

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**  
**ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**  
**FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND**  
**INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO**  
**2010-11 Supplementary Estimates Hearings**

**Outcome Number:** 7

**Question No:** 247

**Topic:** The NTER Monitoring report

**Hansard Page:** Written

**Senator Siewert asked:**

How do you account for the large increase in DSP and Aged pensions in prescribed areas?

**Answer:**

The increase in number of Disability Support Pension (DSP) recipients in Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) communities over the period is largely due to three factors:

- increased servicing of remote communities under the NTER. This has resulted in better liaison with health clinics/other medical personnel and improved awareness of customer health issues. There has been assessment of people's needs through Job Capacity Assessors visiting communities. As a result many previously "hidden" health issues were uncovered and customers for whom DSP is the appropriate payment were identified and assisted to claim.
- the removal of Remote Area Exemptions which has led to an increase in reviews of customers' circumstances by Centrelink.
- from December 2009, policy was changed to allow, in limited circumstances, a claimant's eligibility for DSP to be based on diagnosis of a psychological/mental health medical condition provided solely by a Centrelink registered psychologist. The diagnosis must be provided as part of a specialist assessment and documented in a Job Capacity Assessment report. There are two situations in which this provision may be applied:
  1. vulnerable claimants with suspected mental health conditions who are living in remote communities with little or no access to health services; and/or
  2. vulnerable claimants with suspected mental health conditions who have been identified by customer service centre staff or employment service providers as continually unable to comply with requirements, and demonstrating behaviours consistent with a chronic mental health condition.

Also claimants from remote areas who have limited access to doctors can have their DSP medical report completed by a community nurse rather than a medical practitioner.

A review of Table 4.1, page 39, Part 2 of the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory Monitoring Report revealed an error in the data for Age Pension recipients. Age Pension recipients actually increased between June 2009 and June 2010 by 109 persons (four per cent) not 609 persons (26 per cent). The Monitoring Report was corrected and republished on the Department's website on 3 November 2010.