

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2010-11, 23 February 2011

Question: E11-077

OUTCOME 0: Whole of Portfolio

Topic: UNMET NEED

Written Question on Notice

Senator Sue Boyce asked:

- a) The Department looked at the issue unmet need in 1995, 1997 and 2001. As far as I can see, AIHW has not done any work on defining or on assessment tools for unmet need since; is that correct?
- b) Could you provide me with all work AIHW has done since 2001 on the topic of what unmet need is and provide me with your most up to date definition of what unmet need is?
- c) Can you describe how the inconsistency of data collections and methods affect the quantifying of the degree of national 'unmet need' in disability services?
- d) If so, what are they?
- e) For how long have they been an issue?
- f) If there are problems could you please provide, in detail, what is being done to rectify the problem?

Answer:

- a) AIHW has not undertaken the development of an agreed definition of unmet demand in the disability area. The most recent work on defining and estimating unmet need has been undertaken by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) under contract, initially to the NSW Department of Families and Community Services and, more recently, to the Disability Policy and Research Working Group (DPRWG). The DPRWG is a working party that discusses Commonwealth State Territory National Disability Agreement (NDA) management issues and oversees the development and implementation of the NDA Implementation Workplan. The PwC work was undertaken as part of developing a need and supply model for disability services to be used by jurisdictions for planning purposes.
However a number of AIHW publications listed below under b), have included analysis of unmet demand. These analyses used a variety of definitions dependant on the requirements of the analysis being undertaken.

b) and f)

The following AIHW publications include some analysis of unmet demand.

- Unmet need for disability services: effectiveness of funding and remaining shortfalls. Cat. no. DIS 26. Canberra: AIHW 2002
- Therapy and equipment needs of people with cerebral palsy and like disabilities in Australia. Cat. no. DIS 49. Canberra: AIHW 2006
- Current and future demand for specialist disability services. Cat. no. DIS 50. Canberra: AIHW 2007
- Disability in Australia: intellectual disability. Bulletin no. 67. Cat. no. AUS 110. Canberra: AIHW 2008
- Australia's welfare 2009. Cat. no. AUS 117. Canberra: AIHW 2009

There is currently no generally accepted definition of unmet demand and no consistently applied AIHW definition of unmet demand. *Australia's welfare 2009* notes, in relation to defining unmet need for disability services, that "Existing data on disability support services have an output focus, that is, the number and amount of different types of services received and the number of people who receive them" and notes that assessment of need "... would therefore require insight into who assesses need and how, and the extent to which the person with disability is able to decide how their needs should be addressed".

However, for specialist disability services, the AIHW is contributing to national discussion through the DPRWG to the National Disability Agreement Priority A: Better Measurement of Need, Deliverable 3: Improving Jurisdiction Level Unmet Demand Data.

c), d) and e)

The primary source of information regarding unmet demand for disability services is the Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (SDAC), conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The SDAC relies on self-reported information on needs and services obtained. Definitions of unmet need developed for specific purposes tend to focus on results of formal assessments of need (eligibility for a service) and waiting lists. The PwC model, alternatively, relies on assumptions about the amount of service required for a particular degree of disability in relation to the level of service supplied to the estimated population of those with a disability. The lack of a generally accepted definition of unmet demand, that would need to be used in a variety of circumstances, would make it difficult to accurately quantify the degree of national 'unmet need' for disability services.