

Senate Community Affairs References Committee

DESIGN, SCOPE, COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS, CONTRACTS AWARDED AND IMPLEMENTATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE BETTER MANAGEMENT OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM INITIATIVE

PUBLIC HEARING 8 MARCH 2017

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Meetings with CPSU

Question reference number: QoN 1

Member: Watt

Type of question: Hansard page 35

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

Senator WATT: If not you, has anyone senior in your organisation met with the CPSU in response to that request?

Ms Campbell: I will take that on notice and work out whether they did on that request.

Answer:

On 6 February 2017 the Department provided a written response to the correspondence received from the CPSU on 19 January 2017. The Department met with the CPSU on 10 February 2017 at the Fair Work Commission where the Online Compliance Initiative was discussed in the context of proposed industrial action. As a result of this meeting, the CPSU decided to terminate the proposed industrial action and agreed to recommence bargaining meetings on a new Enterprise Agreement for the Department. There have been four such meetings since that date and further meetings will occur over the coming weeks.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Calls to Centrelink from mobile Phones in Remote Communities

Question reference number: QoN 7

Member: Dodson

Type of question: Hansard page 44

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

Senator DODSON: How many calls to Centrelink are there from remote communities that are from mobile phones?

Ms Campbell: I am not sure we have that information with us at the moment, but we are happy to take it on notice.

Answer:

The Department is unable to identify which customers are calling from a mobile phone in remote communities as the Department does not collect telephony data specifically related to remote customers.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Appeals to AAT

Question reference number: QoN 14

Members: Siewert and Duniam

Type of question: Hansard pages 45-46

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

CHAIR: Thank you. And I am presuming that once they have gone through that formal process and they are still not happy, that is when they appeal and go through the appeals process?

Ms Campbell: That is right.

CHAIR: You do not have any detail on the number of those that have gone to appeal?

Ms Campbell: To appeal? No.

CHAIR: I presume we have to go to the AAT for that?

Ms Campbell: I think we would probably have something, but we do not have it with us.

CHAIR: Okay. If you could take that on notice and I will also follow-up with the AAT.

Senator DUNIAM: Did you ask that question on a period of time?

CHAIR: I want it from the beginning of July through to as current to year-to-date as possible.

Ms Campbell: We will take that on notice.

Senator DUNIAM: On that, can I expand that question on notice back a bit further—maybe another six months or thereabouts?

Ms Campbell: We can take that on notice.

Answer:

For the 2016-17 financial year, as at 28 February 2017, 106 people had lodged an application at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal for a review of an Online Compliance Intervention (OCI) decision. This is 0.1 per cent of people with an OCI-related debt.

The OCI component of the Employment Income Matching measures commenced in the 2016-17 financial year. The manual-only component of the measures, which commenced in July 2015, resulted in 241 people lodging an application at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal in 2015-16. This is 0.3 per cent of people with an Employment Income Matching manual debt.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Further Information Provided

Question reference number: QoN 24

Member: Siewert

Type of question: Hansard page 54

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

CHAIR: Okay. I do not see why you have to take on notice the question I asked: have you provided any further information about the other matter, not system recovery, on a person who has spoken and criticised the department and undermined confidence in the system? Have you provided any further information on anybody to the minister?

Ms Campbell: That could be service recovery.

CHAIR: Or it could be both, and please—

Ms Campbell: Or it could be both.

CHAIR: don't take us around in circles again. Have you specifically done it on either or both?

Ms Campbell: I will take that on notice.

Answer:

The Department continually provides information to the Minister on income support recipients when matters are raised via Ministerial correspondence or in the media.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Face-to-Face Servicing

Question reference number: QoN 33

Member: Siewert

Type of question: Hansard page 67

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

CHAIR: Yes, but what I want to know is whether you keep a recording of the number of people who actually front up to a Centrelink office and want to ask a human being face-to-face what is going on.

Ms Campbell: We can take that on notice.

Answer:

There is no data available on recipients attending Service Centres to specifically discuss Online Compliance Intervention matters with a service officer.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Error detection

Question reference number: QoN 51

Member:

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

If an error is detected at this stage, what actions can a staff member take upon identifying an error?

Answer:

QoN 50 provides detailed information on the assistance provided to recipients with the online system, and the reassessment and formal review process.

Staff can be involved at any point during the online process to assist the recipient. Recipients are able to contact departmental staff using the dedicated compliance phone number 1800 086 400 to explain the income difference and to receive assistance with the online process.

Staff have been trained and provided with reference material to enable them to resolve enquiries from recipients.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Process

Question reference number: QoN 52

Member:

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

At what stage of the Online Compliance Intervention program does a Department of Human Services staff member assess an alleged debt that has arisen because of a discrepancy in the individual's information held by Centrelink and the ATO?

If an error is detected at this stage, what actions can a staff member take?

Answer:

Please refer to questions on notice 50 and 51.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Factors effecting debt collection

Question reference number: QoN 61

Member:

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

What factors are impacting on the capacity of Centrelink to process queries, reviews, prove debts and collect debts in a timely manner? Please table any relevant documents.

Answer:

The Department's ability to process queries, reviews, raise and collect debts is impacted primarily by a person's level of engagement and provision of information about an individual's circumstances.

People are, and have always been, obliged to tell the Department when there is a change in circumstance. This can include changes to their relationship status, living arrangements, care arrangements, assets or income from work. Debts can arise when people do not provide timely updates to the Department about changes in their circumstances.

As provided in evidence to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee (the Committee) and in the Department's submission of 22 March 2017 to the Committee, the Department acknowledges that people do not always engage with the process. The Department's experience is that some people will not engage with initial letters and, indeed, will not engage until their payments are suspended or they receive a debt notice.

The Department works to engage with each person to clarify the information up-front wherever possible. It is important for people to engage with the Department and provide the required information. It is also important that when a debt is raised, that the person contacts the Department to establish a payment arrangement. When establishing a payment arrangement, the Department takes the individual's personal circumstances into consideration.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Reconciliation schedules for customers

Question reference number: QoN 64

Member:

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

Does Centrelink provide a fortnightly reconciliation schedule, such as: we paid you this, you were entitled to that, amount under/overpaid?

If not, why not?

Answer:

This information is available to the recipient during the online process. There is a print function available if required.

Recipients can also request a copy at any time.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Percentage of cases

Question reference number: QoN 85

Member:

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 31 March 2017

Number of pages: 1

Question:

What percentage of cases have been referred to debt collection agencies vs remained with Centrelink for collection and how many have been returned to Centrelink?

Answer:

Please see answer to question on notice 16.