

Committee Inquiries Question on Notice

Health, Aged Care and Sport

Diabetes in Australia

IQ24-000005

Division/Agency: DIV - Territories

Hansard Reference: Spoken, Page No. 56 (07 March 2024)

Topic: Cost of health services on islands

Senator Mike Freeland asked:

Ms Vandebroek: We have a health clinic—I wouldn't call it a hospital—for the Cocos Keeling Islands. Christmas Island has a small hospital, and Norfolk Island has a small hospital. They all have doctors and nurses and some allied health professionals who are resident on the island. With the specialised health practitioners, it depends on what the service is and how many people require it as to whether it's more cost-effective to fly somebody over there to treat patients, in particular if a number of people need to see the same type of specialist. If it's only one or two people it might be more cost-effective to fly the patients off the island. We have assistance schemes to help people with airfares and accommodation when they need to come to the mainland to access health services.

CHAIR: That must be expensive.

Ms Vandebroek: It is.

Mrs McINTOSH: What is the cost, do we know, of those services?

Ms Vandebroek: I don't know off—

Mr Mackay: We can certainly provide that on notice and perhaps broken down by what we provide locally and what's not provided locally.

Answer:

External Territories Health Service Costs 2022-23		
	Norfolk Island	Indian Ocean Territories
On-Island health services	\$11,271,000	\$16,790,000
Off-island health services	\$15,112,000*	\$6,935,000
Total health services	\$26,383,000	\$23,725,000

*Public health service costs included in this figure are an estimate based on known costs from 2021-22 as data for 2022-23 is not yet available under the NHRA processes.

On-island health service costs are defined as the cost of direct service delivery on Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling Islands) by the Indian Ocean Territories Health Service, or on Norfolk Island by the Norfolk Island Health and Residential Aged Care Service.

Off-island health service costs are defined as those costs associated with travel off the islands for health care, including medical evacuations and patient travel subsidies, costs of public health services delivered to residents of the territories within another jurisdiction and

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the costs associated with the support provided by the relevant state government partner for the territory.

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Division/Agency: DIV - Territories

Hansard Reference: Spoken, Page No. 56 (07 March 2024)

Topic: Accessibility for provision of services to territories

Dr Monique Ryan MP asked:

Mr Mackay: [...] One thing worth noting in particular as I say given the last point in your terms of reference is that because there is no state government we are effectively the service provider as well. That means that programs that are designed for administration by a state government can be a challenge for these communities to access. In some cases, they're simply ineligible for, for example, a Commonwealth program that requires a co-contribution by a state government or a Commonwealth program where funding flows through a state to a service provider. The communities in the non-self-governing territories can be just strictly ineligible for access to that funding. That's something that we work on with our colleagues within the federal government to remind them not to design programs in a way that exclude these communities. But clearly these are long-running programs and long-running issues that can be a challenge.

Dr RYAN: Has thought ever been given to just sort of saying that they're all nominally members of the territory, for example, and then increasing the territories capitation for provision of those services?

Mr Mackay: I would have to take on notice whether that's been considered in the past. We do partner with state governments in a number of areas of service delivery. Again, I might ask Ms Vandebroek to speak to that if that's helpful. In the case of the Indian Ocean Territories, we have a longstanding working relationship with the Western Australian government. In the case of Norfolk Island, that had been New South Wales and it is now Queensland. That's right. We can speak to how that works, if that's helpful.

Answer:

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts is not aware that this option has previously been explored.

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Division/Agency: DIV - Territories

Hansard Reference: Spoken, Page No. 57-58 (07 March 2024)

Topic: Hierarchy of goods for air freight

Senator Graham Perrett asked:

Mr PERRETT: Ms Vandebroek has shown me around some of these areas over the years in my role on the Public Works Committee, where we've been looking at port facilities and bringing in food. Do you have any data on the Commonwealth's role in affecting the diet of 4,783 people in these territories? Is it subsidised volumetrically in aircraft or ships? Do you give a discount for a tomato rather than a can of Coke? Can you give us a bit of an insight into how the Commonwealth has any influence over the diet of the people in Cocos, Christmas Island and Norfolk? Because they're the three that I've been to over the years.

Ms Vandebroek: We subsidise the air freight quite substantially. A lot of the fresh food that goes out goes via air rather than sea. The sea freight is not subsidised. There isn't a difference between fresh food and other goods in the sea freight. But in the air freight—

Mr PERRETT: It's just volume for the sea freight.

Ms Vandebroek: Yes.

Mr PERRETT: What about on the commercial planes? Do you give a preference for fresh fruit and veggies?

Ms Vandebroek: I'm not sure what the ranking is. I'd have to take that on notice. But there is a hierarchy certainly for the IoT both for the cargo in the passenger plane and for the fortnightly freight plane. There is a hierarchy where medicine and must-fly goods will go first, fresh food will go second, and then other goods are ranked behind that.

[...]

Mr PERRETT: Now I'll just springboard into the opportunities for the Commonwealth influencing what goes on in communities around Australia that have a high incidence of diabetes. From what you have said, if you influence the freight coming into an area you can influence the diet of communities, although I take on board what Dr McCoy said about the farming folk of Norfolk Island.

Mr Mackay: I think that's right for the services that we subsidise. As Ms Vandebroek said, the sea freight is the market operating. But on air freight where we do provide a subsidy I think that's right. Perhaps we will take on notice to provide that hierarchy of goods just so that we can confirm the detail of that on notice.

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Answer:

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts underwrites passenger and freight flights to both the Indian Ocean Territories (IOT) and Norfolk Island.

Indian Ocean Territories

Virgin Australia Regional Services is the supplier, under contract with the department, for commercial passenger flights to the IOT. Toll is the supplier, under contract with the department, for air freighter services to the IOT. Within these contracts, the following hierarchy for loading cargo onto the flights applies:

1. Must Fly
2. Medical
3. Perishables (no sub categories i.e. healthy vs general)
4. UPU Mail
5. Priority General
6. General

Please note: Priorities are the same on Passenger services with the exception of perishables - this category can only be uplifted on the freighter service.

Norfolk Island

Qantas is the supplier, under contract to the department, for commercial passenger flights to Norfolk Island. Toll is the supplier, under contract with the department, for air freighter services to Norfolk Island.

The contract with Qantas provides for the prioritisation of medical freight on passenger flights. In addition, Qantas has arrangements in place with Australia Post to deliver express post mail and packages, which normally occupies the balance of the limited cargo space.

The contract the department has with Toll does not stipulate priority for types of cargo, and the subsidy is applied equally across all cargo types.