

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 23-27 February 2015

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Outcome/Program: Outcome 2: Indigenous
Topic: Alice Springs Women's Shelter funding

Senator: Senator Nova Peris

Question reference number: 80

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Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator PERIS: The minister could possibly give a very short yes or no answer to this question. Last week I visited the Alice Springs Women's Shelter crisis accommodation, and I just want to read out a couple of statistics. In 2014, 413 children and 561 women provided with a 24/7 crisis response service. The women and children were from 86 towns and five communities across five states, with the majority being from Alice Springs. There were 7,026 bed nights provided, with an average length stay of 5.9 days. This equals 1,265 accommodation stays in the shelter. As the Alice Springs Women's Shelter accepts referrals directly, 3,111 risk assessments were completed, averaging almost 10 referrals a day. The service was not able to support 1,700 individual women and children on 2,336 occasions, which averages to almost seven people being turned away a day. Thirty per cent of children who stayed in that shelter last year were under two, and 30 per cent of the women accommodated were between 20 and 34. In the discussions that I had with the lady who runs the shelter, the chief executive officer, she actually did mention the fact that police officers outside bottle shops had seen a reduction. But, as we all know, the police outside the bottle shops have been deemed discriminatory and the community certainly has made it clear. Predominantly, 90 per cent of the people that go through the shelter are Aboriginal women. As of 30 June this year this service is without funding. I know that this does not fit in your portfolio,—it is DSS—but as the Minister for Indigenous Affairs—and we are talking about violence, women and alcohol—I am asking: what is your commitment towards this?

CHAIR: Can I just make this point: You have just acknowledged, Senator Peris, that this does not fall within the minister's portfolio. We are pushed for time and there is an inquiry into domestic violence by the references committee, which is going to Darwin in a couple of weeks time. You will understand why I think that the question is not in order. It does not fit within the minister's portfolio, by your own admission.

Senator PERIS: Well, not really. It is the only domestic violence shelter which caters predominantly for Aboriginal women.

Senator Scullion: Thank you for bringing it to my attention, Senator. I am more than happy to have a side discussion with you. I am not sure of the details, but it would obviously be a good service to maintain.

Senator PERIS: Okay, thank you.

Ms Carroll: Can I just quickly add—and we can give further details on notice—that this service actually might be funded through the Stronger Futures funding rather than through the DSS funding for which there was some additional funds provided to keep the service maintained.

Ms Edwards: This is the same funding we discussed last time, Senator Peris. There was a sliding scale of money under the Stronger Futures agreement, which were agreed in 2011. There has been a reduction in funding, but we have actually provided additional funding at \$1.3 million this year to cover up some of that drop, and then a further \$6 million to the Northern Territory for domestic violence. So we share an enthusiasm to make sure that women's shelters are up and running and effective, and it is one of our ongoing discussions with the Northern Territory. We have had a great injection of funds in the area and will certainly take away and investigate concerns with Alice Springs. It is on my list of one of the ones that we support the funding of, so we will take it away, and we can provide more information on notice.

Senator PERIS: I just wanted to put it on record because of the anxiety levels of staff who are not sure about the funding.

Ms Edwards: They had different sources of funding, but certainly it is one of ours that we at least contribute to, and we can provide more information on notice.

Senator McLUCAS: Is that tied up with that hostel funding as well?

Ms Edwards: No

Answer:

The Commonwealth Government provides funding to the Northern Territory Government for Women's Safe Houses under the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement (the NPA). The Commonwealth is not involved in the contract for the Alice Springs Women's Shelter, although it is one of the safe houses supported through the funding.

Under the agreement signed by the former Commonwealth Government in May 2013, there was a scheduled reduction in funding for the Women's Safe Houses under the NPA from 2014-15. However, \$1.36 million was provided to the Northern Territory Government on top of the scheduled payment to support the continuation of Women's Safe Houses this year. This is in addition to the \$6 million contribution made by the Commonwealth Government in June 2014 to the Northern Territory Domestic and Family Violence Reduction Strategy.

Under the NPA, the Commonwealth also provided approximately \$300,000 to the Northern Territory Government in each of 2013-14 and 2014-15 for a Domestic and Family Violence Outreach Programme, delivered by the Shelter. Funding for this programme ends 30 June 2015.