

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

BUDGET ESTIMATES – 5-6 JUNE 2014 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Centrelink Reviews and Appeals

Question reference number: HS 185

Senator: Cameron

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 25 July 2014

Number of pages: 3

Question:

- a) How many reviews are currently outstanding?
- b) Of these outstanding appeals, how many relate to the DSP?
- c) Please explain how answers to recent estimates concluded that there had been no increase in the level of appeals as a result of extensive policy changes?
- d) How many staff are undertaking reviews? What funding is spent on internal reviews?
- e) What is the longest wait time for completion of an appeal since 1 July 2013?
- f) What percentage of appeals are met within the current KPI?
- g) When will the Department of Human Services meet its target for review timeliness?
- h) From 1 July 2013 to 31 December 2013 how many and what percentage of internal reviews were affirmed, set aside, withdrawn or varied?
- i) From 1 July 2013 to 31 December 2013 in relation to DSP claims, how many and what percentage of internal reviews were affirmed, set aside, withdrawn or varied?
- j) From 1 July 2013 to date:
 - i) How many appeals have taken longer than six weeks to complete?
 - ii) What proportion of appeals took longer than six weeks to finalise?
 - iii) What was the average wait time to complete an appeal?
 - iv) How many, and what percentage of appeals took 4 weeks, 5 weeks, 10 weeks, 26 weeks, 52 weeks or more to finalise?

Answers:

- a) As at close of business Friday 13 June 2014, the department had 19,871 outstanding reviews.
- b) As at close of business Friday 13 June 2014, the department had 8,811 outstanding Disability Support Pension (DSP) reviews.

- c) In reference to Question on Notice HS12, the department analysed the total number of DSP review applications received by the department for financial years 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 (to 31 December 2013). It was found the department has not experienced an increase in the number of customers seeking to exercise their right of review against adverse DSP decisions. The number of DSP internal review applications, for the last three years, are now as follows:

	Disability Support Pension – Internal Review Applications
2011-12 Financial Year	23,730
2012-13 Financial Year	23,777
2013-14 (to 31 May 2014)	22,045

- d) As at 16 June 2014 the department had 225.7 staff identified as full-time equivalent (FTE) review officers (Authorised Review Officers). The department is unable to quantify all staff who undertake reviews as some functions such as review enquiries and quality checks are undertaken by staff who are not separately identified as review officers. The total funding attributed to internal review is unknown as a number of review officers hold dual or multiple positions, therefore review officers can complete a number of tasks, many not related to internal reviews.
- e) For internal review applications received by the department since 1 July 2013, the longest period of time an individual has had to wait for their review to be completed was 347 days. This review was lodged on 5 July 2013. The review was completed on 17 June 2014, at which time the age of this review was 347 days old. This review related to a Family Tax Benefit (FTB) decision and additional time was required to allow FTB reconciliation to occur. Where customers are identified as being in hardship, their reviews are prioritised and generally actioned within 14 days. Being in hardship is defined as having no income from any source, homeless or at risk of homelessness or otherwise in crisis.
- f) The current internal Key Performance Indicator is 75 percent of all internal reviews are completed within 35 days. As at 31 May 2014, the department was achieving 57.5 per cent of internal reviews completed within 35 days. There are a number of factors contributing to the current timeframes, these include:
- the current high level of reviews on hand, resulting in reviews sitting longer in the queue. The department remains focussed on reducing the number of reviews on hand;
 - a large proportion of the reviews on hand being older, more complex reviews that often take longer to complete; and
 - the mix of review types in the queue include a greater proportion that are more complex in nature and take more time to complete than less complex forward reviews.
- g) If the number of customers seeking a review remains constant, the department will meet its review timeliness in approximately 6 months.
- h) Internal review finalised from 1 July 2013 to 31 December 2013:

Affirmed	26,881	45%
Set Aside	15,240	26%
Withdrawn/Dismissed	12,038	20%
Varied	5,459	9%
TOTAL	59,618	100%

- i) Internal review finalised from 1 July 2013 to 31 December 2013 in relation to DSP claims:

Affirmed	4,825	65%
Set Aside	1,653	22%
Withdrawn/Dismissed	886	12%
Varied	107	1%
TOTAL	7,471	100%

- j) From 1 July 2013 to 31 May 2014:

- i) 45,090 internal reviews took longer than six weeks to finalise;
- ii) 40 percent of internal reviews took longer than six weeks to finalise;
- iii) the average wait to complete an internal review (average time to finalise) was 82.5 days; and
- iv) internal reviews by 'time to finalise' category:

0 – 4 weeks (0 to 28 days)	56,145	49.7%
4 – 5 weeks (29 to 35 days)	8,823	7.8%
5 – 10 weeks (36 to 70 days)	9,807	8.7%
10 – 26 weeks (71 to 182 days)	16,917	15.0%
26 – 52 weeks (183 to 365 days)	20,869	18.5%
> 52 weeks (more than 365 days)	519	0.5%