

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

BUDGET ESTIMATES - 29 MAY 2012 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Portability of Income Support Payments

Question reference number: HS 9

Senator: Siewert

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Question:

a) Senator SIEWERT: I have a specific question which would normally come under Centrelink, but I will ask it and you can answer it where you think it is appropriate. I was discussing yesterday with FaHCSIA the issue around portability and the new requirements. I am not going to talk to you about the policy. What came up during those discussions was people needing to notify you when they go overseas when they are receiving allowances. Can you tell me what your notification rate is now? I am specifically thinking about FTBA payments et cetera rather than allowance payments.
Ms Campbell: It is unlikely we are going to have that information in detail for you tonight, Senator. I am looking around and they are saying no. We can take that on notice and get that for you.

b) Senator SIEWERT: I will ask for the allowances as well. What are the compliance rates, if that is the appropriate term, for notification when people travel overseas for allowances, pensions and FTBA? I bet you London to a brick there are a lot of people receiving FTBA and B that do not realise they should notify you when they are travelling overseas.

Ms Campbell: We do not have those numbers with us. We will have a look at those numbers and get back to you on notice, Senator.

Senator SIEWERT: Am I asking a silly question or do you collect that information?

Ms Campbell: It is not data that I am regularly reviewing in that regard. We will see whether it is data that we should be able to collect.

Senator SIEWERT: I understand that you data match with people who are travelling overseas, so you probably would have it. But, particularly for parents with family tax benefit A and B, do you take compliance measures if they have not told you that they have travelled overseas? I am asking about those two rather than for the pension, DSP and allowances. I specifically want to know about that measure.

Mr Sandison: We will put that together and give you a response in relation to that data.

Answer:

- a) The Department of Human Services does not collect data on the number of customers who notify of their travel outside Australia.

When a customer contacts to notify of travel, staff run the 'portability script' which is a workflow designed to assist them in making a determination on the customer's portability period.

There is an electronic datalink between the department and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) which transmits information regarding a customer's travel to and from Australia. The customer's departure and return is updated in real-time.

There is also a weekly data match that identifies customers who have travelled and have not yet been linked to DIAC via the datalink process.

These two processes ensure that a customer's travel is verified in real-time and their portability entitlement is assessed correctly – whether or not the customer actually advises the department of their travel.

Legally a customer is required to notify of an event that may have an impact on their entitlement (this is under sections 66A and 68 of the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1991*). If the travel outside Australia is not going to have any impact on their entitlement, there is no legal obligation to notify.

Portability rules are complex and the customer will not always be able to self-assess whether there will be an impact on their payment in order to determine if they are required to notify. For this reason, the department still encourages customers to advise of their travel as it is in their best interests to find out what may happen to their entitlements when they travel.

- b) The department conducts various compliance reviews for all payment types, including Family Tax Benefit A and B, based on customers' overseas travel and their circumstances relating to it. The reviews conducted by the department establish residency status and continued payability outside of Australia. As a result of data matching with DIAC, in 2010-11 2,753 FTB reviews were undertaken; in the 2011-12 financial year (to 31 March 2012), 3,133 FTB reviews were undertaken.