



Briefing Paper for AFAO Members

17 December 2005

Review of Public Health Funding for HIV/AIDS under the Department of Health & Ageing's National Public Health Program, March – September, 2006

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Issue:

In 2006 the Commonwealth Department of Health & Ageing (DHA) will be commissioning an independent review of those parts of its HIV Program which it funds from within funds drawn from its 'National Public Health Program'.

The origins of this review are somewhat complex and it is important to note that this review is not intended to be an evaluation of the limited range of agencies which are funded under this program.

This Review will provide both some opportunities and some potential threats for the agencies involved - including the Department itself – and also to Australia's HIV response generally.

This Briefing Paper sets out the key features and aspects of the Review from a preliminary analysis of the Terms of Reference and briefing meeting.

Background:

The Review was announced in a letter to executive officers of the directly-affected agencies of 13 December 2005, followed-up with detailed briefings by the Chair of MACASHH, Michael Wooldridge, and head DHA's Targeted Prevention Programs Branch, Carolyn Smith, on December 15th.

Where does this Review Come From:

The Review arises from a requirement set out on the 2003/04 Budget for the Department of Health to establish a priority setting mechanism to ensure all public health programs are routinely assessed through a series of rolling reviews across a five-year period to ensure their appropriateness, continuation and scale are adjusted in light of changing requirements.

This requirement arose chiefly from the Government's 'central agencies, (Prime Minister & Cabinet, Treasury and Dept. of Finance), in effect forcing Health & Ageing to provide a more consistent and transparent framework which would enable the Government's Expenditure Review Committee to make informed decisions on new proposals in light of existing programs.

All public health programs will have to be reviewed in this manner on a rolling basis within five years. The broad framework for these reviews are set out on the 2003-04 Budget paper 'A Focus on Prevention' (URL provided below).

To a significant degree this review is the beginning of a rolling review of the Department's public health program, rather than a specific review of HIV funding – notwithstanding its title. The HIV program is the first program to be reviewed because it is the largest single program – about A\$11m – in the DHA's 'National Public Health Program'.

Scope of the Review

This review is limited in scope – it is not meant to be a review of Australia's overall HIV program. The Review is limited to those activities and agencies funded from the DHA's National Public Health Program allocation.

The activities and agencies included are:

National community organisations – AFAO, NAPWA and Scarlet

Note: AIVL is not included in this review because its funding comes from the COAG Hep C funding mechanism.

The National HIV Research Centres – ACHH, ARCSHS, NCHECR and NCHSR

ASHM

and World AIDS Day/AIDS Awareness week activities.

Components and activities of the HIV response ***NOT included*** in this review are:

Agencies and programs funded under the PHOFA's – i.e., all AIDS Councils, all state/territory PLWHA organisations, sex worker organisations or IDU organisations – and all other state/territory funding allocated to HIV

CSSS funding (to AFAO and NAPWA)

Medicare Benefits Schedule

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

Australian Health Care Agreements (which provide funds for in-hospital treatment services)

The review is not intended to be an evaluation of the individual agencies covered by the Review – but is intended to identify the worth (through cost-benefit analyses) of the Government's collective investment in this part of the response. It also includes an evaluation of the Department's effectiveness and efficiency in administering these programs.

The Aim and Objectives of the review are attached as appendix 1.

Time-frame for the Review

The Review is comprised of two main components:

1. Independent consultant commissioned to analyse the designated components of the program, undertake consultations and cost-benefit analyses, prepare findings and report on the NPHP-associated HIV Funding
2. Building the findings of the Review into the Department's input to the 2007/08 Federal Budget to meet the 'Focus on Prevention' requirements, (which could include a 'New Policy Proposal' to increase the level of funding for the program

The expected timeframe for the Review is:

February - advertise for Consultant(s) to undertake the review

March - consultant commences

April through August

- consultations with stakeholders;
- assessment of cost-benefit
- preparation of report

September/October – development of DHA's budget proposals for the 2007/08 budget.

Structure of the Review

The first component of the Review will be chiefly undertaken by independent consultant(s), guided by a Reference group.

The Reference group members are:

- Ben Harris (former HIV policy adviser to then Minister Wooldridge and subsequently Vice-president of AFAO)
- Andrew Gibbs, Managing Director, Gibbs Government & Corporate Relations (Sydney-based)
- Kim Stewart, Chair, IGCAHRD
- Rob Moodie, CEO of Vic Health,
- Carolyn Smith, Assistant Sec., DHA Targeted Prevention Programs Branch

After the Review report is lodged the review then becomes an internal matter within the Department in relation to preparation of its 2007/08 Budget proposals. The MACASHH will be able to provide advice to the Minister and the Department.

The Department's approach

At the briefing meetings the Department expressed its intention to be as open and consultative as it can throughout the process. While other members in the HIV Partnership cannot (technically) be part of the decision-making processes on such matters as the selection of the consultants the Department indicated it would be very keen to receive advice and opinions on such decisions throughout the consultation process.

The Department also noted that the Review provided an opportunity for the agencies involved to articulate the range of problems we have with the current contractual framework and its administration by the Department.

Opportunities & Threats

On initial analysis the Review presents both opportunities and the potential for threats to the HIV/AIDS program and the agencies directly-affected by the Review.

Assessing whether “the Australian Government’s response to HIV is still appropriate and effective” (Objective 2), yet looking at only a limited range of components of that response, has the possibility of arriving at an inappropriate and/or incorrect finding.

How the Department handles the review findings – either adverse or otherwise - in its Budget Proposals is not very clear at this stage and could possibly be subject to distortion arising from other internal DHA priorities.

On the other hand, the Review does offer an opportunity for an independent review and forum for raising some of the emerging issues in the response, particular as to whether the response is sufficiently resourced in light of continuing increases in HIV infections and additional demands put on the program from STIs and Hep C. (Unfortunately this Review does not appear to allow much scope for analysing the range of issues in treatment, care and support identified in the 5th National Strategy).

The timing of the Review, leading into the May 2007/08 Budget – likely to be an ‘election budget’ – is also potentially helpful timing.

The AFAO Board and Secretariat will be undertaking a wider analysis of the opportunities and potential threats early in 2006.

Next Steps:

The AFAO Secretariat will be providing Members with a range of relevant documents as they come to hand; the Department expect to provide some key documents early in the New Year.

We also expect to produce series of briefing papers and updates on the Review as it unfolds.

For the keen readers, the overall framework for the Review is included in 2003-04 Budget paper ‘A Focus on Prevention’, albeit rather vaguely. The URL for the document is: <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/wcms/publishing.nsf/content/health-budget2003-fact-hfact3.htm>

Don Baxter
Executive Director
17 December 2005

Appendix 1: Aim & Objectives of the ‘Review of Public Health Funding for HIV/AIDS’

[AFAO s:/Dept of Health & Ageing/review of NPHP HIV Funding/AFAO briefing paper (17 Dec 05)]

‘Review of HIV/AIDS and Associated Activities under the National Public Health Program’

Terms of Reference

(Note: Aim and Objectives only included here)

Aim:

“To review the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the Australian Government’s approach to HIV/AIDS and associated activities funded through the Bill 1 Component of the national Public Health Program”

Objectives:

- To review the appropriateness of Bill 1 funding for HIV/AIDS sector organisations and the National Research centres in HIV, hepatitis and Sexually Transmitted Infections, and funding for World AIDS day and AIDS Awareness Week activities.
- To assess if the Australian Government’s response to HIV is still appropriate and effective
- To assess the processes through which funding is administered and provide a basis for improvement in these processes
- To undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the outcomes of this funding including the total cost to society and Government and any savings arising from these activities
- To supply necessary information for input into the Rolling Program of Reviews under the Priority Setting Mechanism (PSM) for prevention