

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

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

Question: E12-389

OUTCOME 12: Health Workforce Capacity

Topic: MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGIES

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Senator: Senator Wright

Question:

Specially regarding mental health what information is available in regards to projections, projected costs and consideration that the department is giving over the next three to five years about where challenges will be.

Answer:

The National Mental Health Workforce Strategy and Plan were endorsed by Health Ministers on 29 September 2011 to provide an overarching framework for the ongoing development of the mental health workforce in Australia.

The Strategy and Plan outline the actions required to develop and support a high performing and sustainable mental health workforce that delivers quality, recovery-focussed mental health services.

Challenges identified in the Fourth National Mental Health Plan 2009-2014 include the need to:

- improve workforce and service planning through the finalisation of the National Mental Health Service Planning Framework, and by supporting the framework as it evolves to assist in planning non-health services and support; and
- expand and better distribute the mental health workforce, including the increased use of trained mental health peer support workers and promoting careers, and improving career pathways, for those in the mental health field.

Volumes 1, 2 and 3 of Health Workforce 2025: Doctors, Nurses and Midwives (HW2025) was noted by Health Ministers in 2012. This is the first national workforce modelling to estimate health workforce requirements for doctors, nurses and midwives up to 2025.

Volumes 1 and 2 predict a nursing workforce gap without change to policy settings. This includes mental health nurses. The report notes that increasing nursing training numbers alone will be insufficient and reforms to boost productivity, enhance retention and reduce demand for nurses will be needed.

Volume 3 (Medical Specialties) highlights that the number of medical specialists is increasing, but that the workforce is not evenly distributed. It shows that there are likely to be insufficient general practitioners and other medical specialists in regional and rural Australia. Volume 3 modelling, based on observed historical data trends, also identifies that at a national level, the demand for psychiatrists is likely to be greater than projected workforce supply.

Health Workforce Australia will be undertaking an analysis of select allied and other health professions in 2012-13. The project will deliver workforce profiles of 41 health occupations. Those of particular relevance to mental health are psychologists, occupational therapists and social workers. The findings from this report will inform future policy responses and programs to ensure Australia has a sustainable mental health workforce into the future.