

Additional comments from Government Senators

Introduction

1.1 Government Senators are pleased that the committee's report reflects a general commitment to 1800 RESPECT to better support women, children and men who require it. It is and should be the focus of government to continually improve the service. This should be done regardless of who provides the service.

1.2 Government Senators are concerned about some recommendations, particularly those in relation to the procurement process, which are not borne out by the evidence provided. As such, government senators do not agree with these recommendations.

1.3 Government Senators are also concerned by the report's heavy reliance on testimony by the ASU, which given its highly political campaign against the change in service delivery model, is not an impartial source of information.

Procurement process

1.4 Government Senators disagree with statements made within recommendations 2 and 3, specifically 4.12, 4.15 and 4.18.

1.5 Government Senators do not believe that there is sufficient evidence provided to the committee that indicates that the procurement process did not occur properly.

1.6 Consistent with subcontracting arrangements, MHS was responsible for conducting an open, transparent and competitive tender process and appointed O'Connor Marsden and Associates as the external probity advisor to oversee both the EOI and subsequent request for proposal process.¹

1.7 MHS also appointed an evaluation panel, which included two independent subject matter experts with expertise in sexual assault, domestic and family violence.²

1.8 Government Senators acknowledge that there was discussion prior to the procurement taking place, as evidenced by emails provided by the ASU, and these have been comprehensively responded to by both DSS and MHS. The emails conflate issues around the new subcontract with changes to the existing contract.³

1 Department of Social Services, *Submission 31*, p. 23.

2 Department of Social Services, *Submission 31*, p. 23.

3 Department of Social Services, response to ASU submission, *Submission 58*, pp 2-3 and Medibank response to ASU submission, *Submission 58*, p. 6.

Qualifications of MHS counsellors

1.9 Government Senators believe that the evidence provided by MHS and DSS is sufficient to indicate that appropriate training is provided to MHS first response counsellors prior to their commencement including two years practical experience.⁴

1.10 Government Senators have concerns that evidence provided by Mrs Emily Lachevre is included in the committee's report as it is unverifiable hearsay.

1.11 Government Senators note that there is a contractual requirement to lodge complaints and a clear process for doing so.⁵ No evidence has been provided to the committee that indicates a complaint was made.

Conclusion

1.12 Government Senators are pleased that the committee report reflects a general commitment to the 1800 RESPECT service.

1.13 Government Senators are of the view that the procurement process was appropriately and properly conducted.

1.14 Government Senators are of the view that MHS first responders are appropriately qualified and that MHS has appropriate training in place.

1.15 Government Senators are encouraged that the committee has recognised that there has been a significant improvement in the service which will benefit the women, children and men who have been impacted by domestic and family violence, and sexual assault.

Senator James Paterson

Deputy Chair

4 Medibank provided the committee with a copy of the 1800 RESPECT Service Delivery Manual as a confidential document.

5 As noted in the majority report the funding agreements and subcontracts have been provided as confidential documents.