

## Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

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

#### Human Services Portfolio

**Topic:** Language and Cultural Competency

**Question reference number:** 98

**Senator:** Siewert

**Type of question:** Written

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

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **Question:**

- a) What budget is allocated to Centrelink in the Northern Territory for the utilization of interpreters in Aboriginal Languages? What percentage of this budget is utilized?
- b) What Northern Territory Aboriginal Languages are spoken by the staff of the Centrelink Indigenous Call Centre?
- c) Which Northern Territory Aboriginal languages are available for telephone interpreting in Centrelink?
- d) What Northern Territory Aboriginal languages are available for use on the Australia.gov.au website?
- e) What is the budget allocation for training of community based Centrelink Agents in the Northern Territory?

#### **Answer:**

- a) In 2011-12, the Department of Human Services allocated \$700,000 for Indigenous interpreters nationally. To date, expenditure indicates approximately 100 per cent of the allocation will be spent. The vast majority of Indigenous interpreting usage occurs in the Northern Territory. Usage of interpreters is not limited by budget allocation. The department treats the right to an interpreter as an access and equity issue and no customer is refused access due to budgetary requirements. In addition, there are a number of Indigenous staff in the Northern Territory that would use their community language when assisting customers.
- b) The Indigenous Call Centre is not a language specific call centre, but deals with Indigenous specific program issues. Language skills are only recorded if staff receive Community Language Allowance. Although Indigenous languages are recognised for the purposes of Community Language Allowance, there are none recorded for the Indigenous Call Centre.

- c) Indigenous interpreting services for the department in the Northern Territory are supplied by the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS). The AIS was not set up to provide telephone services but will assist where possible. In addition, the department has some limited capacity through contract interpreters in South Australia to provide a very limited telephone service in two languages, Pitjantjatjara and Arrernte, which are spoken widely in South Australia and parts of the Northern Territory.

It should be noted that a high percentage of callers to the Indigenous Call Centre do so from their community with assistance from the department's agents. These agents provide assistance to customers in language to help the department's Indigenous call staff to communicate effectively.

- d) Question transferred to the Australian Government Information Management Office.
- e) The Department of Human Services allocates \$120,000 per annum.