



Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Additional Estimates 2023-24
Wednesday, 14 February 2024
Daily summary

The committee met from 9.00am until 11.01pm in Committee Room 2S1.

The Committee called the following agencies of the Social Services Portfolio:

- National Disability Insurance Agency;
- NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission;
- Australian Institute of Family Studies; and
- Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission.

Some topics discussed by the committee included:

Services Australia: Whole of Portfolio/Corporate Matters

- Increased incidence of lengthy call wait times reported by customers, and congestion messaging;
- NZYQ High Court ruling; and
- Allegations concerning timed breaks for Services Australia staff.

Services Australia: Outcome 1 – Deliver high-quality, accessible services and payments to individuals, families, businesses and partner agencies on behalf of Government; with a focus on contemporary service delivery and customer experience.

- Delivery of superannuation and age pension payments;
- Current staffing rates at a loss of 220 staff per month amid the recruitment of 3,000 new staff;
- Administration of the new commemorative Medicare card symbolising 40 years of Medicare;
- Status Resolution Support Services and Special Benefit payment program for asylum seekers;
- Outcomes of the Australian Public Service Census;
- Payment accuracy, including the appeals and reviews process;
- Breakdown of local government areas receiving disaster recovery payments and allowances;
- Mutual obligation requirements for individuals experiencing unemployment and homelessness; and
- Work of the Australian Securities and Investments Commission on Centrepay issues.

National Disability Insurance Agency and NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

- Methodology for sustaining the costs of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS);
- Implementation of the recommendations of the NDIS Review;
- Self-management of NDIS plans;
- Quarterly reporting of NDIS data;
- Regulation and registration of NDIS service providers;
- Breakdown of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's resourcing;
- Availability of specialist disability accommodation;
- Flexible working arrangements for NDIA staff;

- Funding of assistance animals in accordance with the NDIA's assistance animal operational guidelines; and
- Disability supports for palliative care patients.

Department of Social Services (DSS): Outcome 3 – Disability and Carers

- NDIS/Disability Employment Services (DES) Pathways Pilot;
- Commencement of the Disability Employment Centre for Excellence; and
- Funding allocations to various disability outcomes and programs.

DSS: Outcome 1 – Social Security

- Purpose, eligibility and rate of the remote area allowance to meet additional costs associated with residence in remote areas;
- Adequacy of various income support payments;
- Number of small businesses administering the Paid Parental Leave Scheme;
- Indexation of the aged pension payment, including the number of seniors accessing the energy supplement; and
- Increase to the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, including aggregate figures as a proportion of all rent assistance recipients;

DSS: Whole of Portfolio/Corporate Matters

(Released from hearing)

DSS: Outcome 2: Families and Communities

- Eligibility requirements for the Escaping Domestic Violence Payment, including tracking of applications being or not being rejected;
- Targeting of the government's recent funding announcements to people experiencing financial hardship, including emergency and food relief in response to cost of living pressures;
- Observations surrounding antisocial behaviour and destruction former cashless debit card (CDC) sites following the repeal of the CDC, and its replacement with voluntary smartcard;
- Meetings of the National Coordination Group; and
- Provision of 500 community frontline service workers.

Australian Institute of Family Studies

- The Australian Institute of Family Studies' (AIFS) current state of research in line with the Department of Social Services 2023-24 Portfolio Budget Statement; and
- Staffing restructures to meet re-modelling of research priorities.

Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission

- Status and degrees of input of the lived experience advisory panel;
- Progress of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 (National Plan); and
- Level of transparency regarding the Commission's monitoring and evaluation frameworks for harnessing statistics on matters relating to the National Plan.

DSS: Outcome 4 – Housing

(Released from hearing)

The committee will next meet at 9.00am on Thursday, 15 February 2024 in Senate Committee Room 2S1, calling the Health and Aged Care portfolio outcomes and agencies.