



SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2024-2025

Ms Nicole Lawder MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Miss Laura Nuttall MLA

ANSWER TO QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE (QTON 64)

Estimates Hearing

Thursday, 25 July 2024

Asked by: **Ms Leanne Castley MLA**

Addressed to: Minister for Health

Reference: Uncorrected Hansard Transcript pages 38 –39

In relation to: VMO and agency staff

Hearing Date: 25 July 2024

MS CASTLEY: I guess that is the reason I am very keen for your explanation of your frontline workers, because 400 frontline workers, where did they all go? 800, or whatever—so that would be much appreciated, thank you. In 2022, 2023 annual report, it showed 47 million overspent on supplies and services, which was primarily due to higher utilisation of VMOs and agency nursing staff.

Then 2023-24, estimated outcome for supplies and services is an overspend of almost 170 million, it was 168.6. Can you explain how much of this overspend was spent on agency staff and VMOs as well as the number of staff who were agency staff and VMOs, like can we get an understanding of that overspend?

Ms Stephen-Smith: We will take the detail of that question on notice, but I think what I can say is this is something that has been seen across the health system across the country is there is escalation in the need for additional agency and locum staffing because of the demand that we are seeing in the system, and demand that cannot be put off, demand for emergency department, or intensive care unit, or paediatric inpatients, for example.

Midwifery obviously has been a challenge across the country, and we have made a decision to have longer term agency midwives to provide stability in some of those spaces so that we have that breathing space to recruit and to provide support to the less experienced midwives that are coming in. But we have also seen cost escalation as well, so we have seen escalation in—like every other part of the economy, we have seen cost escalation that reflects the inflation that we are seeing in the broader economy as well.

Ms Stephen-Smith: The answer to the Member's question is as follows: –

As outlined on page 56, Budget Statement C of the 2024-25 Budget, the \$168.5 million increase in "Supplies and Services" from the 2023-24 original budget to the 2023-24 estimated outcome principally relates to: the transition of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce to Canberra Health Services; 2023-24 Supplementary Budget initiatives; and a Treasurer's Advance to support the uplift in services.

“Consultants, Contractors and Professional Services” are included in “Supplies and Services”. The 2023-24 estimated outcome for “Consultants, Contractors and Professional Services” is \$95.772 million, compared to “Original Budget” of \$55.725 million. This increase reflects the North Canberra Hospital transition, Supplementary Budget initiatives and responses to increased demands.

As of 30 June 2024, there were 169 registered nurses and midwives in long term agency contracts at Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital.

As of 30 June 2024, there are 263 VMO contracts at CHS. These are cross territory contracts (can work in both TCH and NCH). As of 30 June 2024 there are also 12 NCH VMO contracts.

Approved for circulation to the Select Committee on Estimates 2024-2025

Signature: 

Date: 8/8/24

By Minister for Health Rachel Stephen-Smith