

**Public Accounts and Estimates Committee**  
**Inquiry into the 2021-22 Budget Estimates**  
**18 June 2021**

**PORTFOLIO: HEALTH**

**Witnesses:**

- Hon. Martin Foley
- Professor Euan Wallace
- Professor Allen Cheng
- Ms Jodie Geissler
- Mr Jereon Weimar
- Mr Chris Hotham
- Mr Greg Stenton
- Ms Nicole Brady

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**QUESTION 1**

**1. Telstra Health was awarded a contract by the Department of Health to undertake a review of the contact tracing centre - when will the review be undertaken?**

**Mr RIORDAN:** On 3 May 2021 a \$150,000 contract was awarded to Telstra Health for a review of the contact-tracing centre. Have they identified any issues with that yet?

**Prof. WALLACE:** Sorry, the contract for Telstra -

**Mr RIORDAN:** For Telstra Health, for a review of the contact-tracing centre. What issues so far have been identified in that review?

**Prof. WALLACE:** I have not seen the review. I am not sure that the review has reported. Mr Weimar?

**Mr RIORDAN:** You do not know about the review, or -

**Prof. WALLACE:** Well, Telstra undertook a review last year. Are you referring to 2020?

**Mr RIORDAN:** No, 2021. You are saying you do not know about that review?

**Prof. WALLACE:** It has not reported.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Sorry?

**Prof. WALLACE:** It has not reported yet.

**Mr RIORDAN:** So there have been no issues identified yet?

**Prof. WALLACE:** Well, it has not reported, so we –

**Mr RIORDAN:** When are you expecting it? You do not get briefs? I mean, you know, it has been in the news a little bit lately, contact tracing. We are not sort of keeping a close watch on it?

**Prof. WALLACE:** We are keeping a very close watch on it, Mr Riordan.

**Mr RIORDAN:** When would you expect the review?

**Mr WEIMAR:** I do not know. We have no date. I am happy to take it on notice.

*BE Hearing Transcript, p. 7*

**Name of Committee member asking questions: Mr R Riordan**

## **RESPONSE**

### **Answer:**

In May 2021 Telstra Health were awarded a contract to implement several of the recommendations from a review of contact centre operations. This work forms part of a continuous improvement approach with the contact centre and is expected to be completed by the end of August 2021.

**Source:** Director, Contact Centre Performance and Programs

## QUESTION 2

### 2. Budget and increased capacity for maternity and perinatal services:

- In the budget line item 'Meeting demand for hospital services' for \$3.69 billion (BP3, p.59), how much of that specifically will be allocated to maternity and perinatal services, and how much of this allocation is for private providers?
- In the maternity and child health and early parenting services budget line item, under the arrangement for the public sector to purchase capacity from the private sector to deal with increased demand, which private hospitals or services are being used for maternity and perinatal services?

**Mr HIBBINS:** The question is on the budget line item 'Meeting demand for hospital services' which is on budget paper 3, page 59, and I think it is outlined as \$3.69 billion. How much of that specifically will be allocated to maternity and perinatal services?

.....

**Mr HIBBINS:** ...You have said previously there is an arrangement for the public sector to purchase capacity from the private sector in order to deal with increased demand. Can you indicate just how much funding is actually allocated towards that out of the maternal and child health and early parenting services budget line item?

**Mr FOLEY:** We have seen a lot of change over the course of this global pandemic, and one of the earliest reforms that the commonwealth led was essentially an unprecedented level of cooperation and almost alignment of the public and private health systems, driven in the initial parts of the pandemic on the basis that there was a real concern based on global evidence that our health system might well be overrun with COVID cases, and whilst our public health and private health systems have had huge challenges, they have not seen those being overrun examples, as we did sadly see in some other countries. As part of that arrangement, through a national partnership agreement, a wide ranging set of arrangements is in place that brings together both the public and private systems to meet all sorts of predicted and possible demands, and we have seen that play out in a range of areas. In regard to the specifics of it applying to maternal and child health and particularly perinatal services, I might have to again seek the assistance of Ms Geissler, who is perhaps more over the detail. With your indulgence, Chair, I might ask Deputy Secretary Geissler to address those specifics.

**Ms GEISSLER:** I am happy to provide a few more comments. Just going back to your first question around allocations, I just wanted to make the point that there has been an average increase of 5.1 per cent per annum in fund activity over the previous five-year period 2019-20 for our public maternity care. In terms of allocations for private, that is not the way it works. They are individual agreements that are reached on the ground between health services given particular demands, so we would not know about those allocations until the end of a financial year wrap-up.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Okay. So would that then be able to be accounted for in the 2020-21 financial year?

**Ms GEISSLER:** Potentially, but I would have to get back to you on that.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Take that on notice. And if possible too, in taking that on notice, could you also outline which private hospitals or services are being used?

Ms GEISSLER: I can take that on notice.

*BE Hearing Transcript, p. 24 - 25*

Name of Committee member asking questions: Mr S Hibbins

**RESPONSE**

**Answer:**

**Q1: In the budget line item 'Meeting demand for hospital services' for \$3.69 billion (BP3, p.59), how much of that specifically will be allocated to maternity and perinatal services, and how much of this allocation is for private providers?**

Funding for maternity and perinatal activity is incorporated as part of the hospital's overall budget allocation. Budgets for 2020-21 have not been finalised and funding for activity is only able to be provided retrospectively, upon completion of the financial year. In regards to the allocation of funding to private providers, again the volume of activity provided by private providers is reported retrospectively so we will not be able to provide advice about what funding may be allocated to maternity and perinatal services under the individual hospital arrangements until the end of the financial year.

**Q2: In the maternity and child health and early parenting services budget line item, under the arrangement for the public sector to purchase capacity from the private sector to deal with increased demand, which private hospitals or services are being used for maternity and perinatal services?**

With current financial year data yet to be finalised, it is not possible to provide advice on which private hospitals or services have provided maternity or newborn care for public patients for 2020-21. However, Victorian Admitted Episodes Dataset indicates the following private hospitals provided contracted services for birthing (delivery episode of care) and/or newborn care in 2019-20:

- St John of God Hospital Berwick
- St John of God Hospital Ballarat

**Source:** Victorian Admitted Episodes Dataset.

### QUESTION 3

#### 3. Are the five call centre contracts the department has published on the department's website?

**Mr NEWBURY:** What about the call centres – how many of them?

**Prof. WALLACE:** Well, I think we have had four providers over the course of the pandemic.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Do you have the total value with you?

**Prof. WALLACE:** I do not because again we are still in the current financial year. It will not be reconciled until the end of the year.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Okay. You said there were four over the year. How many are currently in place, so existing?

**Prof. WALLACE:** In the most recent outbreak, because we have surged during this most recent outbreak in our call centres – I might ask Mr Weimar. I think we had certainly two -

**Mr NEWBURY:** Two?

**Prof. WALLACE:** Two or three.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Yes. If it helps, the department's own contracts site suggests there are two. I presume that is up to date.

**Prof. WALLACE:** Yes. We have contracts in place that are delivering services today and then we have contracts in place that allows us to surge immediately, so again just to go back to this most recent cluster of outbreaks where we have had now 100 cases, something like 10,000 primary close contacts – they all get interviewed. We had almost 90 days of no cases, no primary close contacts. To be able to surge from that base of zero to a situation where we are interviewing literally thousands of people a day we surged very quickly. So underpinning that is a suite of contracts that have people involved in our call centres and then contracts allow us to surge immediately.

**Mr NEWBURY:** So there are live contracts effectively which are ongoing and then there are other contracts in case you need surge capacity.

**Prof. WALLACE:** Indeed.

**Mr NEWBURY:** In short. The two that I referred to that are on the government's website – they end in a few days time. Those are the live contracts, if I can use that term, in terms of people being available...

.....

**Mr NEWBURY:** When something is coming to the end of its life, you have a discussion about what happens next. I think that is what happens with every contract if you are considering moving ahead.

**Prof. WALLACE:** Our contracts would be either extended or adjusted in plenty of time to ensure that there is no shortfall in the provision of services.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Okay. As I understand it, I mentioned there were two currently in place. One of them I believe is, and I am just referring to the government website -

**Prof. WALLACE:** We have five total providers -

**Mr NEWBURY:** Five, sorry.

**Prof. WALLACE:** for the call centre.

**Mr NEWBURY:** So there are the two that are – if I can call them the big ones. Then there are three that are on standby in case you need surge capacity. Is that right? You mentioned two and two. Is that two and three?

**Prof. WALLACE:** Again, our call centre – our COVID line if you like – capabilities are quite complicated, as you can imagine, as you would expect. So we have call centre capabilities that have outbound calls that are there to support the contact-tracing element. Remember the cases are being interviewed by our public health teams either in our nine local public health units or in the case and contact teams in 50 Lonsdale, so in the department. Then thousands of primary close contacts are being interviewed either by those teams or by some of our surge call centre teams. There are inbound calls coming in with requests for assistance, for payments, for testing et cetera, et cetera, and then of course have a call centre function to manage our vaccine program. I think we were here for the mental health PAEC hearing when that day or the immediate previous day the vaccine call centre took something like a million calls, 75,000 in the space of 15 minutes. So we have a suite of call centres, all integrated through our digital systems, all searching, waxing or waning depending on the need at the moment but all ready to serve whichever bit of the pipeline it is, including the vaccination program.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Referring back to the website, there are two here and the other three I presume are available through the website under a different search function. I may not have used the right search term. I presume they are there. Is that right?

**Prof. WALLACE:** I would have to take that on notice, whether they are on the website or not.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Okay, if you do not mind taking that on notice. But the two biggies that I can see are Helloworld at \$13.25 million, who is providing that facility up until 30 June, and Stellar Asia Pacific, who is providing a \$12.84 million contract over that period...

***BE Hearing Transcript, p. 30 - 31***

**Name of Committee member asking questions: Mr J Newbury**

## **RESPONSE**

### **Answer:**

The Department of Health contracts several providers to supply services that support contact tracing, directions information and vaccinations bookings. All five contracts can be found on the Buying for Victoria website ([tenders.vic.gov.au](https://tenders.vic.gov.au)).

The contract numbers are outlined below:

<b>Supplier</b>	<b>CRS Reference Number</b>
Acquire BPO	C9819
Healthdirect CCMS	C9529
Helloworld Travel Limited	C9460
Probe (Stellar)	C9448
Serco Citizen Services	C9820

**Source:** Executive Director, Business Improvement