

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

11 March 2021

PDR Number: IQ21-000053

AHPPC discussion on vaccination and ADF medical team :

Spoken

Hansard Page number: 23

Senator: Katy Gallagher

Question:

CHAIR: On the ADF, I asked this of PM&C last Tuesday: when was that decision taken and by whom? They referred me to Health, FYI— Dr Murphy: I believe the genesis of the idea came out of AHPPC, the committee that Paul Kelly chairs. The head of the ADF medical team is a member of AHPPC. There was discussion on vaccination and that was an offer to stand up their teams early. The teams were going to be stood up anyway to vaccinate so they said, 'This would be good experience for our teams. Can we stand them up and can we help?' And then that offer was formalised through the normal process for seeking ADF support.

CHAIR: Do you know when that decision was made?

Dr Murphy: I would have to take on notice the exact date but it would be about two weeks ago, I think.

Ms Edwards: It was the last week in February, I think.

CHAIR: I think it was announced on maybe early March by the health minister.

Dr Murphy: Yes.

Answer:

ADF support to the Vaccine Operations Centre commenced on 10 February 2021 with six personnel joining the Centre to assist in logistics, operations and generalist roles. ADF support was further boosted on 1 March 2021 with 20 personnel embedded across operations, planning, data entry, logistics and incident management.

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11 March 2021

PDR Number: IQ21-000054

Vaccination provider contracts

Spoken

Hansard Page number: 24

Senator: Katy Gallagher

Question:

CHAIR: Did you bring Sonic on after that, to supplement—

Dr Murphy: Sonic were already contracted and available, but we hadn't deployed them.

Ms Edwards: We had a panel of potential providers, and we'd selected two from the panel to do the aged-care residents rollout to start with. When we found it was more complicated and was going to be slower than anticipated—and also with this incident, which required us to slow specifically HCA in order to re-examine—we moved and engaged another group of people from the panel.

CHAIR: Nobody's got a detail for me on how much money those contracts are worth?

Dr Murphy: We'll have to take that on notice, I think.

Answer:

The Australian Government has invested significant resources to deliver the safe and efficient rollout of COVID-19 vaccinations across the Aged Care and Disability sector. Multiple providers have been engaged to deliver in-reach vaccinations to Aged Care and Disability residents.

To date the Department has committed approximately \$55 million across the contracted organisations.

As of 22 March 2021 a total of approximately \$ 5.7 million has been expended, noting variable costs and expenses have not been calculated as the roll out is still in its first month.

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Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Inquiry into Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Spoken question, 11 March 2021

PDR Number: IQ21-000056

Low dead space syringes availability

Spoken

Hansard Page number:

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Question:

Ms Peisley: To echo Professor Murphy's sentiments, yes, we've procured a range of consumables to assist with rollout in a number of different settings and, as Professor Murphy has indicated, low dead space syringes are now available with particular use in respect of the Pfizer vaccine.

Senator SIEWERT: How many do we have and when did we get them?

Ms Peisley: I believe we've had a shipment just recently in the last number of days. I may need to take on notice; I don't have it just in front of me at the moment.

Answer:

The Australian Government has secured a supply of 1.89 million low dead space Long Orange 25 gauge (25 mm) needles. These needles are compatible with the standard syringes the Australian Government secured from Becton Dickinson in late 2020, as well as a range of other standard syringes on the Australian market.

EBOS Group Australia Pty Ltd is the sponsor of this product on the ARTG (356140).

Distribution of these low dead space needles to Pfizer vaccination sites commenced on 9 March 2021.

The Australian Government has procured additional low dead space products that will be delivered in the coming months.

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Spoken question, 11 March 2021

PDR Number: IQ21-000057

Vaccinations given without low dead space syringes

Spoken

Hansard Page number: 16

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Question:

Senator SIEWERT: Do we have any out in the field, given that we only just—

Dr Murphy: They have been deployed to the state and territory Pfizer hubs already. They are using them now.

Senator SIEWERT: Across the country?

Dr Murphy: In the Pfizer hubs—only the Pfizer hubs; we're not using them in the AstraZeneca.

Senator SIEWERT: I get that. How many?

Dr Murphy: Ms Peisley might have to take on notice how many have actually been deployed at this time but we had a broad deployment just recently to all the Pfizer sites.

Senator SIEWERT: How many vaccinations have occurred without the low dead space syringes?

Dr Murphy: We'd have to take that on notice, but the majority of vaccinations, or the first few weeks, were mostly done with standard syringes. I emphasise that many of the states and territories were routinely getting six doses with the conventional syringes, so it's not a requirement that you have the low dead space syringes to get six doses. If you're careful, you can get six doses using a conventional needle syringe combination, but if you're using the low dead space syringe it's just easier. It's a practical advantage to enable us to get the maximum dose.

Answer:

- Distribution of low dead space (LDS) needles were distributed to Pfizer vaccination sites across each State and Territory commenced 9 March 2021. Approximately 60,000 LDS needles have already been distributed.

- By 7 March around 86,000 vaccinations had been administered. Many of the vaccinations administered prior to this date were prepared and administered with standard syringes and needles, although some jurisdictions had their own stock of LDS equipment.
- Depending on the method used for preparation and handling, states and territories have reported that 6 doses can be extracted from Pfizer vials using standard needles and syringes.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Inquiry into Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

Spoken Question, 11 March 2021

PDR Number: IQ21-000061

Breakdown of \$6 billion for vaccine roll-out

Spoken

Hansard Page number: 22

Senator: Katy Gallagher

Question:

CHAIR: I have a few questions on contracts. There's been \$6 billion allocated for the vaccine rollout, as I understand it. Do you have a breakdown of that \$6 billion that you can provide, or the portion of the \$6 billion that you're responsible for, which I imagine is most of it?

Ms Edwards: I don't think I do have a breakdown like that. I would have to take it on notice.

Dr Murphy: Over \$3 billion of it is purchase of vaccines. The departmental rollout is around \$2 billion, but we would have to take it on notice to give you the full breakdown.

Answer:

The following is a breakdown of the \$6 billion of expenditure allocated towards the vaccine rollout:

Vaccine Funding Components	Committed Funding
Vaccine delivery – workforce funding to states and territories, GPs, pharmacists and surge workforce	\$1.3b
Vaccine delivery – logistics, administration, data and digital	\$0.6b
Vaccine purchases	\$3.3b
Communications	\$0.031b
Medical Research into vaccines and treatments	\$0.371b
Support for international vaccines, diagnostics and treatments	\$0.918b
Total	\$6.5b

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PDR Number: IQ21-000063

Process about approaching whom over the AstraZeneca vaccine and CSL to manufacture:

Spoken

Hansard Page number: 26

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Question:

Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. Could you take on notice—because I know I'm going to run out of time—the actual process about who approached whom over the AstraZeneca vaccine, when you approached CSL to manufacture it, the time line of contact after the first approach, and how the process for the signing of the agreement went from there.

Dr Murphy: We'll take on notice what we can provide. I'm not sure whether any of that is commercially sensitive, but we'll take on notice what we can provide.

Answer:

- The COVID-19 Vaccine Taskforce and CSL first met on 17 June 2020.
- On 18 August, the Minister of Health and AstraZeneca signed a letter of intent to cooperate on supplying and manufacturing the AstraZeneca/University of Oxford vaccine candidate in Australia.
- On 4 September, the Department and CSL executed a production and supply deed for CSL to manufacture the AstraZeneca/University of Oxford vaccine candidate.

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PDR Number: IQ21-000064

HealthEngine optional vaccination booking service value of contract:

Spoken

Hansard Page number: 30

Senator: Murray Watt

Question:

Senator Watt: Just moving on to another topic, I think you mentioned earlier that HealthEngine had been selected as one of the deliverers to help build the platform for COVID-19 vaccination information and booking services. Is that correct?

Ms Edwards: HealthEngine was contracted to do one piece of that. It's the piece to do with the optional booking service that people might elect to use. I mentioned there is a website you go into; it has a list of all the different places you can go to get vaccinated. You do your eligibility checker and you can go direct to the practice—for some of them you will do it by phone call, for some of them will have an automated system of their own. The HealthEngine piece is a booking service that people can elect to use that goes direct from the website, so it's an optional piece. That's the only piece HealthEngine is doing.

Senator Watt: What's the value of that contract?

Ms Edwards: I've managed to come today with totally insufficient financial information, for which I apologise, and I will have corrected it by estimates. I will have to take that on notice also. I beg your pardon.

Answer:

The contract value varies based on transaction utilisation volumes. Based on the anticipated transaction volumes the contract value is approximately \$3.8 million (GST inclusive).

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PDR Number: IQ21-000065

Tender process for HealthEngine:

Spoken

Hansard Page number: 30-31

Senator: Katy Gallagher

Question:

CHAIR: In terms of the tender process, did you say it was a limited tender?

Ms Edwards: I believe so. I probably don't have that depth of information. I might have reached the end of my briefing.

CHAIR: Then you select the people that apply?

Ms Edwards: Which is a standard and appropriate—

CHAIR: Yes, but that means you would have had to pick HealthEngine to be one of the people that tendered.

Ms Edwards: That's my understanding, but can I take that on notice, because the details of the tender are not within my direct knowledge.

Answer:

The Department of Health approached five potential suppliers in a competitive, limited Request for Quotation (RFQ) process. The suppliers selected had significant market share in Australia and track record of delivering online services to connect consumers with clinics in primary care.

Three suppliers responded. HealthEngine was assessed as preferred tenderer after demonstrating best value for money in their ability to deliver on the requirements. This includes meeting the high privacy and security thresholds expected by government.