

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

BUDGET ESTIMATES - 29 MAY 2012 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Access and Equity

Question reference number: HS 61

Senator: Di Natale

Type of question: Written

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Question:

- a) How does your Department ensure that the Government's Access and Equity Strategy is implemented in its entirety and in relation to all Departmental activities?
- b) How do you measure your success against Access and Equity goals? What evidence do you that the Department is actively implementing the Government's Access & Equity policy?
- c) How does your Department acknowledge the multicultural character of the Australian society, in terms of the services and programs you provide?
- d) What changes will you implement over the next financial year to ensure your programs and services are more accessible to CALD communities?
- e) What is your Department doing to ensure it has a culturally competent workforce?
- f) Does DHS provide cultural sensitivity training to its staff? If yes, how often is this training available, what are the materials used for such training and what are the evaluation methods used by DHS to assess the effectiveness of that training?

Answer:

- a) The department has a Multicultural Servicing Strategy and maintains the following programs and services in line with the Government's Access and Equity requirements.
 - 1) Engaging with the multicultural community:
 - Community consultation.
 - Community newsletter.
 - Multicultural Service Officer program and Multicultural Program Managers.
 - 2) Communicating with customers in their own language:
 - Interpreting services.
 - Multilingual Phone Services and the Translating and Interpreting Service.
 - Bilingual staff and multicultural recruitment.
 - Document translation services.

- 3) Customer information products in other languages.
- 4) Arrival and settlement services:
 - Refugee servicing and new arrival settlement support.
 - Multicultural services training and resources.
- b) Success and evidence concerning the department's Access and Equity activities include the following:
 - 1) Annual reporting under the Access and Equity Framework.
 - 2) Two relevant independent reviews:
 - an Ombudsman's Own Motion Investigation into the use of interpreters, report 03/2009, "Use of Interpreters – Australian Federal Police, Centrelink, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, DIAC" which reported that Centrelink was identified as generally meeting best practice; and
 - an ANAO performance audit (no. 42 2011-2012) into the department's *Management of the Multicultural Servicing Strategy for the Delivery of Centrelink Services*, which was tabled in Parliament on 18 June 2012. The audit viewed the department's ability to meet the requirements of the Government's Access and Equity strategy favourably.
- c) See answer to (a).
- d) The department has drafted a new Multicultural Servicing Strategy to reflect its wider responsibilities. The strategy outlines the areas the department will focus on over the next four years to ensure our services are more accessible to customers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- e) In 2011, the department launched the Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2011-15. The Strategy includes the development of plans to support the attraction, recruitment, employment, career development and retention of people from specific groups including people from a diverse cultural and linguistic background.

Other initiatives include:

 - 1) payment of Community Language Allowance to staff who use languages other than English during the course of their work;
 - 2) Cultural Awareness Training for staff who deliver services to Indigenous and Multicultural customers;
 - 3) an Employee Network on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity for all employees from diverse cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds or employees who have an interest in this area; and
 - 4) the department's national network of approximately 70 Multicultural Service Officers across Australia also play a role to ensure the cultural competency of our service delivery staff.
- f) The department maintains a number of formal learning resources to support the cultural competency of staff. Multicultural Service Officers deliver ongoing cultural competency training using a number of modes:
 - 1) one to one coaching;
 - 2) formal training sessions;
 - 3) at team meetings; and
 - 4) by having staff accompany them on community engagement activities.

The department is currently reviewing all training material related to multicultural servicing to ensure that it is up to date and relevant to all staff across the department.