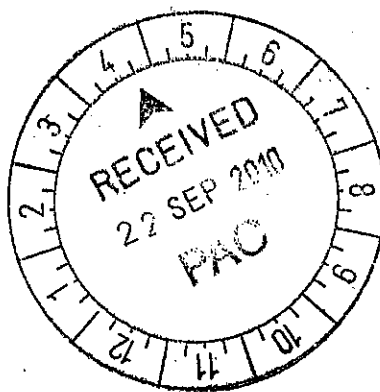


September 21, 2010

Mr Paul Gibson  
Chair Public Accounts Committee  
Parliament of New South Wales  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000



Dear Mr Gibson,

**Examination of Auditor-General's Performance Audit Report: Tackling Cancer with Radiotherapy**

I wish to raise a number of issues for consideration by the Public Accounts Committee in its deliberations on the above inquiry.

Cancer Council NSW has a longstanding interest in ensuring adequate and affordable access to radiotherapy services for people with cancer. Currently in NSW, only around 36% of cancer patients receive radiotherapy despite an internationally accepted benchmark that at least 50% of cancer patients will require radiotherapy at least once during their illness. Our concerns about problems faced by cancer patients in accessing radiotherapy have been well-documented in our public reports – *Improving Radiotherapy: where to from here?* and *Roadblocks to Radiotherapy – stories behind the statistics* – both published in 2009.

Cancer Council has reviewed the report from NSW Health outlining progress against each of the Audit Office recommendations. At the time of tabling of the Audit Office report in June 2009, Cancer Council was pleased that NSW Health accepted all of the recommendations of the report, including the timeframes.

While the report from NSW Health indicates progress on some recommendations and others as 'complete', Cancer Council suggests there is a need for closer consideration of the progress on some recommendations, particularly:

- Establishing new timeframes for progress and completion on those recommendations where implementation has been delayed (eg recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 14)
- Establishing an accountability process to monitor those recommendations where delayed timelines extend into 2011 (eg recommendations 3, 7)
- Establishing the extent of progress on those recommendations marked as 'complete' when only part of the recommendation appears to have been addressed in the comment (eg recommendations 2, 5, 6, 8, 16)
- How NSW Health plans to monitor the impact of new measures which have been delegated to AHS (eg recommendations 1, 4, 15)
- Contingency planning or opportunities to progress recommendations where dependencies are indicated (eg recommendations 1, 2, 4, 9, 14, 15)

For some of the more complex recommendations, more detail may be required in order to accurately assess progress. Specific examples include:

- Recommendation 5 – requires that by June 2010, NSW Health should have identified those people who are not within a reasonable distance or do not have reasonable access to radiotherapy facilities and analyses where additional services and support efforts may be required. The response from NSW Health refers to future centres to be established but which do not yet provide treatment. It is not clear what interim measures are provided to improve access until these new treatment centres are established. Once all the new centres are established, it is not clear what additional services and support efforts have been identified for those people who will still not have reasonable access to radiotherapy.
- Recommendation 6 – requires that NSW Health conducts detailed analysis of options for radiotherapy services and sites in geographic areas of need. The NSW Strategic Plan for radiotherapy services identifies that Western Sydney and the Hunter remain areas of need after all Commonwealth funded services are established. However the Plan does not include any options for addressing this unmet need
- Recommendation 8 – requires that NSW Health monitors and benchmarks operational performance measures for radiotherapy treatment centres. NSW Health reports that it has issued a list of performance indicators to Area Health Services, with no information on the proposed system for monitoring performance
- Recommendation 16 – requires that NSW analyses the affordability of its strategic plan, particularly in relation to Commonwealth payments and the implications of private sector involvement. However, the Plan does not canvass any policy options or priorities to drive funding and allocation to address the identified unmet needs.

Cancer Council would be happy to provide any further assistance to the Public Accounts Committee in its examination of progress on the report of the Audit Office into radiotherapy services in NSW. Please contact Anita Tang, Manager Policy and Advocacy on 9334 1936 if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely



**Ted Starc**  
Acting Chief Executive Officer