

**Portfolio Committee No.2 – Budget Estimates 2020  
Responses to Questions on Notice  
Health and Medical Research – 12 March 2020**

---

Transcript page 7

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What percentage of those one half million people do you think will be hospitalised and then would require intensive care? If we are operating on say 5 per cent of the one and a half million people that could get infected in New South Wales that is still, I think, roughly 75,000 people who will need intensive care beds. It is still 250,000 additional people who will need to be hospitalised potentially over this winter. Is that correct? That is based on 20 per cent.

**Dr CHANT:** Yes, but it is not quite like the 20 per cent. So 20 per cent of the population is affected; then you have a clinical attack rate, which is that portion of the population—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** What percentage is that?

**Dr CHANT:** I am happy to provide that data—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** Dr Chant, as NSW Chief Medical Officer you would be working on a statistic—

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Ms Faehrmann, we are dealing with the NSW Chief Medical Officer and she is actually trying to lead all of New South Wales. There is no desire to give you anything other than the facts. Please keep the tone respectful—

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** But I am sure you are working on statistics—

**Dr CHANT:** Ms Faehrmann, what we are working on—and I can get you the slides in terms of the numbers—

**ANSWER:**

As described on the NSW Health website, current evidence suggests that most people who contract COVID-19 will have mild symptoms, approximately 15 per cent of people will have severe infections and 5 per cent will require care in a hospital intensive care unit (ICU). NSW Health is continuously monitoring the COVID-19 situation and will update this information if estimates change based on local and international evidence of hospitalisation and critical care rates.

**Portfolio Committee No.2 – Budget Estimates 2020**  
**Responses to Questions on Notice**  
**Health and Medical Research – 12 March 2020**

---

Transcript page 16

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** So if you are coming back, if you have got no symptoms, Dr Chant—I am just checking what the latest advice here is—what happens then?

**Ms CATE FAEHRMANN:** And also within what amount of time?

**Dr CHANT:** So 14 days since you left the country or arrived here because we are also concerned about transmission in airports and other things. Basically the risk exists universally now so I would say 14 days from when you step foot in Sydney, your time starts. If you do not have any symptom onset in the 14 days then you can know that you have not got COVID-19, but if you develop any symptoms in that time we ask you to come forward for testing. We are asking all overseas travellers to be prudent and not attend public gatherings—not attend even family gatherings. I went through those social distancing recommendations with Mr Secord and I am happy to make those available too.

**ANSWER:**

Up to date information on NSW Health's response to novel coronavirus COVID-19, including on social distancing, is provided on the NSW Health website.

Transcript page 18

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Minister, I am not asking about the humane way that the animals have been treated, I am asking if there any current research protocols where, if the animals escaped, there could be a human health risk.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** You know what? I think if they follow the guidelines—and I cannot comment about all other animals—then I would think that that is not the case. Having in mind that Dr Chant is talking about only coronavirus this morning, I think it is time we let Dr Chant answer that question to the best of her medical ability.

**Dr CHANT:** To the best of my knowledge, whilst I have not seen the specific briefings around this case, researchers would take that very seriously. I understand and, again, I would have to check, that research involving animals to look at viruses and whether they can be infected is only conducted—for big animals—in AAHL, in Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, Doctor, where?

**Dr CHANT:** It is called AAHL.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** How do you spell that?

**The CHAIR:** Is that another acronym?

**Dr CHANT:** It is another acronym—Australian Animal Health Laboratory [AAHL].

**The CHAIR:** That is okay, I thought it might have been a location.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I thought it was a town, so I am glad you asked.

**Dr CHANT:** It is a designated high security that works with—if we are talking about pathogens and animals. On a COVID line it has actually been raised, "Can domestic animals get COVID-19?"

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** I have seen the media on that one, yes. You mentioned that that is for large animals. Are you aware of any smaller animals—guinea pigs, mice, et cetera?

**Dr CHANT:** I think our research community would be absolutely concerned about anything where there was potential risk in this way. I am happy to clarify that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you.

**Dr CHANT:** Sorry, I am just googling and finding it.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** How about we take that on notice and we will get an answer for you, Emma?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes, pop it on notice.

**ANSWER:**

There have been no reports of pets or other animals becoming sick with COVID-19 in Australia. There is also no evidence that companion animals including pets can spread COVID-19. However, since animals can spread other diseases to people, it's always a good idea to wash your hands after being around animals.

Reviewing and approving research protocols for animal research comes under the auspices of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI), through the Animal Research Act 1985.

Transcript page 18

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** "NSW Health research funding is provided for a number of projects which reduce or replace the number of animals in research." Again, this is something that you may need to take on notice, but I would appreciate if you could advise the amount of funding that New South Wales has been provided for projects developing alternatives for animal testing in the past five years.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I will take it on notice. But I will also say again that it depends on the amount of time that taxpayers' staff would have to pay—

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** With all due respect, Minister, this area of animal research—and it was something that obviously the media found very frustrating when these baboons escaped—is that there is so much secrecy in this area and that is why there are so many questions. People just have no idea the number of animals being used, the species of animals being used, the research being conducted. So that is why I am bringing in a lot of the questions that the community has sent us today. Again, there seem to be no answers.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I appreciate that but as health Minister I have to prioritise the use of taxpayers' dollars in answering those sorts of detailed questions. Because where would it take us? It might take us absolutely nowhere. Ms Hurst, I am not saying I will not. I am just going to ask the questions and if the public servants can give me an idea of the costs and weigh that up against the outcome and the likely value of that, I will certainly ask those questions for you.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Australia as a country experiments on more animals than almost anywhere else in the world. I think we are in fourth place on the number of animals that are used in animal experimentation worldwide. Do you think we need to be doing more progress and research on alternative methods for testing, such as cell-based research and computer modelling?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** You are asking me for my opinion. As you would appreciate, under the standing orders of both the upper House and the lower House, that is not really an appropriate thing. And it is there for a reason, because I am not a researcher and I am not the scientist who is doing these things. So I think I would have to take advice on that question. If I get an advice from an appropriate authority, then I am happy to share that with you.

**ANSWER:**

I am advised NSW Health does not collect this information centrally.

Transcript page 20-21

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** That is perfectly acceptable. Minister, there have been some reports of school cleaners in New South Wales being contracted to go over and clean the *Diamond Princess* or the quarantine station. It was unclear about that. Have you got any more information about—

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I have not, but I heard that there was some circular that went out. It was all second-hand information. It was not official lines and asking for cleaners to go to do that job—I would have thought that the *Diamond Princess* would have required high-level, trained staff. But I cannot answer that; I just do not know. I can find out for you, if it is really necessary.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I would agree with you. Yes, I think it is just useful in terms of—it was publicly reported that there were 12 that went.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** That went or that were asked?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** No, there were definitely more than 12 that were asked, but it was publicly reported that there were 12 who went on the—

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Was it a formal request from someone in government or was it the Princess people asking?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** My understanding was that the same company, Broadspectrum, who have the cleaning contract for a number of government buildings, including for schools and also incidentally MPs' offices in some parts of Sydney—it is the advice I was given that they were contacting their employees to fly them to Japan. The concerning part for me was that a lot of our advice is around self-isolation of people once they are returning. These are people who, if they do go, are going to have direct contact with the virus. I was interested to know—

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Well, query, yes. But—likely.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** —what the arrangements would be in place?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I do not know, Ms Houssos, but actually now you have raised it I think that is a sensible question. In the spirit of bipartisanship but also just of common sense I will get that followed up. If they came back having been in that environment—yes. We would want to know what were the arrangements.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** The public advice that was provided was that they would fly over, clean whatever it was they were cleaning and then fly back, and then do their self-isolation on site—

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** When they got back here?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** —which would obviously be putting the people who were travelling with them in immediate danger. That was where my questions were arising from. What were the arrangements that were in place?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Did Minister Mitchell have any idea?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** No. She said that it would be covered by the Federal guidelines.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** We will double-check anyway.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** I appreciate your comments around a precautionary principle and I would totally agree with that in this situation. I think independent checking before they re-enter schools—if the advice at the moment is people who are going into healthcare centres who are returning from overseas should not be returning, then certainly that should be the case for our schools as well.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Let us find out.

**ANSWER:**

All travelers returning or arriving from overseas must be isolated for 14 days before resuming their normal activities.

**Portfolio Committee No.2 – Budget Estimates 2020**  
**Responses to Questions on Notice**  
**Health and Medical Research – 12 March 2020**

---

Transcript page 27-28

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** The primate breeding colony in Wallacia was once funded Federally by the National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], but that ground has expired. Do you know how the facility is being funded now?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** No. I can find out for you, but I thought it was following the guidelines of the NHMRC. Whether or not it is funded by them I am not sure.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** The funding was ceased in December 2018 is my understanding.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I will take it on notice and find out for you.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you know if the New South Wales Government is also providing any funding at all?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I just said I do not know. I would assume they are but I do not know.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** If you could take that on notice, please.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Sure.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Do you know how much funding the New South Wales Government contributes towards all medical research on animals each year? Again, I am happy for you to take that on notice.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I think that would be a very difficult issue to break down. I know there is about a quarter of a billion that goes annually into research, but how much of that—animals are very much integral to some of the research. I know when I visited various medical research institutes I have seen tiny little fish—they do not seem to be harmed, but their genomic structure had been changed that allows further research to identify the outcomes for human beings. But I do not know about that.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Are you saying that you are not sure if the data is even collected to know how much is being funded towards animal research specifically?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I doubt it is but I will find out for you. I mean, I will ask the question. I will ask the question.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Thank you.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** So your specific question is? Just give it to me. I just do not want to have researchers spending too much time when they should be researching. So just give me the actual question you are asking.

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** The question is how much funding does the New South Wales Government contribute towards medical research on animals each year?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Medical research on animals?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Or in the past five years.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Or medical research for humans involving animals?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** No, just medical research on animals.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I am not sure what that actually means.

**Portfolio Committee No.2 – Budget Estimates 2020**  
**Responses to Questions on Notice**  
**Health and Medical Research – 12 March 2020**

---

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Well, for the benefit of humans would be another subcategory because obviously there is a lot of medical research done on animals for other animals, veterinary research.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Any research involving animals, is that what you want, the cost?

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** Yes. The amount of funding the New South Wales Government contributes towards medical research—

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Ms Hurst, I will take that on notice and I will ask the question. But can I say in the way that other questions that come in, they have to be judged on how much it would cost the Government. Whether it is practical to get the answer I have to find that out too, so I am not guaranteeing I will give you a precise answer. But I will ask the question and see how much time and effort has to go into that to deal with it.

**ANSWER:**

I am advised the Australian National Baboon Colony facility at Wallacia received a one-off grant from the National Health and Medical Research Council in the 2018-19 financial year. The facility is also funded by Sydney Local Health District.

NSW Health does not centrally collect information on NSW Government contributions towards all medical research on animals.



Transcript page 30

**The Hon. EMMA HURST:** In December New York passed a landmark bill that guaranteed hospital patients a healthy, plant-based option at every meal. Currently a lot of hospitals in New South Wales do not offer any plant-based meal. That came after pressure from the American Medical Association, which in 2017 passed a Healthy Food Options in Hospitals resolution that calls on the US hospitals to provide the health of patients, staff and visitors by providing plant-based meals. Would you consider doing something like this?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** I think my understanding was that patients who have particular needs for dietary matters could actually make that request. So I am surprised that you are indicating there is not any. But I will ask the question.

**ANSWER:**

HealthShare provides meals that are designed in accordance with statewide nutrition guidelines and Local Health District service requirements. I am advised meat-free options are available at every meal.

Transcript page 30

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** You talked about the most urgent, so there is priority 1 [P1], that is the most urgent, and then there is priority 2 [P2]. What is the average wait time? Is it P1, P2, P3, P4?

**Ms PEARCE:** Yes, there are a range of priority codes.

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** They prioritise it at the headquarters and work out on a matrix how long it should take to get there.

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Can you give me an average for each—P1, P2, P3, P4?

**Mr BRAD HAZZARD:** Can I take it on notice and get it to you?

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Yes. Can you tell me how they compare to other States?

Transcript page 31

**The Hon. COURTNEY HOUSSOS:** Can I just ask you, because obviously we do want it just to be used for the most urgent cases, is it true that 11 per cent of those most urgent cases wait over an hour?

**Ms PEARCE:** I would have to take that on notice.

**ANSWER:**

The Bureau of Health Information (BHI) routinely reports publicly on ambulance response times, and NSW Ambulance performance data is publicly available on the BHI website.

NSW Ambulance emergency response times are affected by specific local factors such as traffic conditions, distance, travel time and topography. Due to these random variables and non-modifiable factors, NSW Ambulance response times are not directly comparable to other states.

In the most recent quarter reported for October to December 2019, less than one per cent of the Priority 1 cases were waiting over an hour.