

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2013-14, 5/6 & 7 June 2013

Question: E13-041

OUTCOME: 13 – Acute Care

Topic: Indigenous - Dental

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Boyce

Question:

While the most recent Closing the Gap Report (Feb 2013) indicated that in 2011-2012 3,842 dental services were delivered to 2,810 indigenous children and that the overall prevalence for children with at least one oral health problem fell by 12 per cent the Australian Dental association has called on the government to, and I quote, "ensure that comprehensive treatment is made available" and that "while fluoride varnish and fissure sealants are a good supplement ... they are not a substitute for complete dental care."

- a) Your response?
- b) There are pilot programmes involving mobile dental clinics that have been underway for some 12 months now. What is the assessment of those pilots?
- c) Will these pilots become permanent programmes? If not, why not? And if so when?

Answer:

- a) *Grow Up Smiling* was announced on 29 August 2012 as part of the Government's broader dental reforms. From 1 January 2014, the scheme will provide up to \$1,000 in benefits (capped over two calendar years) for eligible children for basic dental services including prevention and treatment (e.g. fillings and extractions), with high end and orthodontic items excluded. To be eligible for *Grow Up Smiling* a person must be two to 17 years old and receiving or in a family receiving FTB-A or other government payments.

Grow Up Smiling will complement other components of the Australian dental system, which includes: states and territories providing public dental services; private health insurance funds paying benefits for the cost of private dental treatment; individuals paying for their own private dental care; and other Australian Government funding for dental-related services through Medicare, hospital funding and other programs for specific target groups.

- b) In 2009-10, the Government committed \$11 million over four years under the *Closing the Gap – Indigenous dental services in rural and regional areas* program to implement and evaluate pilot projects providing mobile dental infrastructure to rural and regional Indigenous communities. The program, including an evaluation, terminated at the end of June 2013. An independent consultant has evaluated the program and its report is currently being considered by the Department of Health and Ageing and will be provided to the Minister for Indigenous Health.

- c) The objective of the pilot program was to implement a range of infrastructure projects to assess the effectiveness of mobile dental facilities in Indigenous communities where dental services and facilities are scarce. Under the funding arrangements recipients are responsible for operating and maintaining the equipment for the delivery of dental services for the Indigenous populations throughout the region for a period of five years. The evaluation report for the program will be provided to Government for consideration of any possible future budgetary implications.