

# Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

## BUDGET ESTIMATES - 29 MAY 2012 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

### Human Services Portfolio

**Topic:** Computer Outages

**Question reference number:** HS 30

**Senator:** Boyce

**Type of question:** Written

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 27 July 2012

**Number of pages:** 2

**Question:**

- a) I am in receipt of documents that say the Medicare system was out of action due to maintenance, breakdown or upgrades for 43 hours and 27 minutes already this year. In regard to customers and vendors is that satisfactory in your view?
- b) What are the consequences for the public of this system unavailability?
- c) Why would system maintenance occur on a Friday or Saturday night which may be considered by some to be periods of intense calls on our health systems?
- d) What is the problem?
- e) How do you propose to fix it?
- f) How long would that take and how many more hours would the system be out of service?
- g) How much will it cost to rectify?

**Answer:**

The department's Medicare Program delivers high quality computer systems to Australians and external parties. Computer system upgrades are an essential part of improving the quality and availability of Medicare systems. Planned maintenance is performed at times which minimise impact to customers and external parties. Changes to Medicare systems are also performed in such a way as to minimise the number of systems which are unavailable at any given time.

- a) The department's Medicare Program systems were not available for the period quoted. The department places the highest priority on the restoration of external facing systems when unplanned events occur.
- b) The consequence of unavailability of systems varies on the system affected, the time and date of the outage and the nature of the outage. The department has safeguards in place against any adverse impact to the critical business systems should outages occur and business contingency plans to minimise external impacts.

- c) Planned outages are performed at times which represent the least possible impact to customers and external parties. System maintenance is not performed on Fridays and Saturdays as a general principle, but is subject to a determination of least impact.
- d) During planned maintenance activities, some systems are taken offline to allow ICT infrastructure and application upgrades and changes to be made. Some unplanned outages between January and April 2012 were a result of short-term computer system issues which are investigated as a high priority and corrected as part of a process of continuous improvement.
- e) Fixes to Medicare computer systems are part of the ongoing planned maintenance program. Where system issues are identified as having impact to systems, fixes and changes are planned and implemented during planned maintenance periods.
- f) The length of time for fixes and changes to Medicare computer systems vary depending on the nature and type of change required. A forward schedule of change is produced as part of the department's planned maintenance program, with communication of upcoming changes and impacts to customers, providers and third parties provided well in advance of these changes.
- g) Computer system fixes are performed via a combination of business as usual continuous improvement activities and as part of major system refreshes or major upgrades.