

Human Services Portfolio

5.1 The Committee took evidence from the Department of Human Services and agencies on Tuesday 13 February 2007 and Friday 16 February 2007.

Department of Human Services and agencies

5.2 The Committee examined the department together with Centrelink and Medicare Australia. The examination focused mainly upon the proposed access card.

Department of Human Services

5.3 The Committee spent considerable time examining general aspects of the access card initiative. Due to rules of the Senate, senators were prohibited from asking questions going to the detail of the provisions of the bill for this measure which had been referred to the Committee for separate inquiry,¹ but instead addressed general issues including:

- IT requirements for the card;
- Costs of the proposed card;
- The tender processes for the card;
- Integration of the card with Queensland's proposed enhanced drivers license;
- Registration for the card;
- The Access Card data-base; and
- Card readers.

Centrelink

5.4 The Committee's discussion of issues relating to the access card continued through its examination of Centrelink. In addition, the agency's IT arrangements and Job Capacity Assessments (JCAs) were explored at length.

5.5 Other issues raised by members of the Committee and other senators in attendance included:

- Integration of IT services between the department and its agencies;
- Customer call time statistics;
- Victorian Police and Centrelink's initiative to target 'cash economy' drivers;
- Optical surveillance;
- Assaults on Centrelink staff;

1 See advice of the Clerk of the Senate, 14 February 2006.

- Privacy breaches by Centrelink staff;
- Financial case management; and
- Accessibility of JCA sites.

Medicare Australia

5.6 During a relatively brief examination of Medicare Australia, the Committee discussed electronic Medicare claiming.

Acknowledgements

5.7 The Committee expresses its appreciation of the service provided by the secretariat, broadcasting and transcription services provided by the Department of Parliamentary Services and the service provided by the Black Rod's Office and Committee room attendants in preparing the rooms and providing refreshments for members and witnesses during the hearing.

5.8 The Committee also wishes to thank all ministers and departmental and agency officers for their assistance.

Next hearings—Budget estimates 2007-08

5.9 By resolution of the Senate, the Committee is scheduled to consider the budget estimates for the 2007-08 financial year from Monday 21 May through to Friday 1 June 2007.

5.10 While the Committee endeavours to follow the usual convention relating to the order of appearance of witnesses, it reminds ministers, departments and agencies that they need to be prepared to be available on the above days.

Senator Brett Mason

Chair