

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2013-14, 20 November 2013

Question: E13-143

OUTCOME: 10 - Health System Capacity and Quality

Topic: eHealth

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Polley

Question:

People living in rural, regional or remote communities often suffer from a lack of access to medical specialists to assist in making a diagnosis of dementia. This is bad news because an early diagnosis is crucial to treating dementia effectively. However, one area where we can really hope for improvement is in innovative approaches to dementia care, such as telehealth initiatives. Of course Telehealth can only really benefit those who have connection to reliable, fast broadband that is available, for example, under Fibre-To-The-Premises (FTTP) broadband.

- a) Could you perhaps go into some detail concerning the benefits of Telehealth and how this may benefit dementia diagnosis and treatment as well as aged care more generally?
- b) Is this now threatened because of the Coalition's National Broadband Network model which means that not all premises will receive FTTP?
- c) Could you please provide an update on assisted technology programs which are currently being funded?
- d) Could you also please provide an update on the Broadband for Seniors kiosks program?

Answer:

- a) Telehealth services use information and communications technologies to deliver health services and transmit health information over distances rather than moving care recipients, health professionals or educators. This encompasses a range of diagnosis, treatment, preventive (educational) and curative aspects of healthcare services. Telehealth technologies represent an opportunity to improve the delivery of healthcare and health outcomes. This may include those in aged care and those with, or at risk of developing, dementia. Medicare rebates are available for telehealth consultations with specialists when provided to patients outside of major cities and in eligible aged care facilities and Aboriginal Medical Services throughout Australia. Rebates are also available for clinical services provided by a health professional located with the patient during the video consultation.
- b) Telehealth services can be delivered by a range of broadband access technologies. The Government has expanded the technologies which are able to be used in the Telehealth Pilots Programme to allow any fit for purpose broadband connection to deliver telehealth services.

- c) The Telehealth Pilots Programme aims to provide evidence to support alternative cost effective health services for the community. There are nine Telehealth pilot projects which are being funded to provide healthcare services via telehealth to the person's home, particularly in aged care, cancer care and palliative care. The services being delivered include vital sign monitoring, video conferencing with a healthcare provider, eye screening, palliative care monitoring and rehabilitation services.

Most projects commenced services in mid-2013 and are scheduled to conclude by September 2014. It is expected that 2,500 consumers will participate in the Programme during the project period.

- d) Updated information on the Broadband for Seniors program is available on the Broadband for Seniors website <http://www.necseniors.net.au/>