

Chapter 1

Overview

1.1 The Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee (committee) examined the proposed 2018–19 additional expenditure for the Health Portfolio and the Social Services Portfolio (including the Department of Human Services) at public hearings held on 20 and 21 February 2019.

1.2 This report outlines the key issues considered by the committee during its examination of the proposed 2018–19 additional expenditure.

Referral of documents

1.3 The Senate referred the following documents to committees for examination and report:

- particulars of proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2019 [Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2018–2019];
- particulars of certain proposed additional expenditure in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2019 [Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2018–2019];
- particulars of proposed additional expenditure in relation to the Parliamentary Departments in respect of the year ending on 30 June 2019 [Appropriation (Parliamentary Departments Bill (No. 2) 2018–2019]; and
- the final budget outcome 2017–18 and the advances under the annual Appropriation Acts for 2017–18.¹

1.4 The Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements for 2018–19 were tabled in the Senate on 14 February 2019.²

Portfolio oversight

1.5 The committee is responsible for examining the proposed expenditure of the department and agencies within the Health Portfolio and the Social Services Portfolio (including the Department of Human Services).³

Hearings

1.6 The Senate resolved that the committee's Additional Budget estimates 2018–19 hearings would be held on 20 and 21 February 2019.⁴

1 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 140, 14 February 2019, p. 4962.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 140, 14 February 2019, p. 4963.

3 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 2, 31 August 2016, p. 75–76; *Journals of the Senate*, No. 84, 12 February 2018, p. 2668.

4 *Journals of the Senate*, No. 133, 29 November 2019, p. 4327.

Health Portfolio

1.7 At its hearing on 20 February 2019 hearing, the committee examined the outcomes of the Health Portfolio. Evidence was provided by Senator the Hon. Nigel Scullion, Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie and senior officers of the Health Portfolio led by the Secretary of the Department of Health, Ms Glenys Beauchamp PSM.⁵

Social Services Portfolio

1.8 At its hearing on 21 February 2019, the committee examined the outcomes of the Social Services Portfolio (including the Department of Human Services). Evidence was provided by Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield, Senator the Hon. David Fawcett and senior officers of the Social Services Portfolio led by the Secretary of the Department of Social Services, Ms Kathryn Campbell AO, CSC.⁶

1.9 During the later component of the hearing, evidence was provided by senior officers of the Department of Human Services led by the Secretary of that department, Ms Renée Leon PSM.⁷

1.10 A list of the departments and agencies which appeared at the committee's hearings is included at Appendix 1. A schedule of the committee's hearings is published on the committee's estimates webpage.⁸

1.11 The committee thanks the ministers and officers who provided evidence, and support for, the committee's hearings.

Procedural matters

1.12 During the hearings, there were occasions where departmental officers declined to provide information requested by the committee. At the start of each estimates hearing, officers at the hearing are reminded by the Committee Chair that:

...there are no areas in connection with the expenditure of public funds where a person has discretion to withhold details or explanations from the Parliament unless the Parliament has expressly provided otherwise.⁹

1.13 The underlying principle of this provision is that the Parliament has an overarching right to obtain information, in accordance with the powers provided to the Parliament by section 49 of the Constitution. The committee recognises that it is not always in the public interest to disclose information and, if needed, established processes exist for raising and determining claims of public interest immunity.

5 *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2019, pp. 1–4.

6 *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2019, pp. 1–3.

7 *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2019, pp. 1–3.

8 See https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/fadt/2018-19_Supplementary_Budget_Estimates.

9 *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2019, p. 4; *Committee Hansard*, 21 February 2019, p. 3.

Questions on notice

1.14 The Senate agreed that responses to questions taken on notice at the 2018–19 Additional Budget estimates hearings should be returned to committees no later than 29 March 2019.¹⁰ The committee agreed that senators should lodge their written questions with the committee secretariat no later than 1 March 2019 for referral to the relevant portfolio department for response.

1.15 Answers to questions on notice are published on the committee's estimates webpage on receipt.¹¹

Timeliness of answers from the 2018–19 Supplementary Budget estimates

1.16 Answers to the committee's 781 questions on notice from the 2018–19 Supplementary Budget estimates were due to be returned to the committee by 6 December 2018. Answers were provided as follows:

- Health Portfolio—of the 300 questions taken on notice, six answers were provided by the due date;
- Social Services Portfolio—responses to all of the 286 questions taken on notice were provided by the due date; and
- Department of Human Services—of the 195 questions taken on notice, 82 answers were provided on time.

Hansard transcripts

1.17 A verbatim record of the committee's hearings is made via the *Committee Hansard*.¹² The *Committee Hansard* is published on the estimates webpage.

1.18 References in this report are to the proof *Committee Hansard*. Pages numbers may vary between the proof and the final versions of the *Committee Hansard*.

10 *Journals of the Senate*, No 139, 13 February 2019, p. 4638.

11 See https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/ca.

12 The *Committee Hansard* is published online at: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/ca/2018-19_Additional_estimates.

