

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2016 - 2017, 19 October 2016

Ref No: SQ16-000470

OUTCOME: 2 - Health Access and Support Services

Topic: Health Workforce - Remote Area Healthcare Workers

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Kakoschke-Moore, Skye

Question:

Has the Department engaged in a dialogue with their health care workers to address the barriers to recruiting and retaining rural and regional health care workers, and what arose from those conversations?

1a. Has any further action been planned?

2. On 3 May 2016 Senator Xenophon moved a notice of notice that the Senate note the tragic death of South Australian woman Ms Gayle Woodford who worked as a remote area nurse in the APY lands.

The Senator called on the Government to;

- i) immediately review the adequacy of current safety measures for remote area nurses,
- ii) abolish single-nurse posts in remote areas or mitigate the risks they pose,
- iii) implement a policy that remote area nurses attend out-of-hours emergencies in pairs (whether that is two nurses, a community member, security officer or other),
- iv) require that all emergency services vehicles be fitted with GPS technology which would allow the vehicle to be tracked and located easily, and
- v) allocate the necessary funding to effect subparagraphs (b)(i) to (b)(iv) above.

Senator Ryan responded to support the motion and noted the Minister for Rural Health was working with the remote healthcare workforce. Is the Department able to update the committee on what they are doing to carry out the terms of the motion?

3a. Can you explain what changes have been made since Ms Woodford's death? Have policies and procedures been reviewed and altered?

b. Can you provide a figure for what funding has been provided to address these issues?

c. In his response, Senator Ryan mentioned an urgent roundtable that was convened to address this issue. Over what dates was that roundtable held and at what locations?

d. Are you able to tell me what came out of that roundtable, and what the Government and stakeholders are doing in response?

e. Did any recommendations come out of the roundtable process? If so, what were they? Is there a timeline for their implementation?

Answer:

The Department of Health does not directly employ health care workers. Health care workers are employed either by state/territory governments or by organisations partially or fully funded by state/territory governments or the Australian Government.

The Department is working to address the barriers to recruiting and retaining rural and regional health care workers through a number of mechanisms, including a range of incentive programs and liaising with key stakeholders representing the rural and remote health workforce.

1a. The health workforce incentive programs and liaison forums are ongoing.

2. As the Department of Health does not directly employ health care workers, it has limited ability to address Senator Xenophon's 3 May 2016 motion points (i) to (v) inclusive.

The Department acknowledges that working in regional and remote areas carries risks that are not generally encountered in more urban locations. To help employers and their employees mitigate these risks, in July 2016, the Department of Health engaged CRAN*Aplus* to develop e-learning modules and resource materials to help address local safety and security issues. CRAN*Aplus* is the peak professional body for Australia's remote and isolated health workforce.

3a. As the Department does not directly employ health care workers in rural or regional locations it has limited ability to influence the review of policies and procedures used by the employers of health care workers. The CRAN*Aplus* project (as per 2 above) will help employers review their policies and procedures.

3b. \$240,298.99 (GST exclusive) will be paid to CRAN*Aplus* for this work during 2015-16 to 2016-17.

3c. A Rural Stakeholder Roundtable was convened and chaired by Senator the Hon Fiona Nash, then Minister for Rural Health, on Wednesday 6 April 2016, Parliament House.

The roundtable is a recurring event that provides a forum in which rural health stakeholders can explore policy options and provide expert advice to the Minister. At the April meeting, additional time was allocated to discuss procedures to avoid danger for remote area health workers. It was acknowledged that the problem extends across all workers in remote communities. Members agreed that the issue requires collaboration across Commonwealth, state and local governments; non-government organisations and local communities.

3d. and 3e. No recommendations relating to the death of Ms Woodford arose from the Roundtable on 6 April 2016. Attendees acknowledged that safety is an issue for the whole workforce. Attendees were largely in agreement with CRAN*Aplus*' priorities for improving workforce safety, which are:

1. Zero tolerance of violence for every health professional workforce;
2. All after-hours call outs must be accompanied;
3. Establishment of a national safety working group to develop, implement and monitor a set of minimum safety standards;
4. Work to be undertaken with employers on Work Health and Safety issues; and
5. Innovative models including duress systems to be developed that ensure safety at all times.

As described in 2 above, CRAN*Aplus* is undertaking work to help address these priorities.

Senator Nash wrote to all state and territory health Ministers in April 2016. All Ministers responded, to advise existing policies and procedures for remote worker safety in states and territories. Many welcomed the opportunity for ongoing collaboration across jurisdictions.