

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2010-2011, 23 February 2011

Question: E11-022

OUTCOME 7: Hearing Services

Topic: HEARING SERVICES PROVIDED AND CLIENT SERVICE ISSUES

Written Question on Notice

Senator Siewert asked:

- a) What information does the Department gather to ascertain effectiveness for clients of hearing services provided?
- b) Does the Department have time-series data to show whether modifications to the program have resulted in significant improvement for clients in the quality of hearing aid outcomes? (Note - HSP modifications have included contract terms, improvement in device technology, training of dispensers, Rehab Plus - extra payment for extra group hearing rehabilitation).
- c) What proportion of hearing services clients assess they have received high quality, satisfactory or poor quality hearing outcomes from the services provided?
- d) Do these proportions vary between providers?
- e) What information is available to potential clients about effectiveness of hearing services providers to help them choose where they go to obtain hearing services?
- f) Is there any impediment to releasing performance data for individual clinics?
- g) Does Government funding discriminate between service providers with poor quality outcomes, and those with high quality outcomes?
- h) What steps is the Department taking to lift the overall performance of hearing services received by clients of the program?
- i) Is the Department aware of any publicly available systems capable of driving Continuous Quality Improvement in hearing care delivery?

Answer:

- a) The Office of Hearing Services (OHS) conducts biennial Client Satisfaction Surveys to ascertain client feedback. In addition, the OHS conducts audits of the services provided by contracted service providers and investigates complaints lodged by clients of the Australian Government Hearing Services Program (HSP).
- b) The Department has time series data relating to service provider claims for service items. This enables analysis of changing trends in service delivery which can be linked to modifications to the HSP (including the uptake of Rehabilitation Plus). Additionally, OHS maintains lists of approved hearing devices that are updated whenever new products are introduced, to ensure clients have access to a wide range of quality hearing devices. The hearing device specifications are periodically updated to ensure current technology is always available to clients.

- c) Previous client satisfaction surveys have focused on satisfaction with OHS service delivery and hearing aid usage. The client survey undertaken in July 2008 found an improvement in the usage of hearing devices with 60.4% of fitted voucher clients (estimated at 263,456 clients) using their device for more than 5 hours per day. The hearing aid usage measure indicates the proportion of fitted clients who gain a significant benefit from their devices. The 2010 Client Satisfaction Survey data sought feedback from clients regarding the outcome of services provided. Analysis of this data is still underway.
- d) As client survey responses are de-identified, data is not able to be linked back to service providers. However, client complaints are recorded against service providers, and individual practitioners, if appropriate.
- e) The Department does not rate individual service providers, or direct clients to specific providers. All contracted service providers have appropriate professional qualifications and are accredited by the OHS under the Accreditation Scheme as outlined in the *Hearing Services Administration Act 1997*.
- f) The *Hearing Services Act 1991* does not authorise the public release of information about the operations of service providers, and the release would raise questions with regard to privacy and commercial in confidence issues.
- g) The contract between the Commonwealth and the service provider includes requirements covering the quality of services provided to clients. Breaches of contract provisions can result in the termination of a contract.
- h) Generally, the Department monitors hearing service provider performance through client feedback, complaints recording, and audits of compliance with contractual obligations. Should any breaches be identified, service providers are formally required to take action to bring their practice into line with their contract and the relevant legislation. More specifically, in 2009 the Department funded the “Statement of Attainment in Audiometry” training program to expand the knowledge and skills of audiometrists providing services under the HSP.
- i) The Department is not aware of any publicly available systems aimed at specifically at driving continuous quality improvement (CQI) in hearing services delivery. CQI systems which support quality improvement in other parts of the health sector, which may be able to be adapted to hearing services include those run by Quality in Practice Pty Ltd (QIP), and the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA).

QIP provides accreditation services and consultancy on quality accreditation frameworks for a range of primary health care professionals including medical imaging, optometry and physiotherapy. It is a wholly owned subsidiary of Australian General Practice Accreditation Limited (AGPAL) which provides accreditation for general practice.

According to their website, NATA provides independent assurance of technical competence through a network of best practice industry experts for customers who require confidence in the delivery of their products and services. NATA provides assessment, accreditation and training services to laboratories and technical facilities throughout Australia and internationally.