

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19

Public Hearing – 30 April 2020
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 2 - Jobseeker Payment

Question reference number: SQ20-000401

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

How are you managing the transition of people from Jobseeker and onto Jobkeeper?

Answer:

People who receive JobSeeker Payment and start to receive JobKeeper Payment are required to report their JobKeeper Payment as income to Services Australia. In most cases this will cease the person's entitlement to JobSeeker Payment.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 3 - Coronavirus Supplement

Question reference number: SQ20-000402

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

How much would it cost to extend the coronavirus supplement to people on DSP and Carer Payment?

Answer:

The Department of Social Services has not costed an extension of the coronavirus supplement to Disability Support Pension and Carer Payment.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 4 - Coronavirus Supplement

Question reference number: SQ20-000403

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

How much would it cost to increase DSP and Carer Payment to the same rate as Jobseeker payment with the COVID supplement?

Answer:

The Department of Social Services has not costed an increase to Disability Support Pension or Carer Payment.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 5 - Coronavirus Supplement

Question reference number: SQ20-000404

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

How many people have dropped off DSP or Carer Payment and applied for Jobseeker Payment?

Answer:

To date, since the commencement of JobSeeker Payment on 20 March 2020 to 24 April 2020, there have been seven people commence JobSeeker Payment within a fortnight of ceasing Disability Support Pension. A further 1072 people commence JobSeeker Payment within a fortnight of ceasing Carer Payment.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 6 - Coronavirus Supplement

Question reference number: SQ20-000405

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written.

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

Is the Government considering extending special benefit to visa holders who are stuck in Australia and currently ineligible for income support?

Answer:

The Government has announced changes that allow most temporary visa holders with work rights to access their Australian superannuation.

Emergency Relief is also available to people, including temporary visa holders, experiencing financial hardship.

Emergency Relief services are delivered by community organisations and help people to address immediate basic needs in times of crisis. The type of assistance offered by Emergency Relief providers may include food, clothing, vouchers, budgeting assistance and referral to other services. There are no citizenship or residency requirements to access Emergency Relief.

The Government continues to monitor the impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 7 - Coronavirus Supplement

Question reference number: SQ20-000406

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written.

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

Have you done any work on visa holders who are currently not able to access income support?

Answer:

The Department of Social Services regularly provides advice on a range of issues related to social security payments, including policy options, payment rates, cohort analysis and commentary on analysis undertaken by research and other organisations.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 8 - CDC

Question reference number: SQ20-000407

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

Why are existing Cashless Debit Card Recipients having the coronavirus supplement and \$750 stimulus payment quarantined on the card?

Answer:

The Coronavirus Supplement and Economic Support Payments are Income Support Payments eligible to be placed onto the Cashless Debit Card under the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999*, consistent with other eligible Income Support Payments.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 9 - CDC

Question reference number: SQ20-000408

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

How many staff are allocated to processing exit and wellbeing exemption forms and has that been reduced during the COVID crisis?

Answer:

As at 4 May 2020, the Department of Social Services has 21 staff involved in processing Cashless Debit Card exit applications. These staff have continued to work on processing exit applications throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Services Australia has 21 staff allocated for the exit application interviews with participants. Between 23 March and 15 April 2020, these staff were temporarily diverted to take calls on the Cashless Debit Card Hotline, following an increase in demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. These staff have now returned to conducting exit interviews.

Services Australia has 29 social workers trained and available to complete Cashless Debit Card Wellbeing Exemption assessments with participants. All social workers trained in completing these assessments continue to be available during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 10 - Recovery Phase

Question reference number: SQ20-000409

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

Are you looking at major reforms to the social security system?

Answer:

Any reforms to the social security system would be a decision for Government.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 11 - Recovery Phase

Question reference number: SQ20-000410

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

Do you expect the job market to return to how it was pre-covid in six months? If not, why has jobseeker only been increased for six months?

Answer:

The Government is closely monitoring the impact of the coronavirus outbreak to ensure it is responding to circumstances as they arise.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 12 - Recovery Phase

Question reference number: SQ20-000411

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

If the Jobseeker payment returned to \$40 a day how would you expect people to be able to keep up with mortgage payments or rent on \$40 a day?

Answer:

The \$550 Coronavirus Supplement is a temporary measure put in place to cushion the economic shock some households will experience as a result in the downturn in the economy from the coronavirus.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 13 - Youth Allowance

Question reference number: SQ20-000412

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

How many under 22 year olds who live away from home year olds and have lost their job, have received special benefit?

Answer:

As at 24 April 2020, there were 285 Special Benefit recipients aged under 22 years who were receiving an away from home payment rate.

Note that a person under 22 would not become eligible for Special Benefit if they are ineligible for Youth Allowance because of the Parental Income Test.

The Department of Social Services is not able to determine how many of these people are receiving payment because they have lost their job.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 17 - Domestic and Family Violence

Question reference number: SQ20-000416

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

Is the Department collating data regarding the incidence of DV during the COVID-crisis? If yes, what is that data showing and will it be made publicly available?

Answer:

The Department of Social Services is monitoring data collected by federally funded helplines who received additional funding under the \$150 Million COVID-19 domestic violence response package.

State and territories will be required to report back to the COAG Women's Safety Council on the impact of the pandemic in their jurisdictions.

Since the start of April to 4 May 2020, around 7 per cent of calls to 1800RESPECT have been specifically related to coronavirus. Callers identified the primary concerns were increased violence committed against them, increased fear of violence, and an inability to escape a violent person due to coronavirus restrictions.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 18 - Domestic and Family Violence

Question reference number: SQ20-000417

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

Where Federal funding is being distributed through the NPA with States and Territories, what oversight does the Federal government have over that distribution? Is the funding subject to explicit priorities or outcomes?

Answer:

Agreed outcomes, outputs and performance reporting requirements are set out in the National Partnership on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses (the Agreement), available online at:

www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/npa/community_services.aspx

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 19 - Domestic and Family Violence

Question reference number: SQ20-000418

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

What consultation is being done with frontline services regarding the impact of COVID-19?

Answer:

The Department of Social Services (the department) is using a number of mechanisms to consult with frontline services on the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on people experiencing violence.

The department recognises the coronavirus pandemic is placing additional pressure and demands on frontline services and has been regularly communicating with grant recipients including sending communications to providers. Information has been emailed directly to organisations and published on the DSS website available here: www.dss.gov.au/coronavirus. Funding Arrangement Managers have also been directly in contact with organisations regarding any specific assistance required and responding to questions.

The department also recognises the safety of people is the collective responsibility of Commonwealth and state and territory governments, and is monitoring the impact of the coronavirus pandemic nationally through the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) Women's Safety Council and its senior officials groups. These groups have been meeting regularly during the coronavirus pandemic to discuss the impact on service providers due to the increase in service demand and complexity during this period.

The department will continue to consult with grant recipients and state and territory governments on the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic to support frontline services to improve the safety of people during this period.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 20 - Domestic and Family Violence

Question reference number: SQ20-000419

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

The Community Services Ministers' communique from last week's meeting says "Flexible funding arrangements are being introduced for critical frontline services to enable them to meet increased demand and respond to changing business operation requirements." What are those funding arrangements?

Answer:

The Community Services Ministers meetings include Ministers from all jurisdictions, as well as the Commonwealth. Questions about actions being undertaken in states and territories to support flexible funding arrangements for service providers should be directed to state and territory Ministers.

The Department of Social Services (the department) is committed to being as flexible as possible to ensure that organisations can continue to operate. This includes not pursuing outstanding reports or acquittals. Where funded activities can no longer proceed or need to be adjusted, the department is working with providers and considers variations to grant agreements on a case by case basis. This could include allowing funds to be carried over into next financial year.

Where appropriate, departmental officers are also providing advice to service providers about accessing COVID-19 payments, such as Job Keeper or Job Seeker payments to support their staff.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 21 - Domestic and Family Violence

Question reference number: SQ20-000420

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

Applications for Safe Places Emergency Accommodation grants closed in February but no announcements have been made. Given the urgent need for additional crisis accommodation during COVID-19, when do you expect to announce the successful applicants?

Answer:

Applications for the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation grant opportunity are currently being assessed. Announcements of successful applicants will be made once funding decisions are finalised. Funding for successful projects is available over two years from 2020-21 to 2021-22.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 22 - Domestic and Family Violence

Question reference number: SQ20-000421

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

The initial \$32.5M committed by the Federal government was to prioritise crisis accommodation. Is there information about how many additional beds have been made available with the funding?

Answer:

States and Territories will provide the Commonwealth with a project plan outlining the intended outputs for the initial funding under the National Partnership on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses by 22 May 2020.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 23 - Domestic and Family Violence

Question reference number: SQ20-000422

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

The French government, and several Australian states, put in place arrangements for hotels to be used for crisis accommodation during COVID. Has DSS considered that option and what has been done to progress it?

Answer:

While the states and territory governments (states) are responsible for the provision of day-to-day housing and homelessness services, the Australian Government and the states are working together through the National Cabinet in response to the coronavirus.

This includes the Government providing \$32.5 million to states to immediately bolster frontline services, including crisis accommodation to protect those most at risk of domestic violence as a result of living changes enforced due to the coronavirus pandemic.

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Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 24 - Domestic and Family Violence

Question reference number: SQ20-000423

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

Women on temporary visas living in abusive households are particularly vulnerable during this crisis as they are often ineligible for income and accommodation support. Noting that Red Cross Safety Net funding is for one-off support for food and clothing, rather than income support or accommodation, what is the government doing to ensure these women and their children have the opportunity to escape abuse during the crisis?

Answer:

Certain temporary visa holders may be able to access Special Benefit if they are in financial hardship, including where they have experienced family and domestic violence. These visa holders include temporary partner visa holders (subclasses 309 and 820), temporary humanitarian visa holders (subclasses 785, 786, 790 and 449) and certain bridging visa holders (subclasses 060 and 070). Special Benefit is generally paid at the rate of the JobSeeker Payment, and attracts the Coronavirus Supplement.

The Australian Government announced a \$150 million Domestic Violence Support Package in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic to bolster family and domestic violence support services, which may include meeting additional demand, or to transition to remote servicing in light of health advice to stay home.

As an immediate response under the package, the Australian Government is providing \$32.5 million to states and territories to help meet urgent needs, in particular through the following areas:

- Safer housing and emergency accommodation,
- Counselling and outreach,
- Crisis support and helplines,

- Men's behaviour change programs and other perpetrators interventions,
- Assisting frontline services to manage the demand and explore new technology-based service delivery methods, and
- Responding to the unique challenges in regional, rural and remote locations.

Programs for CALD communities are included in the Commonwealth's additional COVID 19 response funding.

Responding to the impacts of the coronavirus outbreak is an ongoing priority for the Council of Australian Government (COAG) Women's Safety Council (the Council). The Council will continue monitoring the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and work together to allocate a further \$97.5 million over the next six months to wherever it is needed most.

In addition, the Australian Government has announced changes that allow most temporary visa holders with work rights to access their Australian superannuation, where eligible.

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Public Hearing – 30 April 2020
ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 - Written Question 25 - Domestic and Family Violence

Question reference number: SQ20-000424

Senator: Rachel Siewert

Type of Question: Written. Hansard Page/s:

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 08 May 2020

Question:

The government allocated \$20M towards increasing awareness and capacity of 1800 RESPECT and the Men's Referral Line. In answer to a question from Senator Paterson today, the Department confirmed \$15M had been allocated to an awareness campaign. Can you confirm how much funding will go to 1800RESPECT to meet increased demand likely to be generated through the campaign, and when the money will be received?

Answer:

Of the \$20 million, \$5.9 million has been allocated to meet additional 1800RESPECT demand. The Department of Social Services has commenced negotiating a grant agreement variation with Medibank Health Solutions for 2019-20 and 2020-21.