

HOSPITALS, FREE NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

1434. Hon. P.G. Pental to the Minister for Health

I refer to the Government's policy of providing free needles to drug users calling at all public hospitals and ask -

- (a) what number of needles have been distributed to all addicts/users in each full year since the commencement of the program;
- (b) given the cost of \$3.64 per pack, what Government funds have been used paying for the program in each full year since the commencement of the program; and
- (c) given that all people attending a Government hospital are required to have full details recorded, why are no personal details required of drug users?

Mr KUCERA replied:

It is assumed that the policy that is referred to is the Department of Health Operational Circular OP 1522/01 (Provision of sterile needles and syringes from rural and regional hospitals to people who inject drugs, 20 December 2001). This operational circular requires that all regional and rural hospitals that provide emergency after-hours services are required to provide after-hours access to needles and syringes for people who inject drugs.

- (a) Historically, hospitals have accounted for around 5% of the total number of needles and syringes distributed in Western Australia per year with approximately 137 280 needles and syringes provided by hospitals in 2000-2001.

Free provision of needles at public hospitals commenced officially in 1994 as a result of an amendment to the Poisons Act (1964) in 1994 (Poisons Amendment Regulations 1994). This provided a legislative framework for needle and syringe provision through programs approved by the Commissioner of Health. Hence, many hospitals sought approval at that time to provide needle and syringe programs. Prior to this, some hospitals were providing needles and syringes to people who inject drugs as an HIV/AIDS prevention measure.

Distribution numbers in public hospitals since the needle syringe program commenced were as follows:

1993-94	18 500
1994-95	39 375
1995-96	33 650
1996-97	58 955
1997-98	89 960
1998-99	76 480
1999-00	107 840

- (b) The current wholesale price of Fitpacks is \$2.26. The cost of that portion of the program for provision of needles and syringes provided through public hospitals is as follows:

1993-94	\$2 105*
1994-95	\$21 305
1995-96	\$18 103
1996-97	\$21 403
1997-98	\$39 921
1998-99	\$45 147
1999-00	\$56 795
2000-01	\$87 835

* Purchase of needles and syringes in this introductory year was through both the Department of Health Program and by individual hospitals. Details of the hospital expenditure for this year are not available.

- (c) Requesting that clients who access the program identify themselves acts as a deterrent to obtaining sterile needles and syringes and therefore in the long term is counter effective to the overall purpose of the Program.