

Senate Community Affairs References Committee

DESIGN, SCOPE, COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS, CONTRACTS AWARDED AND IMPLEMENTATION ASSOCIATED WITH THE BETTER MANAGEMENT OF THE SOCIAL WELFARE SYSTEM INITIATIVE

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Vulnerability

Question reference number: QoN 98

Member: DUNIAM

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Question:

Senator DUNIAM: I just have one more question, on the Ombudsman's report. I am looking here at recommendations 6 and 7, which relate to vulnerable customers and talk about expanding the cohort who would be able to get staff assistance. What are the groups currently covered as vulnerable and therefore qualifying for staff assistance with this? If you cannot provide it now, that is fine.

Mr McNamara: I have a list. Just let me see if I can bring it up in a hurry or not.

Senator DUNIAM: If not, I am cognisant of time.

Mr McNamara: I might have to take that on notice. I do have it.

Senator DUNIAM: Okay, that is fine. I noticed that it expands it. I just wondered what the existing list was. That is fine if we have it on notice.

Mr McNamara: I do not have it at hand.

Senator DUNIAM: No worries. Thank you.

Answer:

The Department identifies people with vulnerabilities through information already available on their Centrelink record, through conversations with them, or by receiving advice from a third party.

Vulnerability indicators are used in compliance to assist in pre-identifying people who may require additional assistance, and therefore need to be provided with alternative options for engagement.

People with a current vulnerability indicator will not be selected for an online compliance review, but will be selected for a staff assisted process. The department filters out recipients with certain vulnerability types. For example, those who are culturally or linguistically diverse, if the person is in a period of bereavement, affected by a natural disaster or resides in a geographic location with limited access to digital services. The identification of vulnerable recipients is based on the information the department has on its record.

Vulnerability indicators include customers who experience:

- Psychiatric problem or illness
- Cognitive or neurological impairment
- Illness or injury requiring frequent treatment
- Drug/alcohol dependency
- Homelessness
- Recent traumatic relationship breakdown, including family and domestic violence
- Significant lack of literacy or language skills
- Nationally approved vulnerability

The Ombudsman's final report includes a recommendation to expand staff assisted alternatives to recipients who have payment nominees that are either court appointed or organisations, and to consider the homeless vulnerability more broadly, specifically to identify other means of identifying this vulnerability outside of existing indicators.

The initial online compliance review letter includes the dedicated Compliance phone number. All people selected for review can ask a compliance officer for assistance to complete their review, including if they would prefer not to use the online system.