

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Output 1.1

Question No. 23

Senator Ludwig asked the following question at the hearing on 23 May 2007:

- (a) I understand that – in October 2006 – the government engaged the Institute of Child Protection Studies to undertake a review of how client screening and assessment is working in practice, following on from the previous review conducted by that Institute in early 2006 to develop guidelines for that screening?
- (b) Has this been completed?
 - (i) If so, when was it completed?
 - (ii) If not, when is it due to be completed?
- (c) Has the report been released?
 - (i) If not, why not, and will the report be released?
 - (ii) Could you provide a copy of the report to the Committee?
- (d) Did the report make any recommendations?
 - (i) Are you able to provide a summary of those recommendations?
 - (ii) Has the government issued a response to the report?
 - (iii) Is the government intending on implementing those recommendations?
 - (iv) Can you give the Committee a rundown on where the government is at in implementing any recommendations that came out of the Report?
- (e) Are you able to indicate how much has been allocated for the development of the database search facility on the Family Relationships Online website?
 - (i) Has all of this funding been expended?
 - (ii) If not:
 - (1) How much has been expended?
 - (2) Has any additional funding been provided?
- (f) Is the government currently performing any form of upgrades, improvements or any other changes to the function of the online database?
 - (i) If so, give details as to the exact upgrades that are being performed, the budgeted costs of the upgrades and the actual costs of the upgrades.
- (g) Are you able to indicate the operational costs for the operation of the Family Relationship Advice Line?
 - (i) Is this on budget? If not, give details

The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:

- (a) In January 2006 the Department commissioned the Institute of Child Protection Studies at the Australian Catholic University to develop a Screening and Assessment Practice Framework and Guidelines (the 'Framework') to guide screening and assessment in the new Family Relationship Centres. Because the

Framework was developed prior to the establishment of the Centres, the Department further engaged the services of the Institute to consult with the first 15 new Centres to inform a second iteration of the Framework, taking into account its practical application in the Centres.

(b)(i) and (ii) The Institute completed the consultations, and provided a summary of these consultations to the Department in June 2007.

(c)(i) and (ii) The consultations were not a formal review of screening and assessment and hence there is no report of how client screening and assessment is working in practice. The report provided by the Institute is a summary of the consultations and suggestions for improving the Framework. A copy is attached.

(d)(i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) The Institute did not make formal recommendations and the report did not require a response. The Department has now revised the Framework to implement the improvements identified through the consultation process, and has considered other action to assist screening and assessment in the Centres. The revised Framework is shortly to be distributed to the Centres, and other relevant services and stakeholders, who will be invited to contribute comments.

(e) The Family Relationships Online website and Family Relationship Advice Line Call Management System share the same database and search facilities. As such, costs for the two applications are shared. Maintenance of and improvements to these systems have a budgeted allocation for the 2007-08 financial year of \$2,000,000. The budget for subsequent financial years is yet to be finalised.

(i) and (ii) To 31 January 2008, \$565,650 of the 2007-08 allocation has been expended. The remaining allocation is expected to be fully expended. No additional funding has been provided.

(f) (i) Work performed to improve the Family Relationships Online database includes:

- refinements to search requirements to improve location specific searches
- improvements to the coding of search information to ensure relevant results are displayed
- improvements to the search results returned by prioritising the more relevant results
- building of web pages for each Family Relationship Centre, including maps
- expansion of information available and links to other relevant sites
- expansion of the range of services that can be located through Family Relationships Online, and
- improvements to the website interface

The costs cannot be separated from improvements to the systems as a whole, as shown in (e) above.

(g) The cost for 2006-07 for the operation of the Family Relationship Advice Line was approximately \$6,867,000 which was within budget. The anticipated cost for the current year of operation of the Family Relationship Advice Line is \$11,361,000.