

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

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

Question: E13-042

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.'

Indigenous Australians have a 90 per cent rate of periodontal disease compared to 20 per cent for the non-indigenous population and a rate of dental disease that is five times that of the rest of us. What is being done to close that enormous gap?

Answer:

A list of the current and future dental measures with a focus on the Indigenous community, including a focus on rural and regional areas is outlined below.

Mobile Dental Infrastructure

In 2009-10, the Government committed \$11 million over four years to implement and evaluate pilot projects providing mobile dental infrastructure to rural and regional Indigenous communities. The models are a mix of types of mobile dental service infrastructure including vans, self-drive 4WD vehicles, portable equipment for delivery by road, air or sea, and equipment for hub and spoke models using mobile staff. Grant recipients are responsible for operational costs. The program terminated at the end of June 2013 and an evaluation report will be provided to the Minister for Indigenous Health.

Voluntary Dental Graduate Year Program

The Voluntary Dental Graduate Year Program (VDGYP), which was part of the 2011-12 Budget, provided \$52.6 million over four years (2011-12 to 2014-15) to support 50 dental graduate placements each year commencing from the 2013 calendar year.

In the 2012-13 Budget, the scheme was expanded to provide an additional \$35.7 million over four years (2012-13 to 2015-16), to increase placements to 75 places in 2015 and 100 places in 2016. This brings the Government's total investment in this program to \$88.3 million.

The VDGYP provides dental graduates with a structured program for enhanced practice experience and professional development opportunities, whilst increasing the dental workforce capacity, particularly in the public sector.

Where possible, graduate placements have been directed towards the public sector and areas of need, including indigenous communities and rural and remote areas.

The first group of 50 graduates commenced participation in the VDGYP on 21 January 2013, including 18 placements in regional areas and 5 placements in remote areas.

Oral Health Therapist Graduate Year Program (OHTGYP)

The Australian Government has provided \$45.2 million over four years (2012-13 to 2015-16) to fund the introduction of an OHTGYP.

The OHTGYP will provide oral health therapist graduates with a structured program for enhanced practice experience and professional development opportunities, whilst increasing the oral health workforce capacity, particularly in the public sector. Fifty oral health therapist placements will be supported per year commencing in the 2014 academic year.

Where possible, graduate placements will be directed towards areas of need such as rural and regional locations, Aboriginal Medical Services and aged care services. Distribution will be influenced by a variety of factors including jurisdictional and local capacity to provide suitable support.

The Dental Relocation and Infrastructure Support Scheme

The Dental Relocation and Infrastructure Support Scheme was announced in the 2012-13 Budget. The Scheme aims to improve access to dental services for regional and remote communities through the provision of increased dental services by providing incentives to dentists to relocate to more remote locations in Australia. Financial incentives up to \$370,000 are available to eligible dentists under the Scheme. Dentists participating in the Scheme will be encouraged to be involved in public practice and to support the needs of specific critical groups such as Indigenous Australians. Applications for the Scheme will be sought in August 2013.

National Partnership on Treating More Public Dental Patients

Under the 2012-13 Budget, \$344 million of administered funds was allocated for a National Partnership with the states and territories to alleviate pressure on public dental waiting lists. States and territories will use this funding to provide additional dental services for up to 400,000 public dental patients estimated to be on their waiting lists. This program has a particular focus on Indigenous patients, patients at high risk of, or from, major oral health problems, and those from rural areas.

Dental Reform Package

Under the Dental Reform Package, \$2.7 billion was allocated for *Grow Up Smiling*, a children's dental scheme that will commence on 1 January 2014 for 2-17 year olds who receive, or whose family receives, a range of government payments including FTB-A and Abstudy.

The Package also includes a Flexible Grants Program. The program will provide \$225 million over four years from 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2018 for dental infrastructure (both capital and workforce) in outer metropolitan, rural and regional areas.

The grants will assist in reducing access barriers to dental care. The grants may also be used for targeted programs to address other gaps in service delivery.

Information about the flexible grants will be provided to potential applicants via an Invitation to Apply in the second half of 2013.