

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

SUPPLEMENTARY ESTIMATES - 21 NOVEMBER 2013 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Centrepay – Independent Review

Question reference number: HS 64

Senator: Siewert

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 24 January 2014

Number of pages: 2

Question:

- a) What has been the department's response to the Independent Review of Centrepay, which has been welcomed by groups like the National Welfare Rights Network and the Financial Counsellors Australia? Can you provide a response to the recommendations made by the consultant?
- b) In the past 12 months, how many complaints have been lodged about Centrepay?
- c) How many people access Centrepay currently?
- d) How many businesses currently operate through Centrepay?
- e) In the last 12 months, how many businesses have had their contracts with Centrepay cancelled?

Answer:

- a) The department supports, in principle, eight of the ten key recommendations in the Report on the Independent Review of Centrepay.

There are a range of activities being delivered in the 2013–14 financial year in response to the review. These activities focus on improving services for customers and ensuring the service providers participating in the Centrepay programme understand their contractual obligations and are compliant.

Thus far the department has:

- implemented agreements with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Australian Energy Regulator for the exchange of information; and
- provided additional resources to undertake more compliance reviews of participating service providers.

The department is currently:

- developing a new deduction statement for customers to help them better understand and control their deductions; and
- providing additional details about deductions through the customer's account in the online services channel;

- updating customer feedback mechanisms to ensure prompt and relevant responses by the department;
 - reviewing the Centrepay policy, service streams and risk profiles, including the process by which businesses apply to join Centrepay. Linked to this will be a review of the contract and compliance framework; and
 - developing a communication strategy to provide information, education and promotion to customers, businesses, organisations, stakeholders and staff.
- b) In the period 1 December 2012 to 30 November 2013 there were 126 complaints lodged about Centrepay.
- c) The number of customers using Centrepay on 30 November 2013 was 605,073.
- d) The number of registered participating organisations receiving at least one Centrepay deduction on 30 November 2013 was 13,707.
- e) In the period 1 December 2012 to 30 November 2013 there were 10 Centrepay contracts cancelled.