

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Public Hearing – 22 September 2020
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Commonwealth Funding - Question 1

Question reference number: SQ20-000603

Senator: Kristina Keneally

Type of Question: Spoken. Hansard Page/s: 46-47

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 07 October 2020

Question:

Senator KENEALLY: ... But can I go to this issue of the \$130 million of funding that was announced by the Prime Minister in March as initial funding. Why did it take until 16 September for it to be distributed?

Ms Hawkins: I just preface my comments by saying that it is our colleagues in the Department of Social Services that are responsible for distributing this, but, in the interests of assisting the committee, it has come out in tranches, and we are happy to share the various communiques that have come from the Women's Safety Council, Chair.

CHAIR: I think you can get them online.

Ms Hawkins: Yes, indeed. You can see from the communique from the 30 March to April 2020 meeting that there was a decision way back then that, as an immediate response, the Australian government would provide \$32½ million to states and territories to meet urgent needs. That decision was made on the basis of the discussions among the Commonwealth, state and territory ministers about what was the best way to basically sequence the money going out. So, there was that first tranche that went out very early in the piece, and then as the meetings progressed and the data was coming in there were conversations about how the rest of the money would be allocated.

Senator KENEALLY: How was it allocated in the end? If it's gone out on 16 September—which was just a week or so ago—how was it allocated? Was it allocated on the basis of demand?

Ms Hawkins: Indeed. In that last communique—the Minister for Families and Social Services was quite keen for it to go out on the basis of demand. In response to the views of the state and territory women's safety ministers, it ended up going out on a per capita basis.

Senator KENEALLY: Why didn't it go out based on demand?

Ms Hawkins: It went out on the basis—as I said, Minister Ruston was very keen for it to go out on the basis of demand. I'm just going to the actual meeting outcomes document, so that I'm precise. It says that 'state and territory ministers were supportive of a per capita allocation due to the challenges in producing comparable and consistent data regarding demand across the jurisdictions'. It was on that basis that the Commonwealth allocated the remaining \$68.25 million of the National Partnership Agreement on a per capita basis. That was responding to the states and territories.

Senator KENEALLY: Well, in fact I understand from Ms Hefren-Webb, the deputy secretary of DSS—she told the House of Representatives that it was going to be too complex, which corresponds with what you just said in terms of the communicate: that there wasn't the data to drive that decision around demand. That's where I wanted to go. I have two questions arising from this. First, is there anything in the agreement of the distribution to the states and territories about this money actually hitting the service providers? The evidence we heard this morning is that only 50 per cent of it has hit the service providers. Now, if it only went out on 16 September, it may be the case that it still hasn't hit the service providers, having funnelled itself to the states. But is there anything in the agreement about when it has to hit the service providers?

Ms Hawkins: You've raised a couple of things there, and with the first point I think that what I've just said is consistent with what Deputy Secretary Liz Hefren-Webb said. I was actually with her in appearing at that committee.

Senator KENEALLY: Yes, that's fine. I said that it corresponds to what you just said.

Ms Hawkins: Yes. Sorry—it's hard to hear. But that's good. I'm slightly focused on the fact that the detail of how these payments have gone out is actually something our colleagues in the Department of Social Services are all over. So, I'm wondering whether or not that last question that you've raised—

Senator KENEALLY: If you want to take that on notice, that's fine.

Ms Hawkins: Yes—just about how it works under the National Partnership Agreement.

Answer:

Refer to SQ20-000595.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal
Affairs inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence - Commonwealth Funding

Question reference number: SQ20-000595

Type of Question: Written.

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 07 October 2020

Question:

In regard to the \$150 million of Commonwealth funding announced in March to support frontline domestic and family violence service providers:

When did frontline services receive funds from the states and territories? Did all service providers receive funds on or around the same date? If yes, please provide the date(s)? If not, why not?

Answer:

The Commonwealth has released the total \$130 million under the National Partnership Agreement on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses to state and territory governments through four payments:

- \$27.8 million in May 2020
- \$4.7 million in June 2020
- \$29.25 million in July or August 2020, depending on when the milestones were met
- \$68.25 million in September 2020

State and territory governments are responsible for the provision of funds to frontline services and will report in November 2020 and March 2021 on expenditure under the agreement.