

## **Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee**

### **ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES - 27 FEBRUARY 2014 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE**

#### **Department of Human Services**

**Topic:** Income Management

**Question reference number:** HS 20

**Senator:** Siewert

**Type of question:** written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 24 April 2014

**Number of pages:** 1

#### **Question:**

What is DHS doing to make exemptions to IM more accessible to people in remote communities? At present people have to call the income management line and there are no interpreters available on this line.

#### **Answer:**

As part of the changes to Income Management, implemented from 1 July 2013, departmental staff receive automatic reminders every eight weeks to discuss the exemption process with income managed customers. Training is provided to relevant staff to support the procedures for accessing and assessing exemptions.

The department uses a centralised team to assess exemptions over the phone. The financial vulnerability component of the assessment is sensitive and is not conducted in Service Centres due to risks to the privacy and confidentiality of customers, particularly in areas with smaller populations and close knit communities. A centralised phone service is also the most effective way to reach income managed customers in remote locations. When available, interpreter services are used to support the income management exemption discussions. If necessary, an appointment will be booked with an interpreter to undertake the discussion.

The department also provides information on exemptions through its remote servicing teams with the aid of interpreters, where available. Departmental agents are also located in some remote communities in the Northern Territory and are able to provide income managed customers with exemption information and assist them to access the Income Management Line to discuss an exemption.