

Senate Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Attorney-General's Department

Hearing date: 16 August 2024

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David Shoebridge asked the following question:

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Rather than sort of poke and prod in the blind, why don't I ask both agencies to take on notice what, if any, exchange happened in relation to amica, and when any approaches were made and responded to? Also—and perhaps this matter is only in respect of AGs—could you give us a time line for as and when amica rolled out? Could I ask both agencies to take those things on notice?

Mr Fechner: Certainly.

Ms Priestly: Yes, we can take that on notice. I would just clarify that amica is developed and operated by the Legal Services Commission of South Australia, with funding support by the Commonwealth Government. So it's not a system that we run ourselves, but we provide funding support.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: And can you provide on notice what role, if any, Portable had or has in it, and whether there's any other third party that has an ongoing role in it?

Ms Priestly: We can take that on notice.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: And, just to be clear, it would be unfortunate if the answer was, 'I'm sorry, this is all a matter for South Australia,' because I can go straight on to your department's website and they are directing people directly to the amica website. And I would expect that, before that happened, there would be a knowledge inside the AGs department of what the entity is that people are being referred to. So it would be incredibly disappointing if the answer came back saying, 'This is a matter for South Australia.' I just want to put that on notice.

Mr Fechner: I was just going to add that one of the things that has happened over the last 12 months as well is that, through the Data and Digital Ministers meeting, there has been agreed, among all states and territories, a nationally consistent approach for the application of AI across Australian government entities. I would probably call out that there is always a little bit of a boundary condition about who is a government entity and what the contexts are. All of our guidance, for instance, goes to Commonwealth non-corporate entities, and the rest of the advice that we provide is only advisory in nature because there aren't the binding instruments.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: You see, it was my assumption that amica was a Commonwealth agency because its website is amica.gov.au.

Mr Fechner: If it is actually designated with a .gov.au domain, that can only be issued by the Commonwealth.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Yes, so I'm a bit confused as to how it's a South Australian entity.

Mr Fechner: The constructs of website domains—I can take it on notice—currently sits with the Department of Finance, for the domain naming service that sits there. But, if it's actually just .gov.au, it's associated with the Commonwealth entities, not the states or territories.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Ms Priestley, perhaps you can answer that riddle, on notice.

Ms Priestly: Yes, I'll take that on notice. Thanks, Senator.

The response to the question is as follows:

A grant agreement was executed in June 2017 between the Attorney-General's Department and the Legal Services Commission to provide seed funding to commence the design and delivery work of amica. The design was informed by the process and service delivery standards specified by the Digital Transformation Agency.

The Legal Services Commission of South Australia obtained information from the Digital Transformation Agency about domain name registration in 2019 and engaged with the available guidelines as part of deploying the .gov.au domain name. The Attorney-General's Department did not directly engage with the Digital Transformation Agency in relation to amica.

The use of the .gov.au domain name was agreed between the Legal Services Commission of South Australia and the Attorney-General's Department as it would provide credibility for users that the information is from a trusted source, not for commercial gain, and that the website would identify amica as being an initiative of National Legal Aid with support from the Australian Government.

amica was officially launched nationally on 30 June 2020.

Portable's current ongoing role in amica is contracted through a Service Level Agreement with the Legal Services Commission of South Australia as a development partner. No other third parties are contracted to this project.