

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

BUDGET ESTIMATES – 3 JUNE 2015 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Child Support Programme

Question reference number: HS 52

Senator: Cameron

Type of question: Written

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

Number of pages: 3

Question:

- a) How many child support cases are currently in the child support scheme (registered/enforced maintenance liabilities)?
- b) Can you provide a breakdown of child support payers by gender?
- c) How many child support assessments were undertaken in 2014-15?
- d) How many child support agreements were finalised in 2014-15?
- e) How many court orders/agreements were breached in 2014-15?
- f) What is the average period of time taken to finalise a child support agreement?
- g) What is the average period of time taken to undertake an assessment?
- h) What is the longest period of time taken to finalise a child support agreement?
- i) How many payments were suspended to payees in 2014-15?
- j) How many payments that had been previously suspended were resumed by the Registrar in 2014-15?
- k) For those owing child support payments/who have breached agreements and court orders:
 - i) Can you provide a breakdown by location?
 - ii) Can you provide a breakdown by income level?
- l) For those payers not complying with their agreements, what are the main reasons for non-compliance?
- m) How many 'top up' payments were requested by the Registrar in 2014-15?
- n) How many claims of overpayment against the payee to recover overpaid child support were made in 2014-15 including:
 - i) where there was a registered maintenance liability; and
 - ii) where there was no-registered maintenance liability?
- o) How many cases where ongoing entitlement to child support has ended, did the Registrar will seek to recover the debt from the payee and refund any amounts to the payer?

Answer:

a) As of 31 May 2015, the total current caseload is around 837,000.

Note: this number includes only cases that are active (current) and not ended.

b) Numbers current as at 31 May 2015:

Gender	Customer Count
Female	104,000
Male	642,000
Unknown	18,000
Total	764,000

Notes: 1) Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand.

2) There are a greater number of cases (caseload) compared to customer count because some paying parents have more than one case.

3) The 'unknown' category represents cases where gender is not been recorded.

c) The department interprets this to mean applications taken and processed.

During the period 1 July 2014 to 31 May 2015, approximately 60,000 applications were taken and processed.

d) During the period 1 July 2014 to 31 May 2015, 1,794 child support agreements were finalised (processed as accepted).

e) The department does not collect this data. The department becomes aware of breaches in limited instances, such as when the customer self discloses. The contravention of a court order that specifies care arrangements is a family law matter.

f) During the period 1 July 2014 to 31 May 2015, the average time taken to process an application to accept a child support agreement was 4.5 days.

g) During the period 1 July 2014 to 31 May 2015, the average time taken to process an application for an administrative assessment was 10.6 days.

h) During the period 1 July 2014 to 31 May 2015, the longest time taken to process a child support agreement was 322 days. This was a processing delay that had no effect on the customers complying with the terms of their agreement.

i) The department can suspend payments:

- when satisfied that the parents of a child support case have reconciled. In these circumstances, a "suspension determination" will stop the raising of a child support liability;
- when the paying parent applies to court for a section 107 declaration that they are not the parent of the child (s79A);
- if the payer objects or later applies to the AAT about the decision to accept the application for assessment, where the claim is not about parentage – this includes, for example, where the residency of the paying parent is in dispute or where the eligibility of the receiving parent or child is in dispute (section 79B); and
- if the court makes a Stay Order that has the effect of temporarily suspending the disbursement of child support to a receiving parent.

This information is not able to be readily extracted from the child support system and would require manual interrogation of individual cases and IT changes. Providing this information would be an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.

- j) As with suspended payments/disbursements, data on payment/disbursement resumption is also not readily available and would require the diversion of resources and an IT change.
- k) The department does not collect this data.
- l) The department does not collect this data.
- m) During the period 1 July 2014 to 31 May 2015, the department applied a top-up credit on 30,067 occasions. A top up credit describes the process of using money from consolidated revenue to pay a child support liability after the employer advises that a deduction has been made from the paying parent's wages but was not forwarded to the department on time.
- n)
 - i) During the period 1 July 2014 to 31 May 2015, 44,886 new overpayments were reported where there was a registered maintenance liability. Note: some payees may have incurred more than one overpayment during this period.
 - ii) The department cannot recover overpayments that occur when there is no registered maintenance liability because they are not debts due to the Commonwealth under Section 79 of the *Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988*. A paying parent would need to seek an order from a court and recover any monies privately if a child support case was registered and subsequently cancelled. The department has no visibility of when this occurs and therefore does not collect this data.
- o) As at 31 May 2015, 47,219 debts remain on payees' accounts, requiring recovery, where the case has ended.