



Community and Public Sector Union

Lisa Newman - CPSU Deputy National President

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
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Re: National Cancer Screening Register Bill 2016 and National Cancer Screening Register (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2016

Dear Committee Secretary

As the primary union representing Department of Human Services employees, the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is committed to providing a strong voice for our members in key public policy and political debates.

This submission represents the views of these members. We seek that the Committee consider this submission in its deliberations over the proposed National Cancer Screening Register Bill 2016 and National Cancer Screening Register (Consequential and Transitional Provisions) Bill 2016.

The CPSU's position on a national registry

CPSU members advise us that the current structure of the federal bowel screening register could be improved in a number of ways and their views should be sought prior to any decision about the future of screening in Australia.

The National Cancer Screening Register Bill proposes to bring together numerous bowel and breast cancer screening registers currently managed by federal and state government bodies as well as by some not-for-profit organisations. In principle, the CPSU and CPSU members support the creation of a national cancer screening register and organising body. However, the proposal that the government outsource the operations of such a register to Telstra Health with its registry located in Melbourne is not something that the CPSU supports for three reasons: efficient not for profit public operation, patient privacy and supporting regional jobs.

Why cancer screening should be publicly run

CPSU members have been at the forefront of supporting improved customer service for the Australian population through MyGov. CPSU members broadly supported the creation of one Department of Human Services (DHS) as well as the co-location of Medicare, Child Support and Centrelink. For example, the CPSU was the initiator of a national roundtable held in Canberra in 2007 where members of the welfare organisations, unions and DHS spent two days deliberating about ways to improve services to the community. At this roundtable one of the initiatives that the group resolved to put to Minister Ludwig at the time contributed to the formation of MyGov.

Specifically, the proposal then was to establish a process where members of the community could tell their story once to government rather than to multiple departments.

Further, DHS has a direct relationship with every single doctor in the country through the Medicare payment system. Medicare also has a relationship with hospitals and medical facilities which can become a conduit for an effective national cancer screening body.

Finally DHS currently operates the federal bowel screening registry in Hobart and Adelaide and therefore already has established structures that can easily be expanded to include other States.

Privacy matters

The Department of Human Services should be the body responsible for collating and maintaining vital health records of citizens. It was clear during the 2016 election that the public is nervous about large volumes of our medical records being held in private hands, and possibly even taken off shore. The only way to guarantee records are treated with the appropriate level of privacy is to retain them within the public service.

Location of the registry matters

This new National Cancer screening organisation proposed under the National Cancer Screening Register Bill 2016 is to be run by Telstra Health, with its operations based in Melbourne CBD. Currently the Federal Bowel Cancer register employs approximately 40 staff in Tasmania and 20 staff in Adelaide. These are predominately permanent employees with some non-ongoing and casual staff.

Since the Coalition came to power in 2013, approximately 500 positions have been removed from Tasmania. This large job cut in Tasmania has a significantly larger impact on the Tasmanian economy than if the same number of jobs was lost on the mainland. The reduction of these jobs in Hobart (and Adelaide with a similarly depressed economy) would be exacerbated by the flow on effect from decreased spending power in the local region.

Public sector jobs are critical for local economies. Many areas suffer from higher unemployment than the national average and have weaker job prospects. Public sector jobs often represent 'good' jobs in these regions valued highly by local communities, as they are more likely to be permanent with reasonable wages and conditions.

Rather than outsourcing the work to Telstra Health in Melbourne, DHS would be well-placed to operate the National Cancer Register out of Hobart and Adelaide creating long-term ongoing and sustainable work for Tasmanians and people in South Australia. The government has a unique opportunity to create a national cancer registry in Hobart and Adelaide. As the NBN rolls out a regionally based national register could be used to expand the statistical information for other illnesses. Further it would create the opportunity to have a broader complex array of job types in a regional location and not in Sydney, Melbourne or Canberra.

The employees to operate a national register in Hobart are already there. They simply need updated systems to facilitate the growth. CPSU members not only seek that the registry work remains regionally operated but also that it is not transferred into the private sector.

The CPSU is happy to provide information on the matters raised in this submission and supplementary information on other relevant issues.

For further information, please contact Osmond Chiu, Research Officer

Regards,

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Community and Public Sector Union