

Chapter 4

Human Services Portfolio

Department of Human Services

4.1 This chapter contains the key issues discussed during the 2011-2012 additional estimates hearings for the Human Services portfolio.

4.2 The committee heard evidence from the department on Thursday 16 February 2012. Areas of the portfolio were called in the following order:

- Australian Hearing
- Medicare Australia
- Corporate
- Centrelink

Australian Hearing

4.3 The committee began proceedings by asking about the work being done to encourage people to use hearing aids that are being supplied to them.¹ Ms Michelle Clapham, Executive Manager of Clinical Practice, reported that Australian Hearing encourages all of its clients to talk to staff when they are uncertain about their hearing aids and that staff are trained to help with all basic management and questions. Clients are also surveyed every year, with results showing that 10 per cent of clients do not wear their hearing aids for more than one hour per day.²

Medicare Australia

4.4 Committee members asked an extensive series of questions relating to the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. Senators asked about the numbers of audits conducted of participants in the scheme and the outcomes of those audits. They queried the extent of non-compliance and the approach taken to the recovery of funds. Officers reported that while 540 audits are still ongoing, 89 audit processes have been closed.³ Of these cases, 26 were found to be compliant with the requirements of the scheme while 63 cases were noncompliant.⁴

1 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 86.

2 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 86.

3 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 88.

4 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 88.

Corporate

4.5 The committee questioned the department about a newspaper article that stated that the department spent \$2.5 million in taxi fares over the 2011-12 period.⁵ Officers explained that this was an estimate for the contract entered into by the department and that the number was the value for potential Cabcharge vouchers that could be purchased over two financial years, 2010-11 and 2011-12.⁶ The committee noted that after the two years it would be possible that the final figure could be lower than the original estimate.⁷

Centrelink

4.6 The committee asked the department about the role that staff have in relation to the set-top box rollout. Officers replied that they are assisting the Department of Broadband in identifying customers who are eligible and writing to those customers to indicate the period of eligibility to claim for a set-top box. The department added that it offers call centre support, and quality checks for customers on the services provided to them by installers.⁸

4.7 The committee sought an update on the role the department played during the recent floods in Queensland and Northern New South Wales. Ms Kathryn Campbell, Secretary of the Department of Human Services, reported that the Minister for Human Services visited the region and that the department delivered the Australian government disaster recovery payment, in location and through call centres.⁹

4.8 The department added that it had received 20 000 claims and that 15 851 of those claims had been processed totalling \$18.5 million.¹⁰ Officers reported that there was a greater awareness of the assistance available to the public after the flooding of 2011 and that claims were processed almost immediately.¹¹ Officers also added that as of yet there had been no fraudulent claims.¹²

Acknowledgement of Senator Judith Adams

4.9 The committee concluded its proceedings by acknowledging the absence of Senator Judith Adams, a member of the committee since July 2005, who was unable to attend the estimates hearing process for health reasons. The committee added that

5 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 103.

6 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 106.

7 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 107.

8 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 114.

9 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 123.

10 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 123.

11 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, pp. 123–124.

12 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 16 February 2012, p. 124.

her input and questioning during estimates had been missed. The department and officials also passed on their best regards.

