Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES - 16 FEBRUARY 2012
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Rent Assistance Overpayments

Question reference number: HSW 9

Senator: Siewert
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Question:

For the periods 2010-11 and from 1 July 2011 to 31 December 2011, please provide details of the number and value of Rent Assistance debts. Provide a profile of the Rent Assistance debt base, and detail any efforts to reduce Rent Assistance overpayments.

Answer:

- In 2010-11, 238,589 Rent Assistance debts were raised, to the value of $55,527,266. From 1 July 2011 to 31 December 2011, 113,286 Rent Assistance debts were raised, to the value of $34,972,277.

- Over 60 per cent of those with debts are female and around 60 per cent of all those with debts are between 20 and 40 years of age. The debt base is distributed across Australia.

- Approximately 5 per cent of those with debts are Indigenous customers.

- The department maintains a variety of information resources for staff which assist with processes, tasks, policy and legislation.

- The department reviewed and revised the Rent Assistance training package late last year.

- Having ready access to these materials help staff to provide correct information to customers so that customers have the information they need. This ensures customers understand their payment and their obligations to notify of any changes in their circumstances which may impact on their benefits or payments. Correct and current information helps customers avoid incurring debts.

- Customers also have direct access to a variety of publications to help explain their entitlements and responsibilities about all payments administered by the department. They also have access to electronic material, accessed through the department's websites.

- The department is working towards enhanced online services which enable customers to provide timely information about changes that might affect their payments. Work is also being done to enhance online services for organisations which can act on behalf of customers to maintain up-to-date information potentially impacting on payments.

- In addition, through the use of data mining the department has developed a predictive model that identifies Rent Assistance customers at greatest risk of payment inaccuracy. This information is used to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of Rent Assistance review processes.