

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

26 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000276

Question Subject: Preparedness of providers during outbreaks

Type of Question: Spoken

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Senator: Rachel Siewert

Question:

Senator SIEWERT: When the outbreaks occurred, did that turn out to be the reality? Were the providers actually prepared? It's one thing to say, 'Yes, we are,' and then another thing to actually have it happen. Was that reflected in reality?

Ms Anderson: That's an insightful comment. I suspect that what is happening, as Mr Lye said earlier, is that providers are routinely underestimating the enormity of the impact that an outbreak has on their services. We saw it in the bushfire response as well, I might say, where we asked, 'Do you have an emergency response plan?' The answer would be yes. We asked, 'Have you looked at it recently?' 'Yes, we got it out the other day, and it looks good to go.' And then a service threatened by fire suddenly realises that the scenario planning they'd done hadn't appreciated evacuating 14 bedbound residents 20 kilometres down the road in quite the way that it needs to be done. It's a salutary lesson for us as a regulator, but I think it's equally important for providers to understand this. That has been and will continue to be a part of our messaging back to providers. There is no room for complacency here. A tick-a-box approach, to the extent that there are any providers adopting that—and I'm not saying that that is routinely the case at all—and to the extent that this is given inadequate attention, will show up in their capacity to respond quickly to the emerging complexities of an outbreak situation.

Senator SIEWERT: I do want to get some mental health questions in. Commissioner, could you take on notice the rest of the reply in terms of what came out of that survey? I think that will give us an indicator of where people thought they were and where they actually were.

Answer:

The Commission conducted COVID-19 preparedness surveys of all residential and home service providers and received over 4,000 survey responses.

Residential services: 99.5 per cent reported *best practice* or *satisfactory* in relation to their overall readiness to manage a COVID-19 outbreak affecting their service.

Home services: 93.4 per cent reported *best practice* or *good* in relation to their overall readiness to manage a COVID-19 outbreak affecting their service.

Where issues were identified the Commission has made contact to follow up with services to monitor and support their COVID-19 preparedness. The Commission continues to undertake site visits to respond to identified risks and monitor the quality of care and services.