

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES - 14 FEBRUARY 2013 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Weekly Payments

Question reference number: HS 7

Senator: Siewert

Type of question: Hansard page 109

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Number of pages: 2

Question:

- a) Senator SIEWERT: I will start off with weekly payments. I know that we have had a bit of discussion about this before. I understand that there was a commitment and, knowing that sometimes people find it hard to make ends meet, in some instances you were going to weekly payments.

.....

Senator SIEWERT: How do people get onto the program?

Mr Sandison: They would normally engage with one of our officers. It might be that it is suggested to them by one of the officers. If they saw a person, a customer has come in to talk about some of their issues. It might be that they are vulnerable in relation to seeking extra payments or advances and that sort of thing, or the individual would know about weekly payments and might come in and ask specifically about them. Either way, it would be discussed with them and a decision made with the individual about moving to weekly payments.

Senator SIEWERT: There are no entry criteria? If you apply for it you can -

Mr Sandison: I would have to take on notice the extent to which there are vulnerability indicators and so on of what a person would discuss, but basically it is about the individual saying that they want to move onto it and having a discussion with the officer.

- b) Senator SIEWERT: Has that figure of 22,000 been fairly static or has it been increasing?

Mr Sandison: I think there has been a slow growth. I could give you two figures. One is at a point in time now and the other is a point in time 12 months ago. I can take that on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: That would be appreciated.

Answer:

- a) Weekly Payments are an option to consider when a customer advises, or it becomes apparent, that they are having difficulties budgeting their income support payment over a fortnightly period and are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless.

For the purposes of assessing whether weekly payments are the best service offer, the definition of most vulnerable is a person who:

- is homeless; or
- is at risk of homelessness and has issues of vulnerability and significant disadvantage and would benefit from receiving payments on a weekly basis; or
- has considerable difficulty in managing their finances for policy needs (as defined in *Social Security (Administration) Act* section 123) on a fortnightly basis and would benefit from receiving payments on a weekly basis.

These assessments are made by experienced Customer Service Advisors known as Authorised Weekly Payments Officers. Placing a customer on weekly payments can be instigated either by a customer request or it can be identified through any review of a customer's circumstances.

- b) Authorised Weekly Payments Officers take into account all of the circumstances of the individual when determining eligibility for weekly payment. As at 25 January 2013, there were 21,752 customers in receipt of weekly payments. This is an increase of 6,164 over the number of customers who were being paid weekly as at 27 January 2012, or a 28 per cent rise in that 12 month period.