

Outcome 14

Biosecurity and Emergency Response

Australia's health system has coordinated arrangements to respond effectively to national health emergencies, including infectious disease outbreaks, terrorism and natural disaster

OUTCOME SUMMARY

Australia is at continual risk of major health emergencies generated by natural and man-made disasters, terrorist attacks and naturally occurring pandemics. Outcome 14 is focused on protecting the health and well-being of all Australians through coordinated arrangements capable of responding effectively to national emergencies. The Australian Government aims to achieve this outcome by strengthening the nation's capacity to identify, monitor and implement effective and sustained responses to national health threats or emergencies, including communicable disease outbreaks, terrorism, natural disasters or environmental hazards. The Australian Government works closely with the states and territories to achieve this outcome.

Outcome 14 is the responsibility of the Office of Health Protection.

Key Strategic Directions

- Maintain the capacity of the National Medical Stockpile to respond to a health emergency caused by a bioterrorism event or a serious outbreak of infectious disease, such as pandemic influenza.
- Build on the capabilities for national health emergency response, enhance existing capacity to ensure Australia's health system can respond to mass casualty events and more closely integrate Commonwealth and state and territory health emergency planning and response.
- Strengthen communicable disease surveillance systems to detect, assess and respond to communicable disease threats in Australia and overseas.
- Ensure plans, policy, communications and reporting for major epidemics and pandemics are based on the latest evidence.
- Support effective communicable disease control and national biosecurity initiatives through policy, legislative and regulatory measures.
- Develop and manage strategic approaches to environmental threats to human health.

Major Activities

National Medical Stockpile

In 2008-09, the Australian Government will replenish elements of the National Medical Stockpile that will expire over the next two years, at an estimated cost of \$166.5 million. This will maintain a key element of the capacity of the Australian health system to respond

to a range of health emergencies, including naturally occurring disease, bioterrorism events and communicable disease outbreak. Stockpiling will ensure that, over the next two years, the Australian health system will have access to emergency supplies of pharmaceuticals and medical equipment when needed.

This will ensure that the stockpile's present state of readiness is maintained, including continuing the availability of up to 8.7 million courses of antivirals and 1.2 million courses of H5N1 vaccine for use in an influenza pandemic, along with other vaccines, antibiotics, antivirals, antidotes and equipment.

In 2008-09, the Department will continue to provide advice to the Australian Government on the risk environment and developments in new technology to ensure that future Government decisions about the stockpile are based on the best available information. The Department will work with Government security agencies and health experts in formulating this advice.

Furthermore, the Department will work with state and territory health departments to ensure that the stockpile is ready for immediate deployment should a health emergency occur.

Funding for this major activity is sourced from Program 14.1 – Health Emergency Planning and Response.

National Health Emergency Management

The Australian Government will address gaps in Australia's emergency response plans and maintain a state of readiness to respond to national and other health emergencies. Implementing lessons from recent health and disaster management exercises will increase the Government's capability to respond. These exercises also highlight areas where closer integration between national level health disaster management and state and territory management can be achieved. These activities will strengthen and support the coordination of national health emergency decision-making through the Australian Health Protection Committee and its subcommittees (the Communicable Diseases Network Australia, the Public Health Laboratory Network and the Environmental Health Committee), as well as operational protocols between the Health National Incident Room and other operation centres, and deployable health response capability. In 2008-09, the committee will revise the national burns plan following the outcome from exercises Red Hen and Nexus. The committee will also develop a national trauma plan. Stockpile deployment was evaluated through Exercise Southern Rebound in April 2008 and a range of consequence management elements will be evaluated through Exercise Mercury in October 2008.

The occurrence of natural or deliberate health emergencies presents a further significant challenge under this key strategic direction. However, the National Health Security Agreement will ensure an appropriate national response. Health Ministers, from the Australian, State and Territory governments, signed the National Health Security Agreement on 18 April 2008. The agreement establishes a framework for clear, quick and informed decision-making to support a coordinated national response to public health emergencies. The framework extends emergency response arrangements developed by the Australian Health Protection Committee for an influenza pandemic to encompass all public health emergencies irrespective of cause.

Funding for this major activity is sourced from Program 14.1 – Health Emergency Planning and Response.

Communicable Disease Surveillance

The Australian Government will support programs that provide effective surveillance and early warning of international and domestic communicable disease threats that could impact on the health of Australians. This will be done through OzFoodNet, the Foodborne Disease Surveillance Program and the national communicable disease surveillance system.

In 2008-09, the Australian Government, through OzFoodNet, Australia's national foodborne disease surveillance system, will also take the lead in developing guidelines for investigating outbreaks of gastroenteritis. The Government will seek to reduce the social and economic impact of foodborne illness and gauge the effectiveness of regulatory interventions through a comprehensive national survey of the incidence of gastroenteritis and foodborne illness.

Furthermore, the Australian Government will work with partners in the Asia-Pacific region, including Papua New Guinea, and international organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Health Secretariat and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Health Task Force, to support effective surveillance of communicable disease outbreaks in regional countries. The Government will also support the development of international capacity building initiatives in the areas of communicable disease surveillance and response. In addition, the Department will support the states and territories in their communicable disease surveillance activities through continued development of surveillance systems and providing support to the Communicable Disease Network Australia. This will ensure that Australia has the national capacity to respond efficiently and effectively to communicable disease outbreaks.

The Australian Government is continuing to explore options to minimise the risks posed by communicable disease threats, with the potential to enter Australia via its vulnerable northern border regions. The Government is developing a strategic framework, which aims to enhance surveillance and response capacity through information sharing and the development of sustainable partnerships and agreed priorities. These strategies will enable the effective pooling of existing resources and expertise, and will be undertaken in partnership with relevant government agencies in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. The Department will undertake policy development to take into account available resources, the geographic realities of the northern border regions and the potential for climate change that may affect the distribution of communicable diseases.

The major challenge to achieving northern borders health protection is to enhance existing mechanisms and establish stronger linkages with other border protection agencies and to assist near neighbours to strengthen health systems, expertise and infrastructure so that communicable diseases are better identified and controlled.

Funding for this major activity is sourced from Program 14.2 – Surveillance.

Preparedness – Pandemic Influenza

The Australian Government will ensure that Australia is well prepared for an influenza pandemic by drawing on the latest scientific advice, consolidating the National Medical Stockpile and continuing to build strong relationships with State and Territory, and overseas governments.

In 2008-09, the Australian Government, through the Department, will continue to review and update its pandemic influenza planning ensuring national arrangements are in place to deal with an influenza pandemic. Underpinning this will be the revision of the Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza, due to be released in 2008-09. This has been developed in consultation with the states and territories, through the Australian Health Protection Committee. The plan is being updated to reflect new clinical and scientific evidence. In 2008-09, the Government will provide \$110,000 to continue the development of up-to-date communication materials for use before and during a pandemic.

The Department will monitor the global market for pandemic and pre-pandemic vaccines. While considering options for the supply of vaccines, the Department will monitor the status and outcomes of vaccine trials globally, and the regulatory status of the vaccines.

In 2008-09, the Australian Government through the Department will oversee the movement of the Australian Government-funded WHO Collaborating Centre for Reference and Research on Influenza to new state-of-the-art facilities at the Victorian Infectious Diseases Reference Laboratory. This facility is one of a very small number of such international WHO influenza centres, and plays a key role in global efforts to monitor changes in circulating strains of the influenza virus. In 2008-09, the Government will provide approximately \$3 million for the relocation and operation of the Centre.

Maintaining international interest in global preparedness for a pandemic will be a challenge as the global spread of H5N1 avian influenza enters its fifth year. Australia will continue to engage in the international efforts to maintain preparedness through the WHO, International Partnership Against Pandemic Influenza and other forums.

Funding for this major activity is sourced from Program 14.1 – Health Emergency Planning and Response.

National Biosecurity

The Australian Government is committed to strengthening Australia's biosecurity arrangements by supporting effective communicable disease control and national biosecurity initiatives through policy, legislation and regulatory measures.

This will be assisted by the National Health Security Agreement, under the *National Health Security Act 2007*, which was signed by Health Ministers from the Australian, State and Territory governments on 18 April 2008. The agreement enhances communicable disease surveillance systems and provides criteria to identify events to be reported to the Australian Government to assess, if required, a coordinated national response or referral to the WHO as potential emergencies of international concern occur. It also establishes a national decision-making and coordinated response framework and identifies the roles and responsibilities of governments and public health committees.

The agreement supports the practical operation of the *National Health Security Act 2007*. Passed by the Commonwealth Parliament in September 2007 with the support of all parties, the Act was developed with the states and territories to protect the health of the nation

against the effects of naturally occurring epidemics or terrorist attacks involving chemical, biological and radiological agents, and to implement international treaty obligations.

In 2008-09, the Department will further develop human quarantine policy focusing on the application of risk management methodologies to underpin operational arrangements across the pre-border, border and post border quarantine continuum. This will include the Department developing clearly articulated operational policies on activities such as the screening of incoming travellers, importation of biological materials and the management of risks associated with international aircraft and ships.

In 2008-09, the Australian Government, through the Department, is implementing a regulatory scheme for Security Sensitive Biological Agents. The scheme will raise awareness of the potential misuse of biological agents and will strengthen biosecurity controls by establishing a regulatory regime for laboratories handling biological agents. Regulations and standards under the *National Health Security Act 2007* will be developed in 2008-09 to support laboratories in implementing this new regulatory scheme. Implementation of an inspection scheme will underpin the control arrangements for these agents. This will benefit the community by ensuring Security Sensitive Biological Agents are appropriately controlled, reducing the potential for misuse.

The implementation of a biological agents regulation system for the first time will present a significant challenge to the Australian Government and Department. Close management of this project will ensure timelines and program objectives are met.

Funding for this major activity is sourced from Program 14.1 – Health Emergency Planning and Response.

Environmental Threats to Human Health

The Australian Government will provide strategic support for evidence-based, nationally consistent approaches to managing environmental threats to human health. The Australian Government will work with State and Territory governments to implement the environmental health strategy agreed to by the Australian Health Protection Committee. This will help build nationally consistent approaches to environmental health protection, including the development of guidelines for environmental health protection indicators and for the health investigation of environmental toxin levels and hazards. In addition, the Government will provide health advice to government stakeholders on environmental risks to human health, including those associated with contaminated land, air, water and food, and with climate change.

In 2008-09, the Department, on behalf of the Australian Government, will continue to provide advice to the chemicals regulatory authorities on human health and safety risks posed by exposure to chemicals. A major priority in 2008-09 is to set human health standards for chemicals and provide pre-product public health advice to the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator¹ to assess the human health risks of pesticides and veterinary medicines on behalf of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority. The Government will undertake health risk assessments of agricultural and veterinary chemicals, and provide advice on the potential risks posed by chemicals in the community.

¹ For further discussion on the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, please refer to the Outcome 1 chapter located earlier in these Portfolio Budget Statements.

Furthermore, the Department will coordinate and contribute to the Australian Government's National Drug Strategy Project Cohesion, which tracks drug precursors and preventing diversion to illicit use, including import, export and national monitoring for prohibited and controlled substances under the National Drug Strategy. The Department will support the National Drugs and Poisons Schedule Committee to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of promulgating drugs and poisons schedules into *The Standard* for the Uniform Scheduling of Drugs and Poisons (refer to Outcome 1 for further discussion on the National Drug Strategy).

Maintenance of basic environmental health standards in remote Indigenous communities will continue to be a challenge. The Department will continue to provide funding support to demonstrative projects to build capacity in remote Indigenous communities, including support for the Indigenous environmental health workforce.

Funding for this major activity is sourced from Program 14.2 – Surveillance.

Outcome 14 Resourcing

Table 14.1 shows how the 2008-09 Budget appropriations translate to total resourcing for Outcome 14, including administered expenses, revenue from government (appropriations), revenue from other sources, and the total price of outputs.

Table 14.1: Total Resources for Outcome 14

	2008-09 Total estimate of available resources \$'000	2007-08 Estimated actual \$'000
Outcome 14 Administered and Departmental Output Resources		
Program 14.1: Health Emergency Planning and Response		
<i>Administered Items</i>		
Annual Appropriation Bill 1 (Ordinary Annual Services)	14,059	31,041
Annual Appropriation Bill 2 (Other Services)	14,403	14,477
<i>Departmental Outputs</i>		
Annual Appropriation Bill 1 (Ordinary Annual Services)	11,045	10,736
Revenues from other sources (s.31) for goods and services	1,698	1,696
<i>Special Accounts</i>		
Human Pituitary Hormones Special Account		
Opening balance	3,757	3,857
Appropriation receipts	-	-
Non-Appropriation receipts to Special Accounts	-	-
Services for Other Governments and Non Departmental Bodies		
Opening balance	92	118
Appropriation receipts	-	-
Non-Appropriation receipts to Special Accounts	-	3
Subtotal for Program 14.1	45,054	61,928
Program 14.2: Surveillance		
<i>Administered Items</i>		
Annual Appropriation Bill 1 (Ordinary Annual Services)	5,313	4,885
Annual Appropriation Bill 2 (Other Services)	820	818
<i>Departmental Outputs</i>		
Annual Appropriation Bill 1 (Ordinary Annual Services)	13,548	13,169
Revenues from other sources (s.31) for goods and services	2,082	2,080
<i>Special Accounts</i>		
Services for Other Governments and Non Departmental Bodies		
Opening balance	50	171
Appropriation receipts	-	-
Non-Appropriation receipts to Special Accounts	-	661
Subtotal for Program 14.2	21,813	21,784
Total Resources for Outcome 14	66,867	83,712

Table 14.1: Total Resources for Outcome 14 (cont)

	2008-09 Total estimate of available resources \$'000	2007-08 Estimated actual \$'000
Outcome 14 Resources by Departmental Output Group		
Department of Health and Ageing		
Output Group 1: Policy Advice	7,632	7,446
Output Group 2: Program Management	20,741	20,235
Total Departmental Resources	28,373	27,681
	2008-09	2007-08
Average Staffing Level (Number)	212.5	226.5

Measures Affecting Outcome 14

A summary of measures affecting this outcome is provided at Table 1.3.1, Section 1. Measure descriptions are published in full in *Budget Paper No. 2, Budget Measures 2008-09*, available on the Australian Government website at <<http://www.budget.gov.au>>.

Contribution of Administered Programs

Program 14.1 – Health Emergency Planning and Response

The Health Emergency Planning and Response Program provides funding to prepare for, and respond to, national public health emergencies such as communicable disease outbreaks, terrorism or natural disaster. This will be achieved through acquiring and maintaining a strategic reserve of medical equipment, supplies and pharmaceuticals for rapid deployment supporting the first line public health response. The program also maintains the expert infrastructure required to provide high level policy advice to the Australian, State and Territory governments on preparing for a health emergency, and the capability to coordinate the national response through the National Incident Room and appropriate national advisory structures.

The contribution to this outcome will be measured by the effectiveness of the national response to a public health emergency and stakeholder agreement to national emergency response plans.

Program 14.2 – Surveillance

The Surveillance Program provides funding for a range of activities that inform the Australian Government of the burden of communicable diseases regionally, nationally, and internationally, and interventions protecting the safety of all Australians.

The contribution to this outcome will be measured by the effectiveness of initiatives in detecting emerging diseases, within Australia at the state and territory levels, at the national level and also within the Asia-Pacific region. The ability to respond rapidly to contain outbreaks of communicable diseases through appropriate collaborative networks will also be a measure of success.

Contribution of Departmental Outputs to Outcome 14

The Department describes its core activities in terms of two output groups: policy advice and program management. Outcome 14 reports on both output groups. Refer to Section 2.1 for more information on output groups.

Performance Information for Outcome 14

Performance information for administered programs, individual outputs and output groups relating to Outcome 14 are summarised in Table 14.2.

Table 14.2: Key Performance Information for Outcome 14

Performance Information for Administered Programs

Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
<p>Program 14.1 – Health Emergency Planning and Response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administered Items 	
<p>Containment of disease outbreaks and biosecurity incidents through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) timely engagement of national health coordination mechanisms and implementation of response plans; and b) capacity for timely deployment of the National Medical Stockpile. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Impact of disease or biosecurity incident on the community mitigated, if it occurs. b) Deployments of the stockpile, either through exercises or live deployment, meet the six hour response benchmark.
<p>Use of biological agents for terrorist purposes limited through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) the registration of facilities which are working with identified security sensitive biological agents; b) compliance with mandatory standards; and c) successful engagement with industry. 	<p>100% of facilities registered and compliant with standards.</p>
<p>Enhanced national approaches to environmental health hazards. Measured by Commonwealth, state and territory implementation of the National Environmental Health Strategy and other national environment and health initiatives.</p>	<p>Progress against the key performance indicators in the National Environmental Health Strategy.</p>

Section 2 – Department Outcomes – 14 Biosecurity and Emergency Response

Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
Program 14.1 – Health Emergency Planning and Response	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administered Items 	
Alignment of Australian, State and Territory government pandemic influenza health management plans.	State and Territory governments endorse the Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza through the Australian Health Protection Committee.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departmental Outputs² 	
Resourcing: \$45.054m	

Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
Program 14.2 – Surveillance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administered Items 	
Effective surveillance, analysis and management of domestic and international incidents and outbreaks of communicable and foodborne diseases. Measured through reporting of such incidents and outbreaks within agreed protocols and agreed timeframes.	<p>Early and accurate analysis of national data within agreed timeframes.</p> <p>Reports on communicable disease incidents and outbreaks are produced within agreed timeframes.</p> <p>The impact of communicable and foodborne disease is reduced as measured by medium and long term trend analysis of the National Notifiable Disease Surveillance System and OzFoodNet data.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Departmental Outputs² 	
Resourcing: \$21.813m	

² The Department has four standard performance indicators for departmental output groups. See 'Performance Information for Departmental Outputs' for further information.

Performance Information for Departmental Outputs

In relation to the following programs:

- 14.1: Health Emergency Planning and Response; and
- 14.2: Surveillance.

Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
Output Group 1 – Policy Advice	
Quality, relevant and timely advice for Australian Government decision-making, measured by Ministerial satisfaction.	Ministerial satisfaction.
Production of relevant and timely evidence-based policy research.	Relevant evidence-based policy research produced in a timely manner.
Output Group 1 Resourcing: \$7.632m	

Indicator	2008-09 Reference Point or Target
Output Group 2 – Program Management	
Administered budget predictions are met and actual expenses vary less than 0.5% from budgeted expenses. Measured by comparison of actual expenses against budget.	0.5% variance from budgeted expenses.
Stakeholders participate in program development through a range of avenues, such as surveys, conferences, meetings, and submissions on Departmental discussion papers.	Stakeholders participate in program development.
Evaluations of the human health aspects of pesticides, veterinary medicines, the setting of other chemicals, human health standards for pesticides, veterinary medicines and chemicals are made within agreed timeframes.	98% of evaluations and 100% of standards on human health safety are made within agreed timeframes.
Make recommendations for standards relating to the supply of human medicines, pesticides, veterinary medicines and other chemicals.	Meet statutory deadlines.
Issuing and reporting of permits and licences for controlled and other substances within target timeframes.	98% of permits and licences completed within agreed target timeframes.
Output Group 2 Resourcing: \$20.741m	