

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 19 October 2011

Question: E11-122

OUTCOME 14: Biosecurity and Emergency Response

Topic: TB IN THE TORRES STRAIT

Written Question on Notice

Senator Scullion asked:

- a) Has the Government resolved the issue of the QLD Government closing TB clinics and screening in the Torres Strait?
- b) What funding does the Government provide to TB screening in the Torres Strait?
- c) What initiatives or programs does the Government have or is proposing to address the threat of a potential TB outbreak in the Torres Strait or on Cape York?

Answer:

- a) The Australian, Queensland and PNG governments are working together towards a staged, ethical and safe handover of patients from the Torres Strait TB clinics to the PNG health system. Arrangements for the handover include:
 - Joint handover clinics with Australian and PNG physicians and the patients commenced on 13 October with further clinics currently scheduled for December 2011 and February 2012. On 13 October 2011, 21 patients were successfully handed over to PNG's care; and
 - Continuing supply of multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB medication for patients to ensure continuity of their current treatment regime.

Progress will be reviewed following the December and February clinics to determine any additional arrangements that may be required.

The Australian Government has committed \$845,000 to Queensland Health to support interim TB clinics in the Torres Strait while PNG's TB capabilities in Western Province are improved and patient handover is finalised

- b) Queensland Health is the provider of healthcare in the Torres Strait. The Department of Health and Ageing provides approximately \$4 million per annum to Queensland Health towards the costs of treating PNG nationals, inclusive of TB. DoHA does not direct Queensland Health on how to spend this funding. Queensland Health is responsible for screening and treatment services for Australian citizens living in the Torres Strait.

The Australian Government contributes to the cost of funding services for Australian citizens through the National Healthcare Agreements.

- c) Frontline surveillance, detection and treatment of communicable diseases including TB are the responsibility of state and territory governments. Surveillance information from all jurisdictions, including TB, is advised to the National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System, and national data is regularly reviewed by expert committees such as the Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) and the National Tuberculosis Advisory Committee (NTAC) which are able to consider trends and appropriate outbreak responses when required.

The Australian Government is working with the PNG Government to more effectively treat the number of people with TB in the South Fly District of PNG, rather than only treating those patients that can cross the border. This will provide better outcomes and better manage the risk to Australia into the future by providing a more sustainable whole of population approach and ensuring that PNG nationals access the healthcare they need at home.