

Questions taken on notice at the Hearing

Q 1. There has been a fairly substantial decline in the number of asthma deaths; do you have any explanation for that? The percentage of asthma deaths is increasing in metropolitan areas. What are the issues for metropolitan areas? (Question of Hon Catherine Cusack MLC, Transcript p.13)

Response: We cannot be sure why asthma-related deaths are declining but we do know that the decline reflects an overall reduction in the prevalence of reported asthma, as well as emergency department visits and hospitalisations for asthma in children and young people between 1993 & 2002.

A wide range of factors can trigger airway constriction in people with asthma, including irritants such as environmental tobacco smoke and outdoor air pollutants, and allergens such as house dust mites and pollen. The most common triggers for acute severe episodes of asthma in children are viral infections. As there was no change in the prevalence of viral infections during the period we looked at, nor any of the other triggers mentioned, it is unlikely that this would be an explanation for the decline in asthma-related deaths.

The results of a 2004 study¹ suggest that the improvements that were made over our study period in asthma treatment, management and education are yet to have any impact.

The asthma-related death rate is decreasing in all geographic areas. The decrease is greater outside major cities (56 per cent in major cities compared with 85 per cent in other areas). The increased percentage of deaths in major cities arises from this greater decline in non-metropolitan areas, rather than from any increased rate in the cities.

Q 2. The Annual Report shows that six consultants were engaged during 2007-08 to provide specialist management advice at a cost of \$19,833. In what kind of work were the consultants engaged? How will the advice be utilised by the Commission? (Question of Mr Robert Coombs MP, Transcript p.16);

Response: The Commission engaged the following consultants in 2007-08:

¹ Belessis, Y., Dixon, S., Thomsen, A., Duffy, B., Rawlinson, W., Henry, R. L., & Morton, J. (2004). Risk factors for an intensive care unit admission in children with asthma. *Paediatric Pulmonology* 2004; 37: 201–209

Consultant	Amount	Nature of the consultancy	Utilising the advice
Paradigm Play	\$2,000.00	Facilitating an experts forum on climate change	Used to develop environmental sustainability project
Paradigm Play	\$937.00	Expenses associated with the climate change forum	Used to develop environmental sustainability project
University of Sheffield	\$476.16	Provision of expert commentary on research paper.	Improved our paper on Children and Poverty
TeKnowledge IT Consulting	\$3,500.00	Services associated with the functional requirements and design of eCheck.	Used to guide development of eCheck.
Sage Consulting	\$5,120.00	Specialist IT advice on software integration.	Used to improve IT links with Police and CrimTrac for the Working With Children Check.
Carolyn Quinn Consultancy	\$7,800.00	Advice on operating Relevant Employment Proceedings for the Working With Children Check	Used to guide improvements in the operations of the Working With Children Check.

Q 3. What can [the Committee] do better to fulfil our statutory role? Do you have any suggestions for us? (Question of Mr Robert Coombs MP, Transcript p.26).

Response: As I said at the hearing on 15 April, I believe that the Committee's approach could already be described as "best practice", so I do not have many suggestions for the Committee.

I have appreciated the fact that, in recent years, the Committee has included both newer members with fresh and interesting approaches, and some longer- established members who have had time to absorb and reflect on a great deal of information about children's lives. I hope that this mix of experience will continue.

Perhaps you could continue to explore ways to hear directly from children and young people. This may mean developing ways of operating which are different from the traditional methods used by Parliamentary Committees, as they were developed to take evidence from adults in quite formal ways.