

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

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

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Income Management

Question reference number: HS 25

Senator: Siewert

Type of question: Hansard pages 121 - 123

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 29 March 2012

Number of pages: 3

Question:

- a) Senator SIEWERT: Could I go to the broader issue in the Northern Territory. In terms of the number of exemptions that were asked for—there were 2,454—at one stage there was some delay in handling those exemptions. How quick is the process for dealing with exemptions when people seek them now?

Mr Tidswell: You have those figures from FaHCSIA?

Senator SIEWERT: From FaHCSIA this morning.

Mr Tidswell: We will just make sure we have the same dataset before us.

Ms Ramsey: You are asking about the delay in dealing with—

Senator SIEWERT: How quickly, on average, would exemption applications be made now? [pp121-122]

- b) Senator SIEWERT: While you are looking for the Queensland figures, can I ask: in relation to the child protection measure, how long are people staying on income management?

Mr Tidswell: I am not sure if we have that figure.

Ms Ramsey: The figure for Cape York income management is 147.

Mr Tidswell: Are you after how many people?

Ms Ramsey: How long.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, how long. This is a measure that is supposed to be developing—

Mr Tidswell: I think we will have to take that on notice. I do not think we have that with us.

Ms Campbell: Is that an average period you are looking for?

Senator SIEWERT: An average period. I am conscious of not asking for information that is going to be identifying or whatever. I do understand that.

Ms Ramsey: Are you looking around each of the measures? It is different for each of the measures.

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, I am asking for each of the measures. We have still got that requirement now that you have to stay on for three months for voluntary income management, haven't we?

Ms Ramsey: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could provide the figures for each of the measures, that would be—

Ms Ramsey: We can take that on notice, yes. [p122]

- c) Senator SIEWERT: Going back to the Northern Territory figure of 179 for the vulnerable clients, have people come off that once they have gone on? I have already asked on notice for FaHCSIA to give me a breakdown, if they can, in terms of vulnerability criteria. But have people come off that? Have they been reassessed?

Ms Cartwright: It is probably best if we take that one on notice too. I think it goes into the mix with the other questions you asked around how long people are staying on income management in the various measures. The timing is set by a social worker and it is usually for 12 months. If their circumstances change, they can come off before the 12 months. But we can get you further details on notice. [p122-123]

- d) Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. In terms of the BasicsCard rollout, I know that you have already traversed quite a bit of it, so I am not going to go over that. How many complaints are you getting now for the use of BasicsCards?

Mr Tidswell: Complaints anywhere in Australia?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes.

Ms Ramsey: We will take that on notice. There are, of course, different levels of complaints.

Senator SIEWERT: That is where I was going to next. I can appreciate there will be some that are fairly minor and it is frustration. But could you take on notice the complaints and the nature of them. With all the things that you have put in—and I do not like the BasicsCard—you have tried to make it easier and you have addressed people's concerns and I am trying to find out whether people are becoming less frustrated.

Ms Ramsey: We will take that on notice and look, too, at whether we can give you any trend data on that. [p123]

Answer:

- a) On average, exemption applications are processed within 10 days.
- b) Information on how long people are staying on Income Management measures is not currently available. The data is being sourced and is expected to be available in April 2012.
- c) A total of 28 people have come off the Vulnerable Welfare Payment Recipient measure of Income Management. Of the 28, 14 people are now on another Income Management measure.
- d) A total of 15 complaints were received in relation to the use of the BasicsCard for the 12 months beginning March 2011 and ending February 2012. All complaints were received from the Northern Territory.

Complaint Reason	Number
Department error in processing	1
Delays in processing by department	1
Disagree with legislation / policy between state areas	1
Disagree with legislation / policy re excluded goods	2
Disagree with legislation / policy re involuntary IM	1
Interpreter unavailable	1
Merchant charging fees to customers	1
System unavailable	6
Disagree with department policy re priority needs	1
Total	15

Complaints by Month												
Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Total
1	0	2	2	2	1	0	2	2	1	1	1	15

Trends

The highest number of complaints received was in relation to system availability, with this category receiving six of the 15 complaints. This category includes complaints relating to Merchant and the department's systems.

System availability issues include:

- BasicsCard provider outages;
- Bank system outages;
- EFTPOS line interruptions; and
- a very small number of department system outages.