

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 31 May 2011

Question: E11- 469

OUTCOME 14: Biosecurity & Emergency Response

Topic: QUEENSLAND FLOOD RESPONSE

Hansard Page: CA 103

Senator Boyce asked:

I think there was a report in the Courier Mail today, but I do not have it with me, talking about the level of depression amongst people who had been affected by the floods in Brisbane. They were using a young pregnant woman to illustrate this point. Could you please tell me what the Department has done to support organisations in Queensland – and I know there was some work in medicines and so forth – in terms of physical and mental health since January?

Answer:

**Mental Health**

The Australian Government committed to collaborating with Queensland Health in taking forward a mental health response through the response and recovery period, and is funding enhancements to primary mental health care services over the medium to long term to complement state government services.

Australian Government support includes:

- provision of expanded psychological services for people impacted by the floods or cyclone on referral from GPs or from state mental health services;
- education and training for primary mental health care workers providing services to people who have been impacted, including ATAPS allied health workers and GPs; and
- continued support for ‘whole of community’ activities including telephone based services through Commonwealth services including Lifeline Australia, Beyondblue, Kids Helpline and Mensline.

On 13 January 2011, the Hon Mark Butler MP, the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, announced an additional \$1.3 million to increase services in the flood and cyclone affected regions of Queensland under the ATAPS Program.

On 6 April 2011, the Prime Minister and Qld Premier, launched a Community Recovery and Wellbeing Package which included up to \$10 million for a Mental health Disaster Recovery Package to support mental health services in disaster affected communities.

## **Residential Aged Care**

The Department liaised with all residential and community aged care services in the affected areas to ensure that emergency management plans were in place, confirm the availability of staff, services and supplies, and ensure that older Australians were safe and support for their ongoing care needs was maintained. The Department assisted providers to obtain supplies where required.

The Department worked with state health and emergency management departments to support evacuations including identifying possible alternative residential aged care accommodation.

The Department continues to provide support to aged care providers who had exceptional costs associated with ensuring the safety and well-being of older people during the flood and cyclone crisis. It is also supporting older Australians in regions affected by the flood and cyclone crisis to help replace uninsured independent living aids lost.

## **Community Aged Care Services**

The Department contacted potentially affected community care service providers in affected areas to ensure they were prepared and that the needs of the care recipients would be met.

Where service provision was affected, depending on the location and the level of support required, care recipients were placed in residential respite, transferred to hospitals or had supplies of food and medication delivered.

## **Pharmaceutical Benefits**

Arrangements were put in place in flood affected areas to assist Queensland residents who may have lost their medication prescriptions and to support communities in flood affected areas through collaboration with Medicare Australia and the Pharmacy Guild to ensure residents have continued access to PBS medicines. This included extending existing arrangements to facilitate quick approvals for community pharmacies to trade from new temporary premises, if required, and advising pharmacists what they can do to immediately dispense medicines to affected patients.

The Department also monitored the PBS supply arrangements to flood affected parts of Queensland through the National full line wholesale distributors.

The Department and Medicare Australia implemented a process to allow stoma associations to provide critical supplies to patients in need under a statutory declaration.

The Department ensured that the National Diabetes Services Scheme (NDSS) remained operational during the flood crisis. Although access to some pharmacy sub agents and the Diabetes Australia Queensland Agent office was disrupted, all services provided under the NDSS could be accessed by calling 1300 136 588.

## **Medicare for providers**

All health professionals with a Medicare provider number, who had their practices destroyed or badly damaged as a result of the cyclone and other adversities, were able to continue to use the provider number for that location to provide Medicare services from another temporary location on a short term basis.

All applications were treated as urgent priorities by the Department and Medicare Australia, and access to Medicare benefits arrangements was available to providers assisting in affected communities from the affected start dates.

Residents who lost property or belongings as a result of the cyclone and other adversities were able to obtain their Medicare number from any Medicare office or by calling Medicare Australia on 132 011.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health**

The Department contacted all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and substance use services to determine what, if any, evacuation plans were in place. Particular attention was paid to residential rehabilitation services to ensure clients were provided with alternative, safe accommodation where deemed necessary.

### **Call Centre Support**

The Department contacted the National Health Call Centre Network to ensure that the Queensland 13HEALTH nurse triage service would be supported if needed. The healthcare direct Australia service was also made available to support this service.

### **Hearing Services**

The Department ensured continued access to subsidised free hearing rehabilitation services and hearing aids for eligible clients (largely children, pensioners and veterans) of the Australian Government Hearing Services Program through the Office of Hearing Services by working with the major service providers who voluntarily established reciprocal services for clients for flood affected areas.