides has there been in Kimberley in past year?
- c) Has the Expert Advisory Group been established?
- d) What is their budget?
- e) Who is on the Expert Advisory Group?
- f) How were members selected?
- g) How many times has the expert advisory group met?
- h) Are the members on contract to DoHA? Details? (on notice)
- i) What are the objectives and expected outcomes of the Advisory group?
- j) We now know of another spike in Mt Isa - what is DoHA's response to that?

Answer:

- a) On 14 April 2011, the Australian Government announced:
- “An immediate investment of up to \$150,000 for enhanced psychological services for Indigenous communities in the Kimberley Region and for associated education and training provided through the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program”; and
 - “Up to \$6 million over four years for targeted suicide prevention interventions, making Indigenous communities the first priority under the \$22.6 million Supporting Communities to Reduce Risk of Suicide component of the Taking Action to Tackle Suicide package.”
- The \$6 million over four years has been set aside for community based initiatives that target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples around Australia, including but not limited to the Kimberley region.
- b) Unofficial data reported to the Department of Health and Ageing by local service providers in the Kimberley region indicates that there have been a total of 39 deaths by suicide between October 2010 and October 2011.
- c) Yes. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Advisory Group was established in October 2011 and has met twice.
- d) As a non-statutory advisory body to the Department of Health and Ageing the Group does not have a budget. The Department provides Secretariat and operational support to the group.
- e) Members were listed in the Australian Government’s media release dated 10 September 2011 announcing the new group. Members are:
- Dr Tom Calma (Chair), Former Social Justice Commissioner, National Coordinator to Tackle Indigenous Smoking;
 - Ms Adele Cox, member of the Australian Suicide Prevention Advisory Council and the Western Australia Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention;
 - Professor Ernest Hunter, Psychiatrist and Adjunct Professor, School of Medicine, North Queensland Health Equalities Promotion Unit, University of Queensland;
 - Mr Tom Brideson, consultant on Social and Emotional Wellbeing for Indigenous Health *InfoNet*;
 - Dr Noritta Morseu-Diop, social worker with experience in bereavement counselling and support and community development initiatives for communities;
 - Dr Pat Dudgeon, psychologist and chair of the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association; and
 - Ms Mary Victor O’Reeri, convenor of the inaugural Blank Page Summit at Billard; and

- Mr Ashley Couzens, Senior Aboriginal Health Worker, Riverlands Region, South Australia.
- f) Members were selected by Ministers Butler, Snowdon and Macklin on advice from the Department of Health and Ageing.
- g) The Advisory Group has met twice: on 5 October and 15 November 2011.
- h) Members are not contracted to the Department of Health and Ageing. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Advisory Group is a non-statutory advisory group. Members are appointed through the establishing authority within the Department and are remunerated in accordance with the Category 1 rates set by the Remuneration Tribunal's *Determination 2010/11: Remuneration and Allowances for Holders of Part-Time Public Office*.
- i) The Terms of Reference of the Advisory Group are that members will provide:
- Guidance on the development of the first national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy; and
 - Strategic advice on priorities on the investment of \$6 million funding to be provided through the *Taking Action to Tackle Suicide* package, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention activity.
- j) On 6 October 2011 the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, the Hon Mark Butler MP, joined the Member for Kennedy, Mr Bob Katter MP, at a community forum to discuss suicide prevention measures in Mt Isa with the community.

Commonwealth and State government representatives present at this forum agreed to consider actions to address the issues raised by the community.

Since this forum the Australian Government has progressed the following:

- the announcement on 24 October 2011 that a *headspace* outpost will be established in Mount Isa to improve the access of local young people to mental health care and related services. *headspace* National Office is talking with the Townsville *headspace* service and Queensland Health and will work with local organisations (including schools, existing health services and youth services) to explore how this outpost will operate to best improve care and support for young people; and
- Funding has been provided through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander component of the *Supporting Communities to Reduce Risk of Suicide* measure the *Taking Action to Tackle Suicide* package for a Critical Postvention Response in Mt Isa which will be led by the StandBy Bereavement Response service. Work commenced in Mt Isa on 14 November 2011.

A follow up forum is to be held in Mt Isa on 7 December 2011 and the Department of Health and Ageing will continue to work closely with Queensland Health and local service providers in Mt Isa.