

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2013-14, 20 November 2013

Question: E13-092

OUTCOME: 13 - Acute Care

Topic: Prevention, Early Detection and Service Improvement

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Boyce

Question:

National elective surgery waiting times are currently only measured from the time a patient is referred for surgery – it does not include the time patients spend waiting for their initial appointment with a doctor. This is the ‘waiting list for the waiting list’. What plans are there to measure and report on this factor?

Answer:

In August 2011, the Council of Australian Governments approved recommendations by an Expert Panel established to review the previous elective surgery and emergency access targets under the National Partnership Agreement on Improving Public Hospital Services. Recommendation 14 of the expert panel’s report was:

“That a measure of surgical access time (‘National Elective Surgery Access Time’), that is from GP referral to patients receiving surgical care, be developed to determine the true waiting time and demand for elective surgery and that consideration be given to utilising such a measure of elective surgery in future agreements.”

On 11 November 2011, the Standing Council on Health agreed that work be done to provide an initial scoping paper regarding the development of a measure of surgical access time from general practitioner referral to surgical care, to reflect the actual waiting time for patients and demand for elective surgery performance.

The initial scoping paper and preliminary work on the measure was undertaken by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. An options paper and work plan has progressed through the National Health Information and Performance Principal Committee, and the Hospitals Principal Committee and will be considered by the Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council with a view to further development of the next phase of work.