

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

BUDGET ESTIMATES – 3 JUNE 2015 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Aged Care – means testing

Question reference number: HS 28

Senator: Siewert

Type of question: Hansard pages 78 and 79

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 24 July 2015

Number of pages: 2

Question:

- a) Senator SIEWERT: Let us take out the quarterly review ones. Of the, say, 12,500 average, do you know how many of those have been incorrect?

Ms Golightly: What we do know is where we have had people raise an issue with us so we could take on notice how many of those have resulted in something being incorrect.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you take on notice how many per month and, in particular, in the last six months of last year?

Ms Golightly: The last six months of the calendar year?

Senator SIEWERT: Yes, of 2014.

Ms Golightly: Certainly.

- b) Senator SIEWERT: How many staff are dealing with this issue of just the means testing? It is a huge task.

Mr Storen: When you say 'dealing with the issue'?

Senator SIEWERT: How many are engaged in the process of addressing this particular issue of the means testing process? Do you still have to do it manually?

Ms Golightly: No. Maybe if we could clarify it, the means test assessments are done as part of our normal business. We do them for all sorts of payments, including age pension, for example, as well as for aged care. If your question is how many people are dealing with complaints or queries we receive, we could get that for you again on notice.

Senator SIEWERT: Because the aged care means testing is now part of the normal process, can you separate out the number of people who are dealing just with the aged care means testing process?

Ms Golightly: We might be able to. I will take that on notice.

- c) Senator SIEWERT: If you can take that on notice, that would be appreciated. Do you keep the details of means testing for those that are eligible for home care packages separately, or is it all dealt with as one?

Mr Storen: The processing is part of the same processes we do for residential.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay, so you cannot provide me with breakdown figures on what is home care?

Ms Golightly: We might be able to give you a rough split, because we know roughly the size of home care program compared to residential care, but that would be sort of a rough proportional estimate.

d) Senator SIEWERT: Can you provide the number that are means tested?

Ms Golightly: We can probably—

Senator SIEWERT: But you do the mean test assessment?

Ms Golightly: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Okay, that would be appreciated, thank you. [Page 79]

Answer:

a) Between July 2014 and September 2014 approximately 20 per cent of means testing letters required manual intervention. As at June 2015 this is now less than 1.5 per cent.

The department has made significant improvements to our systems to resolve the issues that were experienced with means testing letters, and as soon as issues were identified in 2014 implemented additional processes to ensure letters are correct. Where incorrect system letters are identified, a manual letter is issued to replace the system generated letter so the customer does not receive the incorrect letter. There will be exceptions due to the manual nature of generating these letters where an error can occur.

b) The degree of manual work increases with the complexity of the case. The department's workforce moves in line with peak demand and staff are trained across different processes and programmes administered by DHS and, as a result, the number of staff undertaking means test processing varies daily.

c) and d) For the period 1 July 2014 to 14 June 2015, the department conducted 26,099 means test assessments for people considering taking out a home care package and 81,185 means test assessments for people considering entering residential aged care.