



Australian Government
Department of Human Services

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Acting Deputy Secretary
Integrity & Information

Mr Andrew Hastie MP
Chair
Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Chair

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security - Review of the Identity-matching Services Bill 2019

I am writing on behalf of the Secretary of the Department of Human Services (the Department), Ms Renée Leon, PSM. The Department welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security to inform its review of the Identity-matching Services Bill 2019 (the Bill).

The Department provides services to a diverse customer base including families, farmers, older Australians, students, sole parents, people facing unemployment or homelessness, people with a disability and people caring for someone. The design of services needs to be suitable for different delivery channels and to meet the varying needs of all Australians.

The Department's centralised service delivery role gives it end-to-end visibility of the impact of policy on service delivery. It also gives the Department valuable citizen insights and service design expertise that has relevance for the broader APS and the government.

The passage of the Bill would assist with the delivery of efficient, seamless, contemporary and trusted services for all Australians.

The Department's understanding is that the key changes of relevance to this Department that the Bill will affect are the expansion of:

- Identity Matching Services (IMS) to non-law enforcement agencies to verify identity, and
- Facial Verification Services (FVS) to include state/territory issued credentials, such as drivers licences.

The availability of the IMS as proposed under the Bill, and specifically the FVS, will make it easier and quicker for the Department to verify the identity of its customers (particularly those who are vulnerable) and ensure they receive the right payment and service when they need it. These services will also modernise the measures the Department uses to protect Australians from fraud, by enhancing our capacity to confirm customer identity.

Challenges of existing credentialing approaches

The Department confirms the identity of individuals to ensure that payments and services are received by the right person and to prevent fraudulent claims. For example, when an individual seeks a payment through Centrelink the Department requires them to present identity documents, including, if possible, documents with a photo, to confirm that the individual presenting for support is who they claim to be.

The Department currently uses the Department of Home Affairs' Document Verification Service (DVS) to confirm the authenticity of identity documents.

The DVS enables the Department to take information from a customer's identity document - such as a passport, birth certificate or drivers licence - and, with the customer's consent, have the agency that issued the document confirm its veracity. These checks are performed through the DVS in real time to inform decisions that rely on the confirmation of a person's identity. The DVS is a key tool that assists the Department to detect individuals presenting with fraudulent identity documents.

However, the DVS cannot verify whether an individual presenting with a real identity document has obtained that document fraudulently. This is because the DVS does not match the biometric elements on an identity document, namely a photo, against the person attempting to use it to claim a payment or service.

To mitigate against this possibility, and in addition to the DVS check, the Department currently undertakes a manual visual comparison of a physically present individual against the image on their photo identity document.

Face biometric technology has the potential to replace this manual process and strengthen the accuracy of identity confirmation against photo identity documents, such as passports and drivers licences, and therefore reduce the risk of incorrect matching.

Who will benefit from face verification services

The Department is particularly interested in using the FVS to more confidently provide vulnerable customers with the payments and services they need, when they need them, as seamlessly as possible. Importantly, the FVS creates opportunities for the Department to verify a person's identity when they do not have physical access to their identity documents, such as following a crisis or emergency.

Victims of family and domestic violence

Victims of family and domestic violence sometimes need to leave their home without being able to take their identity documents with them. For some, these documents are withheld by the perpetrator of the violence. The Department could use the FVS to match a victim's facial biometrics to a government held record, providing a quicker, more seamless avenue for them to access payments and services.

In 2017-18, the Department granted 17,180 Crisis Payments to support customers affected by family and domestic violence¹, and in 2018-19, the Department's social workers received 73,011 referrals for people affected by family and domestic violence.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found that 115,000 women, children and men sought homelessness services in 2016-17 due to family/domestic violence².

People impacted by natural disasters

People impacted by natural disasters may have had their identity documents destroyed. The Department could use the FVS to match a person's facial biometrics to a government held record, allowing them to meet the identity requirements for an emergency payment without having to replace their documents.

Since February this year, the Department has granted over 100,000 claims for the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment and the Disaster Recovery Allowance – worth more than \$120 million – for natural disasters in Tasmania, New South Wales and Queensland.

Other beneficiaries

The proposed expansion of the FVS might support identity confirmation in other situations where individuals do not have access to identity documents such as:

- individuals who have lost or misplaced identity documents
- individuals experiencing homelessness, and
- prisoners and newly released prisoners.

¹ Department of Human Services. (2018). 2017-18 Annual Report. Pg 96.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2018). Family, domestic and sexual violence in Australia 2018

The addition of state and territory driver's licence records would broaden the application of the FVS for people who don't hold an Australian passport or equivalent Commonwealth photo identification. This is particularly relevant to some Centrelink customers.

In addition, the proposed expansion of the FVS would enable core functionality in the Digital Transformation Agency's GovPass digital identity solution. More secure identity confirmation would support a future where identity verification enables Australians to seamlessly access government payments and services.

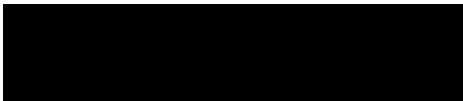
Protecting privacy

The Department is continually exploring approaches to strengthen the management of identity in regard to the delivery of payments and services.

Any measures to strengthen the Department's identity management processes through utilising the proposed expansion of the FVS would be subject to comprehensive assessment to ensure continued strong protection of the personal information held by the Department. Any changes would be subject to extensive consultation across government and other stakeholders.

I trust that the information provided is useful to the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Annette Musolino

10 September 2019