

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2012-2013, 17 and 19 October 2012

Question: E12-078

OUTCOME 11: Mental Health

Topic: COMPLEX TRAUMA AND HEALTH

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Number of pages: 3

Senator: Senator Wright

Question:

We believe that the Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma and Trauma Informed Care and Service Delivery have been released and that Minister Butler will be launching them at Parliament House on October 29th. It is our understanding that these guidelines set the standards for clinical as well as organisational responsiveness to complex trauma.

- a) As complex trauma clients make up the vast majority of those presenting to mental health services will the government be providing ongoing funding to ASCA (Adults Surviving Child Abuse), the organisation which developed the guidelines to put the research from the guidelines into practice?
- b) What specifically is being done in terms of GP training for screening, identification and appropriately addressing complex trauma presentations?
- c) I understand that currently few GPs or primary care physicians screen for childhood trauma and yet the many causes of childhood trauma have marked impacts on both physical and mental health.
- d) What measures is the government taking to embed a trauma informed approach to care concurrently with a recovery oriented approach?
- e) I understand that there is currently no telephone or web service for adults who have experienced complex trauma. Does the Department plan to fill this gap so those who have experienced complex trauma can find pathways to recovery?
- f) Given the burden of disease of complex trauma survivors, and costs to the individual and economically in terms of lost productivity and crisis intervention does the Department consider this area a policy and funding priority?
- g) What strategies have the Department implemented, or is considering implementing, in terms of improving the outcomes of complex trauma survivors, with training for health professionals in this area and for organisations and workers?

Answer:

a) In relation to the Adults Surviving Child Abuse (ASCA) Practice Guidelines, the Department of Health and Ageing is currently considering a proposal from ASCA regarding next steps to implement the guidelines into practice.

b) and c) The government has funded the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) since 2002 to auspice the General Practice Mental Health Standards Collaboration to support GPs in the delivery of primary mental health care.

The Collaboration is a multidisciplinary body with representatives from the RACGP, the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, the Australian Psychological Society, and consumer and carer representatives through the Mental Health Council of Australia. The Collaboration establishes the standards for mental health skills training for GPs and accredits training courses and seminars against these standards for continuing professional development (CPD) points.

The RACGP is represented on the board of directors of the Mental Health Professionals Network (MHPN) Limited. The MHPN is a Commonwealth funded organisation which aims to improve consumer outcomes by supporting interdisciplinary collaborative practice in Australia's primary mental health sector.

The Collaboration has approved the MHPN's Complex Trauma webinar and its associated podcast (delivered in part by topic expert, Dr Cathy Kezelman) for CPD points under RACGP's Category 2 activities.

d) A recovery orientated approach is consistent with the Fourth National Mental Health Plan 2009-2014. The Fourth Plan is being actioned through the development of the National Recovery-Oriented Mental Health Practice Framework. Trauma informed care has been considered during the development of the framework. The Framework will be finalised later this year, and is intended to guide recovery oriented service delivery and practice in Australia.

e) ASCA operates a professional support line during business hours. The support line offers information and referrals for survivors of childhood complex trauma (all forms of child abuse and neglect), their family, and supporters.

The Department is currently finalising an open grant funding round of the Telephone Counselling, Self Help and Web-based Support Programmes (Teleweb) measure, which is intended to expand the range of projects funded and fill gaps in existing online and telephone mental health services. At present the Department is negotiating with a shortlisted applicant in this round for services to this specific group.

f) Policy and funding priority decisions are a matter for government.

g) The Department does not have a specific complex trauma training strategy, but does fund training for health professionals in this area and for organisations and workers.

As noted above, the Department is funding the MHPN Limited to support the interdisciplinary collaborative practice and the MHPN has produced a complex trauma webinar and associated podcast.

The Australian Government also continues to support the mental health workforce through its involvement with the Mental Health Workforce Advisory Council and initiatives such as the Mental Health Professionals Online Development (MHPOD) Program. The MHPOD program provides approximately seventy hours of material on 45 topics, written and produced in Australia. Each topic includes an overview, knowledge check, activity, in-practice section, and a list of resources and the curriculum is based on the National Practice Standards for the Mental Health Workforce.

An additional 13 topics are currently being developed for MHPOD, including a module on Trauma and mental health – impact & neurobiology and trauma informed practice. An understanding of the neurobiology of trauma is very helpful for understanding and responding to people experiencing mental distress regardless of diagnosis.