

Chapter 4

Social Services Portfolio

Department of Social Services

4.1 This chapter outlines key issues discussed during the 2014–2015 additional estimates hearings for the Social Services Portfolio.

4.2 The committee heard evidence from the Department of Social Services (department) on Thursday 26 and Friday 27 February 2015. Areas of the portfolio were called in the following order:

- Cross Outcomes/Corporate Matters/Grant Programs
- Housing
- Ageing and Aged Care
- Aged Care Quality Agency
- Disability and Carers
- National Disability Insurance Agency
- Families and Communities
- Social Security

Cross Outcomes/Corporate Matters/Grant Programs

4.3 Proceedings commenced with discussion on the department's grants processing and grants purchasing. As part of ongoing consideration of the grants process, the department explained the term and level of funding offered under each activity that was a part of the 2014 grants process.¹ The department tabled information at the hearing relating to grants including, executed new grants as at 26 February 2015, the profile of applications received for the open funding rounds and the outcomes of funding rounds undertaken in 2014.² The department undertook to take several questions on notice relating to the grants program.

4.4 The committee followed up from discussions from the previous Budget Estimates about the new accommodation of the department in Tuggeranong.³ The department has signed the agreement for the arrangements for the new building. In regards to parking at the new building, the committee was told that the developers will build a service road at the back of the property with 200 car parking spaces.⁴ This will

1 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, pp. 48-51.

2 Social Services Portfolio, Tabled documents and additional information, accessed 17 March 2015:
http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Senate_Estimates/clacctte/estimates/add1415/Social%20Services/index

3 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 71.

4 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 71.

be in addition to car parking available underneath the new building and existing non-affected car parking outside the existing property.⁵

Outcome 4 Housing

4.5 Senator McLucas asked the department how they calculate the amount allocated to Commonwealth Rent Assistance for private rentals beyond the current fiscal year.⁶ The department responded that Commonwealth Rent Assistance is not a primary payment, and that the payment is calculated by considering the individuals eligibility and access to a number of other payments including the aged pension, disability support pension, carer payment and other payments.⁷ In terms of a forecast, the department looks at what growth has been in the previous year, finding that over recent years the Commonwealth rent assistance has been exceeding those estimates.⁸

4.6 In response to a question about the work being done to respond to the increasing number of people who are living in rental stress, the department outlined that they monitor closely people's ability to pay their rent or their mortgage or to get a home loan in the first place.⁹

Outcome 3 Ageing and Aged Care

4.7 The department provided an overview for the committee on the establishment of the national severe behaviour response teams regarding dementia behavioural problems.¹⁰ The teams will have clinical experts who can provide advice and intervention for those displaying extreme levels of behavioural difficulties. The department explained that while the dementia behaviour management advisory services play a valuable role in the system now, they are directed at more general low level behaviours that might be experienced in residential care.¹¹

4.8 The severe behaviour teams will be able to respond on request to a provider who is having difficulty caring for someone who has very extreme behaviour.¹² The committee heard that the team would come into the home and 'work with the particular facility and resident to put in place strategies to manage the behaviours causing concern'¹³.

5 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 71.

6 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 77.

7 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 77.

8 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 77.

9 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 77.

10 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 85.

11 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 85.

12 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 86.

13 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 86.

4.9 The committee discussed the aged care service improvements and healthy ageing grants program. The committee heard that funding for the program was part of the grants round, with funding focused on service delivery.¹⁴

4.10 The committee heard evidence from the Aged Care Quality Agency regarding the Kepnock Grove Retirement Centre.¹⁵ The committee heard that the agency is currently conducting a review audit at the home prior to making a decision about the home's ongoing accreditation.¹⁶

Outcome 5 Disability and Carers

4.11 The committee discussed with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) people who have cognitive impairments who are caught up in the justice system.¹⁷ Mr David Bowen, Chief Executive Officer of the NDIA, outlined that in the Hunter trial site the NDIA works with custodial facilities 'when a person is being discharged back into the region [so] that preliminary work can happen around their eligibility [for the NDIS] and what supports can be provided'¹⁸.

4.12 The NDIA outlined that identifying people as they are coming out of the justice system tends to be on an individual basis. The NDIA is advised by the relevant authority of the discharge arrangements, after which the NDIA arranges to meet with the person and assess their eligibility.¹⁹ The NDIA is unable to determine the eligibility until the person is actually physically located in the trial site, but is able to complete all the preparatory work so 'when they are there, the supports can be quickly put in place'²⁰.

Outcome 2 Families and Communities

4.13 The committee heard evidence from the department on increasing the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in advocacy and policy development in regards to violence against women.²¹ The department explained that:

...[w]e have certainly taken the attitude in the development of the national plan and in the ongoing running and operation of the national plan that involving women is a huge benefit to developing projects and deliverables that really work. We would fully support the engagement of Indigenous women in projects and work.²²

14 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 90.

15 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 91.

16 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 92.

17 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 93.

18 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 94.

19 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 94.

20 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 94.

21 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 114.

22 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 115.

4.14 The department also has responsibility for the involvement of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, which has seen the department holding discussions across Australia to find out what their views are.²³

4.15 The committee heard evidence about the trends in the costs of child care and the Productivity Commission's report on child care and early childhood learning. Questions were asked about the recommendations made by the Productivity Commission in its report—some of these focussed on how the proposed changes may impact on children at risk and if the department has done any modelling on the cost of nannies.²⁴

4.16 When asked about the recommendation that child care subsidies for children at risk move from 100 per cent of the actual cost to the benchmark price and who will pay the difference the department said:

I do not know that the productivity [commission] makes a recommendation on who should pay that difference. I think they are suggesting the government subsidy should be the full cost of the benchmark price. It is open to interpretation whether the individual is expected to pay the difference or to shop around for care that is provided within the benchmark price. It is not clear.²⁵

Outcome 1 Social Security

4.17 Under this outcome the committee heard evidence from the department about the process by which a person can have their payments cancelled under the Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (Foreign Fighters) Bill 2014.²⁶ The committee heard that 'it is the Attorney-General who has that decision-making power about whether or not to issue a notice requiring cancellation of a person's payment'.²⁷ The Attorney-General issues that notice to the Minister for Social Services who then provides notice to the secretaries of the Department of Social Services and Department of Human Services (DHS). The Secretary of DHS, who is the delegate, will then cancel payments.²⁸

Senator Zed Seselja

Chair

23 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 115.

24 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 18-21, 23-24, 31.

25 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 27 February 2015, p. 31.

26 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 131.

27 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 131.

28 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 26 February 2015, p. 131.