

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: E12-083

OUTCOME 11: Mental Health

Topic: ONLINE MENTAL HEALTH AND COUNSELLING SERVICES

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Number of pages: 1

Senator: Senator Wright

Question:

\$22.3 million was allocated to expanding online mental health and counselling services. It was approximated that this investment would see 40,000 people benefit from online treatment. Since the allocation of these funds, and the expansion of these services, how many people have benefited from the expansion of online mental health services? How are these figures collected and calculated? If there is a disparity, how can the Department account for this disparity, and how does the Department intend on addressing this?

Answer:

Under the Taking Action to Tackle Suicide measure, \$21.3 million was provided over four years from 2010-11, for the development of an online mental health and counselling service.

In 2010, a decision was made to delay the implementation of the service due to the potential overlap in applicants for the 2010 Federal Budget's youth teleweb measure. This initial delay was extended by the 2011 Budget which boosted funding for the measure (\$14.4 m over 5 years) and allowed it to be implemented in a single process.

In September 2011, the Department of Health and Ageing established the e-Mental Health Expert Advisory Committee, to provide advice on the design of the mental health portal (now called *mindhealthconnect*) and on the e-mental health strategy. It was necessary to first determine the design of the portal to ensure the specifications for an online mental health and counselling service were compatible

An open and competitive tender process for an online mental health and counselling service was then undertaken in the first half of 2012. As a result, a funding agreement with Access Macquarie (a wholly owned subsidiary of Macquarie University) was executed on 18 September 2012. An online mental health virtual clinic will commence operations in late 2012. It is anticipated that over the first three years of service, 37,500 people will gain access to web-based therapies through the clinic.