

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018

Outcome 1 - Employment

Department of Employment Question No. EMSQ17-004207

Senator Kakoschke-Moore provided in writing.

Question

Job seekers and jobactive providers

1. When a job-seeker misses an appointment or activity, is it correct that there is meant to be a two-stage process before a penalty is applied: first, the job agency is required to make an attempt to make contact with the job-seeker; second, after this, Centrelink's Participation Team is required to attempt to make contact with the job-seeker?
2. How often do either of these happen, before a job-seeker is penalised, and how much change has there been over the years in how often this process is followed?
3. What constitutes an attempt to make contact?

Answer

1. Providers are required to attempt to contact job seekers when they become aware of the non-attendance in order to discuss the reasons for the non-attendance. Regardless of whether the provider can contact the job seeker, the provider will need to determine the best strategy to re-engage the job seeker. To assist in determining what re-engagement strategy to use following non-attendance, providers must consider the job seeker's explanation for non-attendance or non-compliance (if contact with the job seeker was successful) and their personal circumstances. Where the job seeker does not have a Reasonable Excuse, and based on the information provided by the job seeker, providers may decide it is appropriate to use the job seeker compliance framework and submit either:

- a No Show No Pay (NSNP) Participation Report (PR) for a missed activity; or
- a Non-Attendance Report (NAR) for a missed provider appointment.

The NSNP PR is then sent through the department's IT system to Department of Human Services (DHS). Job seekers will not receive their next income support payment instalment until they make contact with DHS to discuss the reported non-compliance. No penalty decision will be made until DHS talks to the job seeker and makes a determination as to whether a failure is to be applied or the job seeker has a reasonable excuse for the non-attendance.

Outbound phone contact attempts are still a part of the DHS model wherever it is feasible to do so. DHS also rely on SMS to assist in generating more immediate contact from recipients during business hours. These messages are in addition to those sent by the job seeker's provider.

Alternatively, if a NAR is sent through the department's IT system to DHS, DHS completes a validity check and suspends the job seeker's payment. A NAR cannot result in a penalty and the job seeker does not need to discuss the non-attendance with DHS

at this time. The job seeker is sent a message informing the job seeker that their payment has been suspended and they must contact their provider.

When the job seeker contacts their provider, the provider will come to a view on whether the job seeker had a reasonable excuse. If they do not believe the job seeker had a reasonable excuse and they want to recommend a financial penalty, they will complete and submit a Provider Appointment Report to DHS and advise the job seeker that they must discuss the non-attendance with DHS. The provider will also arrange a re-engagement appointment, and the job seeker's payment will remain suspended until they attend.

DHS will make a determination on the reported non-attendance when the job seeker makes contact with them, the job seeker will not receive their next instalment until they have attended their re-engagement appointment and discussed the report with DHS.

2. Prior to a job seeker incurring any penalty for non-attendance at an appointment or activity, the provider must have attempted to contact the job seeker once on the day they became aware of the non-attendance. This is a contractual requirement that providers must follow and has remained a consistent element of the job seeker compliance framework from Job Services Australia to jobactive.

Similarly, prior to any penalty being applied for non-attendance at an appointment or activity, DHS must speak with the job seeker about each non-attendance. This process has not changed and is followed each time DHS investigate non-attendance at an appointment or activity and apply a penalty.

3. Depending on the contact details available for the job seeker, an attempt to contact may be a phone call or e-mail on the day the provider becomes aware of the non-attendance.