

# Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

## INQUIRY INTO CENTRELINK'S COMPLIANCE PROGRAM

PUBLIC HEARING 27 August 2021

### ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Social Services Portfolio  
Services Australia

**Topic:** JobKeeper Income Support debts – maximum debt

**Question reference number:** IQ21-000090

**Member:** Rachel Siewert

**Type of question:** Spoken. Hansard Page/s:

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 10 September 2021

#### **Question:**

Mr Birrer: They are a subset. So, of the 57,000, there have then been a number that have been concluded. Some have been concluded where there's been no overpayment identified. Some have been referred back to the Australian Taxation Office. Then, in relation to the 11,771, that's where the review's been completed, and, having taken into account all of the customer's circumstances and all of the income they were receiving, they've been identified as having been overpaid their social security entitlement, and so that overpayment has resulted in a debt. But there are other reviews that have been completed where an overpayment has not been identified.

CHAIR: Are there any further overpayments that have been identified since April, beyond the 11,771?

Mr Birrer: I'd need to take that on notice.

CHAIR: You could take on notice how many. What's the maximum debt that is owed? Mr

Birrer: I don't think I have that information, so I'll take that on notice.

CHAIR: Could you take that on notice: the maximum and the average, please.

Mr Birrer: The average debt is \$2,790. As you'd recall, at that point in time, with the coronavirus supplement [inaudible] the social security entitlement that many of our customers were receiving was of sort of a high order.

#### **Answer:**

Information as at 30 September 2021 was provided by Services Australia at the Supplementary Budget Estimates hearing of the Community Affairs Legislation Committee, held on 28 October 2021 (Hansard pages 68-69). Providing a maximum debt value may potentially identify an individual.

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PUBLIC HEARING 27 August 2021

### ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Social Services Portfolio  
Services Australia

**Topic:** JobKeeper related income support debts

**Question reference number: IQ21-000091**

**Member:** Rachel Siewert

**Type of question:** Spoken. Hansard Page/s:

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 10 September 2021

#### **Question:**

CHAIR: Thank you. You may not be able to tell me now, but are you able to break down the time that the bulk of those debts occurred? For example, we saw the stepdown in payments of JobSeeker. What people are saying to me about it being highly confusing is fairly obvious to begin with, because the payments were clearly above the earning threshold for JobSeeker. But as the payments were stepped down in September and then at the end of the year, are you able to break them down into the periods in which these debts occurred?

Mr Birrer: We'll take that on notice to see what we can do about the periods in which those customers were overpaid their income support payments as a result of not correctly reporting what their income was at those points in time. I note that throughout the JobKeeper program we were working very closely with our colleagues in the Australian Taxation Office in ensuring that there were communications to our customers. The ATO was also communicating through its own website that for the purposes of calculating somebody's income support payment entitlements they did need to report their JobKeeper payment that they received through their employer as part of their ordinary income.

#### **Answer:**

As at 2 August 2021, overpayments identified in the JobKeeper review activity related to periods preceding March 2020 through to periods post March 2021. Further breakdown of individual overpayments to identify amounts attributable to the reporting of JobKeeper income would be an unreasonable diversion of resources.

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## INQUIRY INTO CENTRELINK'S COMPLIANCE PROGRAM

PUBLIC HEARING 27 August 2021

### ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Social Services Portfolio  
Services Australia

**Topic:** JobKeeper related income support debts - by state

**Question reference number: IQ21-000104**

**Member:** Rachel Siewert

**Type of question:** Spoken. Hansard Page/s:

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 10 September 2021

#### **Question:**

CHAIR: If you could take that on notice, that would be appreciated. On what time frames were you interacting with the ATO? Was it on a real-time basis?

Mr Birrer: It was. We updated the data to ensure that we kept up to date. The data exchanged with the Australian Taxation Office, where we were checking people who were customers of income support payments against those who were registered by their employers as being eligible for JobKeeper, occurred between 18 May 2020 and 28 March 2021.

CHAIR: Thank you. Firstly, concerning debt pausing, are these debts also debts that are paused in areas in lockdown?

Mr Birrer: Yes, they are.

CHAIR: Secondly, are you able to break the debts down state by state?

Mr Birrer: Yes, we can.

#### **Answer:**

As at 20 August 2021, the jurisdictional breakdown of debts paused in areas of lockdown is as follows:

- 4,954 for customers in Victoria
- 2,932 for customers in New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory
- 2,374 for customers in Queensland.