

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

Program 1.1

Question No. 121

Senator Cash asked the following question at the hearing on 18 October 2010:

With reference to the 2010/11 Budget and in particular the proposed new measures in respect of Reducing Violence Against Women, what amounts have been allocated and what progress has been made to date in respect of the following measures:

- a. Access to justice – legal assistance priorities
- b. Legal aid
- c. Community legal centres
- d. Indigenous legal services
- e. Addressing Domestic Violence – continuing training for health workers in regional and rural areas
- f. Closing the gap – strengthening Indigenous communities – community safety
- g. National Binge Drinking Strategy – expansion

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

Please note: Answers (a)-(d) were provided by the Attorney-General's Department (AGD), (e) by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), and (f) by both Departments. Answer (g) was provided by the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA):

- a. The Australian Government provided additional funding of \$154 million over four years in the 2010-11 Budget to enhance legal assistance services provided through Government funded programs. Further detail about each program is provided in the responses to (b)-(d) below.
- b. Under the National Partnership Agreement on Legal Assistance Services the Australian Government has reformed legal aid funding policy to allow greater flexibility in the way that legal aid commissions deliver legal services. Commonwealth funding is now able to be applied by legal aid commissions to providing early intervention services across criminal, family and civil law jurisdictions and grants of aid in family violence and child protection cases where there are related family law matters. The 2010-11 Budget provided new funding of \$92.3 million for legal aid commissions over the next four years to support the provision of services under the Agreement.
- c. In the 2010-11 Budget, as part of the injection of an additional \$26.8 million in funding for the Commonwealth Community Legal Services Program, \$3.55million was allocated for community legal centres over four years (to 2013-14) to specifically respond to family violence and raise awareness of victims' rights. Additional one-off funding of \$1.56 million was allocated in May 2010 for community legal centres to increase assistance for victims of family violence and raise awareness of victims' rights. Progress to date for the period July to September 2010, as compared to the same period in 2009, already shows an increase in the

numbers of clients and associated assistance such as advice activities and cases, including those involving court representation.

- d. The Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Program received an allocation of \$19.50 million in 2010-11 to provide culturally appropriate legal services and assistance to Indigenous victim/survivors of family violence or sexual assault. Additional one-off funding of \$1.46 million was allocated in May 2010 for Family Violence Prevention Legal Services to increase legal and related support to victims. In the 2010-11 Budget, additional funding of \$34.9 million was allocated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services over four years (to 2013-14) to deliver culturally sensitive legal services for criminal, civil and family law matters. This additional funding was announced as part of the Access to Justice Measure. Historically approximately 30% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services clients are female.
- e. Funding of \$540,000 has been allocated by FaHCSIA to continue training for practice nurses and Aboriginal health workers in regional, rural and remote areas. A contract with Lifeline Australia has been extended to 30 June 2011 to allow the continuation of training.
- f. AGD manages funding programs under the Closing the Gap law and order measure which contribute to improving safety for Indigenous women. In particular \$21,530,200 has been allocated for night patrols services in 80 communities in the NT.

FaHCSIA manages funding of the Indigenous Family Safety program which addresses the high rates of Indigenous family violence. \$64.4 million over four years has been allocated to fund innovative Indigenous family safety community initiatives focused on priority action areas including addressing alcohol abuse, more effective police protection, strengthening of social norms against violence and coordinating family violence support services. There are currently 39 Indigenous family safety projects.

FaHCSIA also manages funding of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Family Support Package totalling \$31.6 million over three years. The package includes 22 Safe Places in 15 remote Indigenous communities, as well as Darwin and Alice Springs; a Mobile Child Protection Team consisting of 10 child protection workers and Remote Aboriginal and Family Community Workers in up to 13 remote Indigenous communities.

Further funding of \$18.6 million has been made available from 2010-11 to 2011-12 to continue alcohol restriction initiatives in the Northern Territory as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, including the ongoing development of Remote Alcohol Management Plans (AMPs). Two Northern Territory communities have draft AMPs and over 20 communities are currently developing AMPs.

- g. The Australian Government is committed to changing Australia's drinking culture and to addressing the problems associated with binge drinking, especially among young people. As part of a comprehensive approach, the Government is implementing the National Binge Drinking Strategy. With the addition of \$50 million through the 2010-11 Federal Budget, the Government has now committed \$103.5 million to the Strategy.

Although the National Binge Drinking Strategy does not specifically target reducing violence against women, its projects contribute to national efforts, including raising awareness of the longer term risks and harmful consequences of excessive alcohol consumption.

Community Sponsorship Fund (\$25 million from 2010 to 2014) – DoHA has prepared a consultation paper on the Community Sponsorship Fund, which was available at

www.alcohol.gov.au and circulated to key stakeholders on 27 October 2010, with submissions requested by 19 November 2010.

Feedback on the consultation paper will help the Government to gain a better understanding of the organisations that may be eligible for funding, the type and size of the sponsorships they currently receive and the number of organisations involved.

It is expected that community-based sporting and cultural organisations will be able to start applying for funding from mid-2011.

Community grants program (\$20 million allocated for a third round of grants from 2010 to 2014 as part of the Community Level Initiatives under the National Binge Drinking Strategy) – the National Binge Drinking Strategy measures announced in 2008 included two rounds of community grants for projects to address binge drinking, and 38 projects are currently under way, totalling \$7.2 million.

A further \$20 million for a third funding round of community grants has been committed as part of the 2010-11 Budget. This funding round will be advertised nationally in 2011.

Enhanced alcohol helplines (\$5 million allocated from 2010 to 2014) – the aim of the telephone counselling helpline is to enhance services and potentially provide a single national phone number that people can call to receive information, counselling, advice, and referral to appropriate alcohol and other drug services where required.

The Australian Government has had initial consultations with the states and territories. DoHA expects to commence formal negotiations with the states and territories on national rollout of enhanced alcohol helplines later this year.