

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

SUPPLEMENTARY BUDGET ESTIMATES - 20 OCTOBER 2011 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Department of Human Services career opportunities, services and investment in regional areas.

Question reference number: HSW 5

Senator: Williams

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 9 December 2011

Number of pages: 1

Question:

Throughout the history of Medicare, Centrelink and now the Department of Human Services, funding for the development and placement of new roles, teams and specialist positions has continually been centred within the Capital Cities, particularly Canberra. Country and Regional areas, except for process type work have largely been ignored. This has been to the detriment of those rural and regional communities in a number of ways. The ability to retain youth within these communities has been eroded due to lack of quality employment opportunities. These communities have become degraded due to the lack of financial investment through infrastructure development and service expansion by the Australian public service.

- a) What plans do you have to provide further funding to allow people in country and regional areas to take up career opportunities within the Department for Human Services?
- b) What existing strategies do you have with regard to allocation of funding to provide further services and alternatively career opportunities and financial investment into country and regional centres?

Answer:

The department is already a major employer in many regional, rural and remote areas, providing fulfilling and meaningful careers. The decision to locate many call centres in regional areas was to create employment opportunities outside of the major cities. As at 31 October 2011, the Department of Human Services had 9,820 staff located outside major cities, representing over 25 per cent of its total workforce.

There is no specific funding or strategy to increase (or decrease) this ratio. The department's strategic focus will continue to be based on the ability to sustain a workforce that provides high quality services to its customers, in ways and locations that best meet their needs.