

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2010-2011, 23 & 25 February 2011

Question: E11-014

OUTCOME 6: Rural Health

Topic: PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME (PATS)

Written Question on Notice

Senator Siewert asked:

The Senate Committee report titled 'Highway to health: better access for rural, regional and remote patients' was released late 2007.

- a) What is the status of the recommendations?
- b) With respect to Recommendation 2 [7.110] 'that as a matter of urgency, the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council establish a taskforce comprised of government, consumer and practitioner representatives to develop a set of standards for patient assisted travel schemes that ensure equity of access to medical services for people living in rural, regional and remote Australia'. What action has been taken to establish a taskforce by the Australian Health Ministers' Council to develop standards for patient travel schemes to ensure equitable access?

Answer:

- a) The status of the recommendations is below.

Recommendation 1 - the Commonwealth, states and territories have committed to ensuring national standards for PATS that ensure equity of access to medical services for people in rural and remote areas.

In the April 2010 National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement the Commonwealth and states and territories committed to undertake work around PATS, with a view to higher and more consistent national standards. This view was supported by the February 2011 Heads of Agreement – National Health Reform.

Recommendations 2-8 and 13 relate to the establishment of an Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC) taskforce to progress issues in relation to PATS and are addressed in the response to Part B of this question.

Recommendations 9, 11, 12 and 15-16 identify issues to be considered by state and territory governments.

Recommendation 10 relates to negotiations between the Commonwealth Government and the private health sector. The Department of Health and Ageing undertakes regular discussions with private health insurers, a number of which currently offer products including travel and accommodation assistance.

Recommendation 14 - as part of the 2009-10 Federal Budget the Australian Government committed \$560 million from its Health and Hospital Fund for the construction of a network of best practice regional cancer centres and associated accommodation facilities, to help improve access and support for cancer patients in rural and regional Australia.

The Government has so far announced funding for 21 Regional Cancer Centre projects in: NSW (six); Victoria (five); Queensland (five); Western Australia (two); South Australia (one); Tasmania (one); and the ACT (one).

- b) As directed by AHMAC members, the Health Policy Priorities Principal Committee (HPPPC) established a taskforce to examine the recommendations of the Senate Committee's report in relation to PATS and to report back to them.

Subsequently, the HPPPC requested that the Rural Health Standing Committee (RHSC), as representative of the states and the Northern Territory, develop:

- national PATS policy principles; and
- models to provide a basis for future costing work to be undertaken.

RHSC members have reached agreement on the draft policy principles that will be provided to the HPPPC for comment.

The RHSC is in the process of finalising advice on this matter to the HPPPC and AHMAC.