

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
BUDGET ESTIMATES 2014

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Australian Public Service Commission

Outcome/Program: 1.1

Topic: Employee Assistance Programme data

Senator: Lundy

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Question:

Senator LUNDY: Has there been any monitoring of the use of employee assistance programs, particularly in relation to concerns over job security?—which I am sure you could appreciate would be at the forefront of most people's minds.

Mr Sedgwick: We will check, and we will correct the record if my memory is wrong here. Every year we do a survey of agencies. It helps to inform the State of the Service report, which we tabled in the parliament late in the year. One of the areas we asked agencies about in that survey is their use of things like an employee assistance program. We can take on notice how detailed that is, if you like, but it is annual data.

Senator LUNDY: Is it produced each financial year and then reported post-financial year—is that the cycle?

Mr Sedgwick: The data is financial year. To the extent that it is reported, and we may or may not, it would be in the State of the service report, which is tabled at the end of November or early December.

Senator LUNDY: Say you do not have a monthly monitoring role of the use of those programs?

Mr Sedgwick: No.

Senator LUNDY: Do you think that might be a good idea, given the concern that is in the Public Service at the moment? That is promoted, I am sure, as being an available source of support and advice.

Mr Sedgwick: Every agency—that I am aware of, at least—has such an instrument. They are typically uncapped, so they are demand driven. If the employees wish to use them, then they are available to do it. Collecting data is not costless and we have not been collecting—

Senator LUNDY: But I was hoping that I would not have to include it in my questions on notice for all agencies and departments, which I am happy to do. I thought you could foreshorten that process for me.

Mr Sedgwick: Not at this stage. At the moment, we are troubling agencies for quite a bit of data.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: Doesn't the employee assistance program report?

Mr Sedgwick: The employee assistance programs are contracted by each agency.

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: But doesn't it provide a generic report to each agency?

Mr Sedgwick: They would be providing reports to their agency, yes, which is why the agency—

Senator JACINTA COLLINS: I think some of the substance that Senator Lundy is looking for would be in those reports.

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Mr Sedgwick: It should be, yes.

Senator LUNDY: There is no reason why this committee should wait till the State of the service report for that information to be collated, surely.

Mr Sedgwick: The reports will be in different formats. The formats will have been devised by the agencies, reflecting their needs. It is not actually a simple matter to collect consistent data across the service. We do ask questions about the use of employee assistance programs. We will take it on notice to tell you what they are; we just do not have that with this. We will be happy to give you the data when we have it, if you like, but I do not think we will have it at the level of disaggregation that you are looking for.

Answer:

Has there been any monitoring of the use of EAP?

The Commission does not routinely ask agencies about the use of EAP.

In April 2014, the Commission conducted a survey of APS agencies as part of another project that included questions about the use of EAP. A total of 51 APS agencies responded to this survey. A summary of findings related to EAP use is provided below:

- An average of 8% of FTE of the participating agencies accessed EAP services.
- The most commonly cited issues raised by employees were personal reasons (either health or other) the next most common issues were conflict with either one's manager/supervisor or a colleague.
- 65% of agencies receive reports from their EAP to their Executive.