

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

02 June 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000347

Question Subject: Covid process and terms of visiting arrangements with First Nations people in prisons

Type of Question: Spoken

Hansard Page number: 18

Senator: Malarndirri McCarthy

Question:

Senator McCARTHY: Thank you, Chair. I'd like to go to a couple of questions to give the Senate inquiry an understanding about prisons and hostels—I think I can go to you on this, Mr Griggs—and then on mental health. Firstly, on our processes with First Nations people in prisons across the country, what has the COVID process been and what's happening post-COVID in terms of visiting arrangements?

Mr Exell: Thanks for your question. I guess the key part of the answer is that NIAA doesn't look after corrections; that's the responsibility of states and territories.

Ms Edwards: It's a matter for states and territories as to how prisons are managed and so on, but there has been guidance issued by the AHPPC in relation to COVID-safe practices in prisons.

Senator McCARTHY: I understand that it's a jurisdictional care, but you have taken an overarching approach in terms of COVID. If there's a particular focus around the prisons, are you able to provide that for the committee, on notice?

Ms Edwards: I can take it on notice, but I can also direct you to the fact that it's publicly available, as I understand it. It would be of the same ilk, in relation to other businesses, as where there's medical advice which is published. Just like supermarkets set up their queuing, in a similar way there's guidance in relation to prisons, which states and territories will take on board in making sure they have safe environments for prisoners. But we don't have any direct role in managing that process.

Answer:

On 31 March 2020, the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee endorsed the *Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) National Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Public Health Management of COVID-19 Outbreaks in Correctional and Detention Facilities in Australia* (www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/cdna-guidelines-for-the-prevention-control-and-public-health-management-of-covid-19-outbreaks-in-correctional-and-detention-facilities-in-australia).

The Guidelines assist public health authorities, administrators of correctional facilities, employees of correctional facilities and healthcare workers by providing best practice information for the prevention and management of COVID-19 outbreaks in detention and correction facilities. How this is managed or facilitated is the responsibility of states and territories and the facilities.

The document is currently being updated to align with recent amendments to the Series of National Guidelines (SoNG) for COVID-19 and will be published shortly.

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

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

02 June 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000352

Question Subject: Use of masks

Type of Question: Spoken

Hansard Page number: 30

Senator: Rex Patrick

Question:

Senator PATRICK: I accept that it is complex. Thank you for that. Another issue that has been raised is the use of masks. I've seen a fact sheet that the Department of Health has issued in relation to masks. Basically, the impression I get is that the Commonwealth's position is that masks on public transport, for example, are not necessary. Is it correct that that is the position of the government at this point in time?

Ms Edwards: I will defer to the fact sheet, which would have been drawn directly from the AHPPC, but it's certainly the case that there's no recommendation at the moment that masks should be worn by general community members. My focus has been, as you know, on ensuring that the masks held in the national stockpile are for those who definitely do need masks in healthcare settings. It's one thing the AHPPC is regularly looking at. One of the real issues that arise, as I understand, is that use of masks, and all PPE, depends entirely on how well you use them—so being trained in order to put a mask on properly and not to touch it, which can actually have the perverse effect of causing infection and so on. But I would defer to what's on our website. Perhaps I could take it on notice to come back in the event that there's something new that hasn't been on the website, but I'd be very surprised.

Answer:

The agreed position of state and territory health officials along with the Australian Government Department of Health's Chief Medical Officer is that "the routine use of face masks in the community is currently not recommended, while the rate of community transmission of COVID-19 is low."

The advice titled, "Use of masks by the public in the community" published on 28 May 2020 on the Australian Government Department of Health's website: www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-use-of-masks-by-the-public-in-the-community was endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee whose core membership are the chief health officers from the states and territories and chaired by Australian Government Department of Health's Chief Medical Officer.

With respect to public transport this advice also mentions, "However, some members of the public may choose to wear a mask in situations where it is not feasible to maintain physical distancing e.g. on public transport and/or if they are at increased risk of severe illness if infected (e.g. because of their age or a chronic medical condition). This may provide some additional protection in these circumstances."