

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 21 October 2011

Question: E11-514

OUTCOME: 8 Indigenous Health

Topic: PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION REPORT: OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS
DISADVANTAGE: KEY INDICATORS

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Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

Perhaps if I indicate my question and if it is not appropriate it can be just taken on notice. That report made reference to strategic areas for action in healthy lives, and mental health in suicide and self harm being strategic areas. It made a couple of recommendations most specifically about juveniles in detention and risk factors for vulnerability to both mental and physical illness often transmitted across generations in the absence of interventions to break the cycles. There was that comment. There was another comment about the data collection, in particular, in relation to mental health. That is at 7.9 'Future directions in data'. They make specific reference there about improving existing collections, such as improving reporting for rural- remote, expanding data collection instruments such as Indigenous-specific surveys and longitudinal studies of Indigenous children to incorporate mental health modules. Perhaps you might give me some views, on notice—if there are views—of the Department on those specific two areas relating to the mental health chapter.

Clarification of question:

My questions went to 2 sections in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators.

To simplify the matters, I ask the following questions:

Has the government responded to the report?

If so, can you provide details of the response and most particularly in response to sections 7.7 and 7.9.

Based on this clarification, can you please advise whether your Department can now provide an answer to this QoN.

Answer:

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs advised that the Australian Government has not responded to the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators report that was released on 25 August 2011 and will not be doing so, consistent with previous practice. While the Productivity Commission provides the Secretariat for this report, the report is prepared under the auspices of an inter-governmental steering committee that includes representatives of the Commonwealth.

However, the Department of Health and Ageing notes the findings of the Report and continues to work closely with states and territories to improve mental health national data collection. In doing so, it will consider improving reporting nationally on the number of

people receiving mental health care via a data linkage exercise being undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. This work presents several challenges due to a multiple data custodians and ethics approval has proved challenging.

Data in mental health is available for prisoners through the National Prisoner Census. Responsibility for juvenile justice rests at state and territory level. Data in Indigenous mental health (including by remoteness) is available through a number of national data collections including: the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey and the Hospital Morbidity Database. As part of data development activities funded under Schedule F of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, work is underway to assess the level of Indigenous under-identification in key health data sets.

Regarding the suggestion on longitudinal studies of Indigenous children including a mental health model, it is worth noting that Footprints in Time: the longitudinal study of Indigenous children (LSIC) has collected information from more than 1200 parents and carers of Indigenous children across Australia annually since 2008. Parents and carers, predominantly mothers, have been asked questions about their social and emotional wellbeing and major life events each year. In Wave 1 information was collected about postnatal depression and in alternate years parents and carers are asked about life stress and how well they are coping. LSIC has also asked about parent culture, language, experience of racism, physical health, smoking, drinking and gambling habits, relationship with the other parent, employment, education, housing conditions, community safety and the stolen generations which also give insight into parent and carer health and wellbeing. In Waves 1 and 4 parents and carers were asked about their sources of support and resilience using some of the 'strong souls' questions from the Menzies School of Health Research. Information is also collected about the study child's health, behaviour and wellbeing and parent concerns about development in order to follow the development of Indigenous children's social and emotional wellbeing.