

## Chapter 2

# Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Portfolio

### Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

2.1 This chapter outlines key issues discussed during the 2013-2014 budget estimates hearings for the Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs portfolio.

2.2 The committee heard evidence from the department on Monday 3 June and Tuesday 4 June 2013. Areas of the portfolio and agencies were called in the following order:

- Cross Outcomes/Corporate Matters
- Social Security Appeals Tribunal
- Disability and Carers
- Seniors
- Women
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency
- Housing
- Families and Children
- Australian Institute of Family Studies
- Community Capability and the Vulnerable

#### *Cross Outcomes/Corporate Matters*<sup>1</sup>

2.3 Proceedings commenced with questions in relation to the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commissioner (ACNC). Senator Cash was interested in the relationship between the ACNC and the department. The department explained that their relationship is with the chief executive of the organisation, and outlined the role of the department in liaising with the ACNC.<sup>2</sup> Officers of the department explained that they had been working for some time with not-for-profit partners on improving efficiency, and as part of this established the program office in January 2013. The program office is currently in the process of bringing together all program related

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1 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 4.

2 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 5.

activities into the one place, and the department expects this to be mostly complete by August 2013.<sup>3</sup>

2.4 The discussion then moved to general staffing questions, with the department noting that:

our slight reductions in staff are masked by the fact that we are implementing the National Disability Insurance Scheme, and at present DisabilityCare Australia, the agency, is part of the department. At some stage it will separate from the department.<sup>4</sup>

2.5 Under this outcome there was also a discussion around the department's social media policy, staff misconduct, particularly in relation to computer use, and advertising and media. In relation to advertising and media, there was an extended discussion in relation to the DisabilityCare Australia campaign. The department explained that the focus of the campaign will be around raising awareness among people with a disability of both the new agency, and eligibility and access to the scheme.

2.6 The committee also discussed the rebranding of the NDIS to DisabilityCare Australia, including when the decision was made to change the name of the program, and who was responsible for the decision.<sup>5</sup> After discussing pay equity in the community sector in the aftermath of the SACS case,<sup>6</sup> the department took a range of questions relating to costs on notice.<sup>7</sup> Finally under cross outcomes the committee covered Freedom of Information Applications, employment demographics, performance payments, certain tenders put out by the department, and office locations.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT)***<sup>9</sup>

2.7 Officers of the SSAT outlined various aspects of the corporate operations of the SSAT, including staffing, hospitality spending, professional development and training, before moving onto a discussion of the caseload of the Tribunal, including the average length of cases, number of appeals, and trends. Officers of the SSAT noted an increase in cases appealing Centrelink decisions from 2007.<sup>10</sup>

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3 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 6.

4 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 6.

5 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 23.

6 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 19.

7 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 25–26.

8 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 26–29.

9 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 29–33.

10 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 31.

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2.8 The committee was interested to find out the number of appeals from indigenous persons to the SSAT. There was also a discussion of the steps taken to ensure information about the availability of review with the SSAT is understood by providers of services to indigenous persons, including through community education.<sup>11</sup> The committee also discussed various aspects of the membership of the tribunal, including the number of members, their qualifications, and appointments and reappointments.

### ***Disability and Carers***<sup>12</sup>

2.9 Outcome 5 began with a discussion around re-entry into the disability support pension (DSP), including issues around portability and impairment ratings or capacity ratings. The committee also asked about the number of claims and rejections for the DSP and reasons for rejections. After lunch, the committee asked for more clarification about assessment and eligibility for the DSP, including putting questions on notice in relation to a further breakdown of medical and non-medical reasons for rejections.<sup>13</sup> There was also an extended discussion about the effects of the review of the DSP impairment tables, including for people whose impairment is psychosocial, or who are under 35. The department noted that a report on the evaluation of the review of the impairment tables is due in 2014.<sup>14</sup>

2.10 The committee then asked about the PHAMS program and other programs in FaHCSIA, asking whether there is any overlap between these and the Partners in Recovery program run by the Department of Health and Ageing.<sup>15</sup> The department noted they had worked closely with the Department of Health and Ageing during the development of the Partners in Recovery program, and that while there may be an overlap in cohort between the two programs, the roles of the programs are different. Ms Farrelly explained the differences between the programs, notably that:

Partners in Recovery is targeted at a much smaller population of people who have high support needs and have very complex interagency needs so that they require support to navigate the system to actually unblock difficulties that go between a whole range of sectors. PHAMS is one-on-one personal support. A person who comes to PHAMS is severely affected by their mental illness but would probably be drawn from a broader population. Those people need support in a range of life areas. That personal helper or mentor can help them do an individual recovery plan and then work through their plan so that they can basically live with their mental illness or recover from it.<sup>16</sup>

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11 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 31.

12 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 33–81.

13 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 38.

14 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 42.

15 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 39.

16 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 39.

2.11 After a discussion of the numbers of people benefitting from the carer payment and carer supplement, the committee moved to questions around the Business Skills Wage Assessment Tool (BSWAT), which until recently was used by employers of people with a disability as a tool to determine wages. The department noted that the BSWAT is currently suspended as the High Court dismissed the Commonwealth's application to appeal the Full Federal Court decision disallowing the tool. The committee was interested to find out what is currently happening for people coming into an Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE), and what options were available to government in the absence of the BSWAT. The department explained that ADEs have their own enterprise agreements, over which the department neither has control nor collects data, and that these organisations are free to seek their own industrial advice. The Department noted, however, that Fair Work Australia have agreed that, as part of ADE assessments, it will not record non-conformities.<sup>17</sup> As the department was still in the processes of advising the government on alternative options, it declined to go into detail about these.

2.12 The committee then moved to a lengthy discussion over various aspects of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, which will formally transfer into the new agency, DisabilityCare Australia, on 1 July 2013.<sup>18</sup> The committee first discussed advocacy funding, and how funding outside of NDIS funding was to be made available for advocacy. The department explained that the National Disability Advocacy Program (NDAP), which is the existing Commonwealth program providing funding to organisations for advocacy, will continue, and that extra funds in Program 5.6 are going towards an external merits review process that will be managed through the NDAP by FaHCSIA (rather than DisabilityCare Australia) as an additional component.<sup>19</sup>

2.13 The department outlined both the external merits review process and internal review within DisabilityCare Australia. Ms Angus explained that the role of advocacy funded by the department in the external merits review process would be to support the person rather than legally advocate on their behalf.<sup>20</sup> In regards to internal review, funding for advocacy here would be through broader support for people in putting their plans together, within the agency. Once an internal review decision is appealed, advocacy support and the funding therein would come from outside the agency.

2.14 The committee also asked questions around the set-up of the new agency, including around the choice of Geelong as the site for the main headquarters, and the number of jobs in the Agency as at January 2014, compared to the anticipated number of positions required to support the Agency when it has been fully rolled out. The committee also clarified that the national and regional office in Geelong are being

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17 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 47.

18 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 48.

19 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 49.

20 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 50.

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kept separate, and discussed the spread of regional offices generally, including possibilities for co-location with other FaHCSIA or Human Services locations, IT requirements, and the potential for contracting some activities out to specialised organisations.

2.15 In relation to the Disability Care agency, the committee also discussed the following matters:

- Remuneration for the chair of the Board of the Agency;
- The skill set of Board Members;
- Funding for the Agency under the Medicare levy;<sup>21</sup>
- The progress of negotiations between the Commonwealth and Western Australia;<sup>22</sup>
- Rules around compensation payments;
- Research and consultation around the name of the Agency;
- Eligibility for the scheme;
- The communication campaign;
- Interaction with the aged care system and reforms;<sup>23</sup> and
- Early intervention for children with autism and other specific scenarios.

### *Seniors*<sup>24</sup>

2.16 Under this outcome the committee inquired into the additional funding included in the 2013-14 budget for the Broadband for Seniors program. The department outlined the aspects of the program which are being extended, which includes the provision of new computers for Broadband for Seniors Kiosks, and training for staff in the kiosks.

2.17 The committee also discussed the Housing Help for Seniors Pilot, asking the department to provide numbers of people expected to take-up the incentive, or be eligible, the eligibility requirements, interaction of the pilot with aged care services and reforms, and the cost of the program.<sup>25</sup> The department noted that other discussions around the mechanics of the pilot are ongoing.

2.18 The committee also discussed pension increases and the seniors work bonus.

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21 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 63–64.

22 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 65.

23 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 76–77.

24 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 81–85.

25 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 82.

## **Women**<sup>26</sup>

2.19 Under outcome 6 the committee asked questions about training programs run by the Office for Women for staff of other departments, as well as training for staff within the Office. The Office also tabled a document outlining programs and services delivered under outcome 6.

2.20 The committee then discussed the issue of gender balance on boards, including a recent publication on the issue, AICD board diversity scholarships, monitoring the number of women on boards;<sup>27</sup> Board Links and Ausgovboards (although the department noted that this initiative is headed by the Department of Finance).<sup>28</sup>

2.21 Other topics covered by the committee included:

- research and data from the Work Life Family survey;
- Activities around International Women's Day;
- The National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; and
- The COAG Reform Council and the COAG Select Council on Women's Issues.

## **Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA)**<sup>29</sup>

2.22 The WGEA discussed their experience of companies reporting to them under the new *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*, and the Agency's work on increasing the number of organisations identified as covered by the act. The committee also asked questions about representation of companies in implementation groups,<sup>30</sup> the Agency's IT system, and its education strategy, which is currently being finalised.

## **Housing**<sup>31</sup>

2.23 Discussion of Outcome 2 began with questions about the one year transitional agreement on the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. The committee was interested to find out why only a one year agreement had been signed.<sup>32</sup> In discussing funding, Senator Payne expressed disappointment that the department could not at the time break down the funding under the transitional agreement into the

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26 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 85–99.

27 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 87.

28 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 94.

29 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 92–94.

30 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 93.

31 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 99–124.

32 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 104.

funding committed by the Commonwealth and the funding committed by the states and territories for each jurisdiction.<sup>33</sup> The committee also discussed the competitive development fund under the transitional agreement, the work going into a longer term Agreement and the government's response to the Auditor-General's report into the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness.<sup>34</sup> The department noted the need to be clear about what is being funded through the different agreements, particularly in working on longer term responses to homelessness. The department also tabled a communique in relation to a meeting of the Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness and discussed the COAG Select Council on Housing and Homelessness meetings.

2.24 The committee also had questions about the Housing Payment Deduction Scheme and the Public Housing Tenants' Support Bill, before moving onto questions around the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS). The committee discussed issues in relation to the next rounds of the NRAS including linkage with the Livable Housing Design Guidelines and other aspects of the guidelines and selection criteria.<sup>35</sup> The committee also inquired into the number of incentives allocated to date under NRAS, internal review of the scheme, trading incentives,<sup>36</sup> and the impact of NRAS projects on local communities.<sup>37</sup>

2.25 On being informed that questions around affordable home ownership were the responsibility of Treasury portfolio, Senator Ludlam remarked that this is "the last bit of fragmentation in this portfolio, which is a shame".<sup>38</sup> The committee also had questions on social housing, as well as the use of Australian made building materials in projects receiving funding under the National Rental Affordability Scheme.<sup>39</sup>

### ***Families and Children***<sup>40</sup>

2.26 The committee commenced with questions around support for persons affected by past forced adoption practices included in the 2013-14 budget. The department noted that the funding is for support services and that FaHCSIA is now responsible for coordinating the whole of government approach.<sup>41</sup> The committee also inquired into the modelling used by the department to determine need for support

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33 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 99.

34 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, pp 101–102.

35 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 111.

36 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 121.

37 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 122.

38 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 115.

39 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 3 June 2013, p. 117.

40 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, pp 3–34.

41 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 4.

services, progress around setting up the working group,<sup>42</sup> and the interaction between the Commonwealth's approach and that of the states and territories.<sup>43</sup>

2.27 The committee then discussed support services related to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, including components of funding for support, and tenders for services. The department noted that its funding for support is not directed specifically to people giving evidence to the Commission, but for survivors generally, and that the Attorney-General's Department has responsibility for support for people giving evidence.<sup>44</sup>

2.28 There was a range of questions around the Family Support Program, and sub-programs under this. The committee was also interested in specific outreach programs in Western Australia,<sup>45</sup> and there was a wider discussion around the Vulnerable and Disadvantaged Client Access Strategy, including outreach to rural areas in Western Australia, indigenous communities, and the general aspects of the strategy.<sup>46</sup>

2.29 The committee also discussed the Family Tax Benefit, the Schoolkids Bonus, the Baby Bonus, Paid Parental Leave, Dad or Partner Pay, and the double orphan pension.

#### ***Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)***<sup>47</sup>

2.30 The AIFS explained that increases in the Institute's expenditure in 2012-13 are due to it being asked to establish the Australian Gambling Research Centre, and also growth in contracted research for the institute. The committee had questions for the Institute about its longitudinal studies, and the nature of the gambling research being undertaken, as well as research into forced adoptions, grandparents raising their grandchildren, Kinship care, and gay and lesbian families.

#### ***Community Capability and the Vulnerable***<sup>48</sup>

2.31 After specific questions about the funding for a range of projects under the Financial Management Program,<sup>49</sup> the committee moved to a discussion around financial counselling. The department noted that additional funding was included in the budget for additional counsellors to assist people affected by problem gambling, and that a drop off in funding for the Money Management Information and Education

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42 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 16.

43 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 17.

44 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 5.

45 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 18.

46 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 22.

47 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, pp 34–39.

48 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, pp 39–53.

49 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 39.



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program was due to funding being tied up in the income management program, the funding for which terminates in 2013-14. The committee was also interested in the rural financial counselling service,<sup>50</sup> and the work that the department is doing with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in this area. FaHCSIA officers noted that while the two departments are running separately managed programs, organisations may apply for funding for both more general financial counselling and the specific funding for a specialist rural financial counsellor. There is no formal arrangement between the departments at this stage but FaHCSIA is participating in the DAFF policy development process for this program.

2.32 The committee then moved to questions around measures directed to tackling problem gambling, beginning with a discussion about the National Gambling Regulator,<sup>51</sup> then moving to further discussion on the Australian Gambling Research and preparations for pre-commitment trials in the ACT.<sup>52</sup> Finally the committee asked for an update on income management, including on the matched savings scheme and options for when the BasicsCard ceases in 2015-16.

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50 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 43.

51 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 44.

52 *Proof Estimates Hansard*, 4 June 2013, p. 49.

