

# Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

## INQUIRY INTO CENTRELINK'S COMPLIANCE PROGRAM

### PUBLIC HEARING 3 OCTOBER 2019

#### ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

**Topic:** Abuse of Staff

**Question reference number:** QoN 10

**Member:** O'Neill and Siewert

**Type of question:** Hansard page 55-56

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 28 October 2019

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **Question:**

- a) Mr McNamara: I don't really think that's what the evidence was this morning, in terms of what the CPSU had to say. We encourage our staff to report any incidents. We treat customer aggression very seriously. In the compliance space, we have clear support and encouragement for people to actually report incidents. We're not interested in them completing a review and not worrying about the fact that the customer was overly verbally aggressive. We expect them to report such incidents. In the integrity space, one of the things that we've done in the last 12 months is start a program of increased training for our team leaders to essentially help with the mental health side of being in the compliance integrity space from what I'd say is a cumulative point of view.

Senator O'NEILL: The wearing-down factor, yes.

Mr McNamara: That factor has been very important. As a board, which Ms Musolino chairs, one of the priorities we've had is to increase team leaders' training to identify and support staff. If they had a bad call one day of the week, they may have been able to deal with it. But if it's the second or third call this week, or if there's something going on in their lives where they couldn't handle that call that day—

Senator O'NEILL: We heard a lot of evidence around this phenomenon in the first responders inquiry.

Mr McNamara: Yes. We're very focused on this, and we've initiated a significant amount of work and training. We can take it on notice to give you more details about that.

- b) CHAIR: Just to pick up, any more information you could give us specifically about training would be useful.

Mr McNamara: We'd be happy to provide more detail on that.

c) Senator O'NEILL: And if you have any training comparative between the privately provided staff, who, I understand, have the same training from Serco as those of the department but have churn, because of the insecure nature of their work, if you could provide a comparative of whether there is any difference in reporting of verbal abuse or physical abuse in those different contexts, or any other differentiation in service provision or rate of response.

**Answer:**

a) Team leaders, managers and staff in the Department of Human Services (the Department) have access to a broad range of training on workplace mental health and wellbeing. The Department's Service Skills Learning Program (the Program), which includes its Managing Aggressive Behaviour (customer aggression) training, also includes a suite of training on creating mentally healthy workplaces. The suite covers training on resilience, mental fitness, recognising and supporting the psychological health and wellbeing of staff and mental health first aid.

The Department has piloted a Managing for Team Wellbeing training program, delivered by a specialist provider. The pilot focused on developing team leader and manager skills to assist them to create a healthy, supportive workplace environment and to undertake effective conversations with their staff around stress, mental health and wellbeing. Given the success of this pilot, the Department will roll out similar training for team leaders and managers in the Integrity and Information Group during 2019-20.

b) All staff in service delivery roles complete customer aggression training to build their skills in preventing, de-escalating and responding safely to customer aggression incidents. The Department's Managing Aggressive Behaviour Training Standard (the training standard) outlines the customer aggression training that staff are required to complete. The training standard includes the Department's Your Safety—Managing Aggressive Behaviour courses. This training is part of the broader Service Skills Learning Program. The Program was introduced in October 2017 and replaced the Department's previous customer aggression training. The Program recognises the relationship between key communication skills, quality service and managing aggressive behaviour. De-escalation skills training and safety procedures are included as part of the Program. The Program includes courses pitched at various levels of capability and experience, covering new staff, experienced staff, team leaders and managers.

It is mandatory for all staff in service delivery roles, and their team leaders and managers, to complete the Department's Managing Aggressive Behaviour training. In addition, it is mandatory for team leaders and managers to complete a learning course focused on supporting staff in managing aggressive behaviour and managing staff health and wellbeing following incidents. Advanced customer aggression training is also available to staff, team leaders and managers through a panel of external providers.

c) The customer aggression training delivered to the Service Delivery Partners is the same as the training provided to departmental staff.

It is expected that the comparative information requested by Senator O'Neill will be provided by 6 December 2019, as agreed.