

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2010-2011, 23 February 2011

Question: E11-184

OUTCOME 11: Mental Health

Topic: AUTISM

Written Question on Notice

Senator Fierravanti-Wells asked:

The US Centre for Disease Control has suggested there may now be an epidemic of autism. Please advise:

- a) Does DoHA have any information about an epidemic of autism in Australia?
- b) What data does DoHA currently collect with regards to surveillance on autism disease prevalence and treatment rates?

Answer:

- a) Autism is generally considered as a pervasive developmental disability and as such is the remit of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). FaHCSIA is the lead agency for the *Helping Children with Autism* (HCWA) package which provides early intervention and individual assistance packages for children and their families, funding for training teachers and supporting playgroups, and created new items in the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS). The package commenced in October 2008 and complements existing services provided by state and territories.

The Department does not collect data on autism prevalence. The Department is not aware of any evidence of any major shifts in prevalence of autism in Australia.

- b) The Department has Medicare data on the specific MBS items created under the HCWA package. Data on MBS items is available publicly at:
www.health.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/Medicare-Benefits-Schedule-MBS-1