

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 18-22 November 2013

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Outcome/Program: 1.1 Prime Minister and Cabinet

Topic: National Partnership Agreement – health

Senator: Senator the Hon Jan McLucas

Question reference number: 222

Type of Question: Hansard

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 17 January 2014

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Ms Palmer: The objective of the National Partnership Agreement was for commitments from the states as to how much they would spend on Indigenous health over time. That commitment and agreement did not occur before the signing, so the signing by Queensland has not come into effect. No other states have formally responded at this time.

Senator SIEWERT: And what was the time line for them? Did you say, 'Could you please get back to us by August?'—I think you said? Was that the date?

Ms Palmer: It was offered in early August and I do not believe that a time frame was put on a request for reply. No—no time frame was put on the request for reply.

Senator SIEWERT: Why not?

Ms Palmer: The agreement is offered by the Prime Minister.

Senator SIEWERT: So, can I ask PM&C why? Surely, we need to agree this; we need to get this signed and have the next phase ready to be implemented as soon as possible?

Ms Carroll: Senator, I am not trying to be difficult but that is in the other part of Prime Minister and Cabinet, and we would need to take that on notice, because we do not have those officers here today. They were here on Monday. I am not trying to be difficult, but we—

Senator SIEWERT: I understand. I did not think you were! But I suppose it does not stop me from being frustrated. Could you take that on notice? Where are the negotiations with the states up to? Do we have any that are close to commitment?

Ms Palmer: My understanding is that state officials have advised they were waiting for advice from the new government as to their intention with the NPA, and that it is under government consideration.

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Senator SIEWERT: So therefore, can I go back to the minister and to PM&C and ask if it is the government's intention to proceed with the plan?

Ms Carroll: I will just need to take that on notice. We might be able to get you an answer shortly; but I would not want to say one way or the other because I do not have a briefing on it here.

Answer:

It is not usual practice for the Prime Minister to specify a date by which First Ministers need to reply when writing to seek State and Territory agreement to an NPA or an extension to an NPA. The rationale for this usual practice is that States and Territories are sovereign governments, and they have their own cabinet processes and decision-making processes which need to be met before responding.

Regarding the final question from Senator Siewert above referring to the “plan”. This was subsequently clarified at the hearing (Hansard p 17-18) as meaning the National Partnership Agreement.

The purpose of a National Partnership Agreement is to transfer funds from the Commonwealth to the States. There will not be a National Partnership on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes as there is no plan to transfer funds from the Commonwealth to the States under this initiative.

The Commonwealth and the States will continue to invest and work together in this area without the need for a National Partnership.