

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES - 18 OCTOBER 2012 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Material in Aboriginal languages

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Senator: Siewert

Type of question: Written question

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Question:

The DHS website states “We are committed to helping people access information and services in their language”. What steps are DHS taking to make its materials accessible in Northern Territory Aboriginal languages, noting that information is not available in Northern Territory Aboriginal languages on the Australia.gov.au website and information in approximately 52 non-Indigenous languages is available?

Answer:

Products translated into Indigenous languages in the past have generally had little success. This is mainly because Indigenous languages are traditionally oral and many Indigenous customers do not read and write in their traditional language. Research undertaken by the Department of Human Services in September 2011 indicates that Indigenous customers with language barriers prefer face-to-face communication and calling to speak to one of our staff members.

The Department has a network of Indigenous servicing staff and access points to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through their preferred contact channels across Australia.

These services include:

- Indigenous Service Unit Managers – focus on the delivery of services that affect Indigenous customers and communities;
- Indigenous Specialist Officers – facilitate communication between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers and the Department;
- Indigenous Customer Service Advisers– provide one-on-one individual customer service to Indigenous customers;
- Indigenous Call Centres – four Indigenous Call Centres answer around 350,000 calls annually - these are located in Palmerston (NT), Cairns (QLD), Bunbury (WA) and Port Macquarie (NSW);
- Remote Servicing Teams – travel to rural and remote areas throughout Australia to provide services to Indigenous customers who do not have direct access to the Department’s programs and services due to their location;

- Remote Area Service Centres – small offices located in remote areas which serve mostly Indigenous customers and are generally staffed by local people;
- DHS Agents and Access Points – community organisations contracted by the department. In northern Australia these offices mostly employ local Indigenous people; and
- Indigenous Interpreter service.

In addition to these services, the Department of Human Services is currently undertaking a trial of talking albums in the Northern Territory and North Queensland. The albums include messages recorded into Indigenous languages specific to the region where the product is used.

When communicating a measure that has a significant impact on Indigenous audiences, such as Income Management, the Department uses translated DVDs. The Department currently offer DVDs in the following Indigenous languages:

- Arrernte;
- Anmatyerre;
- Alyawarre;
- Anindilyakwa;
- Burarra;
- Dhangu;
- Dhual;
- Gurrindji;
- Kriol (Kimberley dialect);
- Kriol (NT dialect);
- Kunwinjku;
- Luritja;
- Murrin Patha;
- Northern Kriol;
- Pitjantjatjara;
- Tiwi;
- Walpiri;
- Warumungu;
- Western Arrente;
- Wik-Mungkan;
- Yankunytjatjara; and
- Yolngu Matha.