

Independent Progress Report of the Tonga Health Systems Support Program

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

Initiative Summary

Initiative Name			
AidWorks initiative number	INI960		
Commencement date	26 October 2009	Completion date	30 June 2013
Total Australian \$	7,500,000		
Total other \$	-		
Delivery organisation(s)	Ministry of Health		
Implementing partner(s)	Ministry of Health / Government of Tonga		
Country/Region	Tonga		
Primary sector	Health		

Evaluation Summary

Evaluation Objective:

The purpose of this Independent Progress Report (IPR) was to provide the Australian and Tongan Governments with information about the implementation of AusAID funded bilateral support to the health sector in Tonga, delivered through the Tonga Health System Support Program (THSSP).

The overall objectives of the Independent Progress Report were:

- To review the progress of the THSSP against its original objectives;
- To assess the Program against AusAID's quality criteria (relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, sustainability, gender equality and disability inclusive health measures, monitoring and evaluation framework, analysis and learning);
- To assess the strategic value of the program vis-à-vis broader sector development and the degree to which it adheres to aid effectiveness principles;
- Provide recommendations on how AusAID support to the health sector in Tonga should be delivered beyond June 2013, and particularly the possibility of a 1 – 2 year extension, and the design of a second phase thereafter.

Evaluation Completion Date: April 2013

Evaluation Team:

- Catriona Waddington, Team Leader; and
- Rebecca Dodd, Senior Health Specialist.

AusAID's response to the evaluation report

The Independent Progress Report ('the Report') was jointly agreed by the Governments of Australia and Tonga, and was conducted in accordance with AusAID's Performance Management and Evaluation Policy.

The Report is well structured and provides a constructive and useful analysis of AusAID's health program to Tonga. It makes three broad conclusions:

- The NCD component is highly relevant to Tonga's needs and has made a broadly promising start.
- The critical deficiencies, flexible fund and twinning components largely focus on hospital care. They have stronger government involvement in their management, and have generally spent more of their budget. While all components appear to make a positive contribution to curative care, they do not operate in a framework of objectives, and targets that allow for effectiveness to be gauged.
- The joint governance of the Program does not focus on the big strategic issues.

The Report found strong Government ownership of the program, and that it is well aligned to national priorities. It notes that THSSP is a hybrid of programmatic features and the use of government systems, and highlights the story of the establishment of the NCD nursing cadre as a text book example of how working 'outside' the system can provide the space to develop and pilot innovative approaches, which can then be embedded in government structures.

The Report recommends a two year extension of the current program to 30 June 2015. It also recommends that this extension be used to prepare for likely changes in the way support is provided after 2015, including moving some program components to a system of annual audit and review, and to commission analytic work on the overall "shape" of health services in Tonga and what areas might be priorities for international support.

AusAID accepts the 21 recommendations put forth in the Report, and will work with the Tongan Government and the Health Ministry to implement them. AusAID's responses to the most important recommendations (as identified by the review team in the executive summary) are detailed below.

AusAID's response to the most specific recommendations made in the report

Recommendation 1 & 2: Extend the current THSSP (all components) for two more years until June 2015. Review and correct the budget procedures before deciding if and when the budget should be increased.

Response: Agree

Actions: AusAID Nuku'alofa Post will work with the Health Ministry on a Program extension to June 2015. AusAID's strategic health adviser and an accounting firm have been contracted to review and correct procedures for presenting budgets and expenditure. There has been some confusion over the budget for THSSP with the sum of the annual MOH budgets being more than actual funds received from AusAID. The reason for this is because the allocation of the first year (2009-10) was not spent. The funds available were therefore incorporated into the budgets of future years, but appeared as a double count. In addition, the budget for 2011/12 was revised to include some new activities (following recommendations from a program review). Due to a misunderstanding, rather than these funds being taken from unused funds of existing activities, there were added to the budget. The previous years budgets are now being amended and budgets for financial years 2013-14 and 2014-15 have been drafted. This process will inform AusAID decision making on whether or not to include a cost or no-cost extension to 2015.

Recommendation 3: National NCD Committee to lead process of clarifying roles and responsibilities for health promotion and inter-sectoral activities related to NCDs. Involve the Cabinet to ensure high-level buy-in.

Response: Agree

Actions: AusAID Nuku'alofa Post has engaged its strategic health adviser to help clarify governance arrangements for inter sectoral activities related to NCDs. As a first step, the strategic health adviser facilitated a National NCD Coordination workshop on 28 and 29 May 2013 to brainstorm different governance arrangements. Follow up work is required to reach agreement on these governance arrangements, which is being advanced by AusAID's strategic health adviser.

Recommendation 6: Follow up on formal approval for the new cadre of NCD nurses with the Public Service Commission and the Ministry of Finance (by the time of the final version of this report, the authors had informally heard that this matter had been resolved and that the recruitment of NCD nurses could proceed).

Response: NA

Action: No action required. As suggested by the authors, the Health Ministry has resolved this issue and the NCD nurses have been recruited.

Recommendation 7: Establish an operational research program to assess to effectiveness of the diploma training and the new nursing cadre itself.

Response: Agree

Actions: AusAID Nuku'alofa Post will work with the Health Ministry to ensure that an operational research program to assess the effectiveness of the diploma training and NCD nursing cadre is included in the THSSP work plan and budget for 2013-14 and 2014-15.

Recommendation 10: Plan monitoring activities so that information on outcomes is available at the time of the end of the program in June 2015.

Response: Agree

Actions: A key monitoring survey for the program is the WHO STEPwise Approach to Surveillance of NCD Risk Factors (STEPS) survey, a relevant and internationally recognised method for collecting information on NCDs. One survey was conducted in 2004, and another survey conducted in 2012 (the results are yet to be published). AusAID Nuku'alofa Post will liaise with WHO and the Health Ministry about the possibility of conducting another survey in 2014 for publication in 2015. If this is not possible, then AusAID Nuku'alofa Post will work with the Health Ministry to determine what other surveys could be managed locally to collect similar information.

Recommendation 11 & 15: Allow greater flexibility in the use of the 'critical deficiencies' budget to respond to broader health workforce needs, and allow flexible fund expenditures to align with the Health Ministry's Annual Management Plan. Move these components to a system of annual audit and review.

Response: Agree

Actions: AusAID Nuku'alofa Post will work with the Health Ministry to allow greater flexibility in the use of the critical deficiencies budget in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 workplan and budget, and will work with the Health Ministry to redefine the parameters of the flexible fund. It will also look to move these components

of the program to a system of annual audit and review by 1 January 2014. The system of annual audit and review will be reflected in the contract extension.

Recommendation 17: Employ a ‘transition advisor’ to manage the two year extension phase. Key tasks will be to oversee the implementation of recommendations in this report, and to engage with the Health Ministry and AusAID at senior levels to design the next program.

Response: Agree

Actions: The Ministry of Health and AusAID Nuku’alofa Post agree that AusAID will recruit the transition adviser as a priority, through AusAID’s Health Resource Facility (AusAID’s primary mechanism for sourcing specialist expertise in the health sector). A terms of reference for this position has been drafted, and the position will be recruited as soon as possible.

Recommendation 18: Strengthen the program’s use of government procurement, budgeting and reporting systems where possible and strengthen the engagement of the executive in planning.

Response: Agree

Actions: AusAID Nuku’alofa Post is in the process of undertaking a review of Tonga’s public procurement system, including the adequacy of procurement arrangements under the AusAID funded health program. AusAID Nuku’alofa Post will also conduct a public financial management review of the Health Ministry. These two pieces of analysis will inform AusAID’s thinking on how to strengthen procurement, budget and reporting in future programs.

Recommendation 19: Review the effectiveness of the program team, with a view to agreeing a freeze on the recruitment of additional staff.

Response: Agree

Actions: Should the Health Ministry agree, the transition advisor will be tasked with assisting the Ministry of Health Executive to review the 23 positions employed under the Program, and determine which positions are likely to be required at the end of the program, and begin the process of moving this positions onto the Health Ministry’s staffing establishment.

Recommendation 21: Commission work on the overall “shape” of health services in Tonga and hence what areas might be priorities for future international support.

Response: Agree

Actions: In preparation for AusAID’s next phase of support (post 30 June 2015), AusAID will undertake a series of analysis to inform its support to the health sector after 2015, including analysis on the overall shape of health services in Tonga to inform decisions about what areas to concentrate on to further develop the package of services provided by the Ministry.