

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Health

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Australian Government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic

13 May 2020

PDR Number: IQ20-000219

Question Subject: Lack of gowns for doctors in Ballarat

Type of Question: Spoken

Hansard Page number: 24-25

Questioner: Senator Davey

Question:

Senator DAVEY: I've first got a couple of questions about the stockpile. I know this is a topic that we keep coming back to, but it is one that is very important. As I think you said earlier, PPE has proven to be one of the most effective defences we've got. We heard early in this committee's life that we had taken active measures to address concerns about the shortfall in the stockpiles, but—even as late as last week—we're still getting reports, particularly from regional areas, about concerns with stockpiles. There was an issue reported last week where doctors from Ballarat had taken to actually sewing their own gowns and distributing those gowns to regional doctors and regional clinics. Can you give us an update on stockpiles—not just masks and gloves but also gowns—and, in particular, how things are being distributed to regional areas?

Ms Edwards:...Gloves, gowns and goggles—the three Gs, as we call them—are things that we didn't traditionally have, and we have as quickly as we can but still slowly been building up supplies. So there have been some very limited instances where we've done things like borrowed from a state and repaid them and so on. Defence has been helpful in providing some of their supplies. And I'm not aware of the issue in Ballarat, though I would be very happy to take advice on it through our minister's office and to investigate. But I am certainly not aware of any major outbreaks like that.

Answer:

During 2020, the Department of Health secured more than half a billion masks and millions of other personal protective equipment (PPE) items for the National Medical Stockpile as part of the COVID-19 response. Access to critical supplies from the National Medical

Stockpile continues to be available where there are critical shortages, supply issues and a demonstrated need and clinical indication.

As at 13 April 2021, more than 88 million masks, 5 million gowns, 12 million gloves and 4 million goggles and face shields have been dispatched from the National Medical Stockpile.

The Department has continued providing PPE from the National Medical Stockpile to the Western Victoria Primary Health Network (PHN), which has coverage of Ballarat. To date, the NMS has dispatched approximately 800,000 masks, 40,000 gowns and 240,000 goggles to this PHN for distribution to local primary care services.

Since 9 June 2020, the Department has also dispatched additional PPE from the NMS to the Royal Flying Doctors Service to support the delivery of vital services to rural and regional areas, including over 60,000 masks and 5,000 gowns.

The Department of Health continues to monitor supply chains and product availability to identify and mitigate any potential supply issues, and ensure sufficient capacity to continue the response to COVID-19.