



PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA

MEDIA RELEASE  
Senate Community Affairs References Committee

**Call for submissions  
Inquiry into Centrelink's compliance program**

Issue date: 2 August 2019

The Senate Community Affairs References Committee is conducting an inquiry into Centrelink's compliance program, particularly the Government's automated debt collection practices.

This is the committee's second inquiry into Centrelink's compliance program. 'In the two years since the [final report of that inquiry](#) was tabled, many of the issues raised in that inquiry are still to be resolved,' the committee's Chair, Senator Siewert, said.

The committee will be inquiring into the ongoing impact of automated debt collection on income support recipients, the processes for managing errors in the compliance program, the review and appeals process, and other aspects of the program's delivery and management.

'This inquiry is an opportunity to examine ongoing concerns about how debts are calculated and recovered by Centrelink and the Department of Human Services and the impact this has on both current and past income support recipients,' Senator Siewert said.

**Call for submissions**

The committee is seeking submissions from a wide range of people, including current and past recipients of income support payments who have been issued debt notices through the Centrelink compliance program. The committee has requested that submissions be received by 20 September 2019.

While the committee welcomes submissions from individuals about their experience of Centrelink debt collection practices, the committee does not have the ability to advise on, advocate for, or take action relating to individual cases.

If you would like to make a submission you may find it helpful to read the guide to making a submission available on the Senate website: [Preparing a submission to an inquiry](#).

If you have questions, or need more time to write your submission, please contact the Community Affairs secretariat.

Further information about the inquiry, including published submissions and hearing programs, is available on the committee website: [www.aph.gov.au/senate\\_ca](http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_ca).

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**DATE REFERRED**

31 July 2019

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**SUBMISSIONS CLOSE**

20 September 2019

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**NEXT HEARINGS**

To be advised

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**REPORTING DATE**

4 December 2019

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**COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Senator Rachel Siewert  
(Chair)

Senator Wendy Askew  
(Deputy Chair)

Senator Hollie Hughes  
Senator Malarndirri  
McCarthy

Senator Deborah O'Neill  
Senator Anne Urquhart

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## **Attending a public hearing**

Most committee hearings are held in public and anyone is welcome to come and listen. The audio and video of each hearing will also be broadcast live on the internet: [www.aph.gov.au/News\\_and\\_Events/Watch\\_Parliament](http://www.aph.gov.au/News_and_Events/Watch_Parliament)

Further information about what to expect when attending a Senate committee hearings is available on the Senate website: [Attending a public hearing](#)

## **Inquiry Terms of Reference**

Centrelink's compliance program, with specific reference to:

- (a) the ongoing impact of the Federal Government's automated debt collection processes upon current and past income support recipients;
- (b) data-matching techniques used by Centrelink, including limitations and uncertainties of data-matching techniques and error-handling processes;
- (c) the handling of under-payment errors, including the number of payments identified and made through data-matching following an under-payment error;
- (d) the use of real-time wages data and other techniques to prevent overpayment;
- (e) the capacity and adequacy of Centrelink and the Department of Human Services to deliver the program, including the use of contract staff and the impact of staff performance targets on the program;
- (f) the error rates in the issuing of initial letters and debt notices, the causes of these errors and what steps are routinely taken when errors are identified;
- (g) the procedures that have been put in place to prevent future errors;
- (h) the number of initial letters and debt notices sent out and the number of debts that have been recovered;
- (i) the review process and appeals process for debt notices, including the number of reviews and appeals undertaken;
- (j) the use and legality of the debt collection processes used by Centrelink and the Department of Human Services;
- (k) the use of debt collectors in the compliance program; and
- (l) the cost of the compliance program to date, including the projected and actual amount raised from the program.