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## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### AGENCY KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

#### SIGNIFICANT AGENCY FIGURES - FINANCIAL YEAR 2023–24

CLAIMS	
Centrelink	3.7 million
Medicare (services)	464.7 million
Child support registrations	55,800

PAYMENTS	
Total payments	\$241.0 billion
Centrelink	\$151.3 billion
Medicare	\$87.8 billion
Child support facilitated	\$1.9 billion

CONTACTS	
Online transactions	1.1 billion
Call handled	53.9 million
Face-to-face contacts	10.7 million

AGENCY SITES VISITED BY THE MINISTER (1 June 2022 – 30 September 2024)	
Service Centres	33
Corporate	6
Community Engagement	6

#### DAILY UPDATES – AS AT 3 NOVEMBER 2024

AGENCY REACH	
Face-to-face sites (as at October 2024)	318
Access Points	211
Agents	357

### MYGOV SIGN-INS

Peak this financial year (FY) to date	3.0 million in one day (1 July 2024)
Peak in last Fortnight	1.3 million in one day (31 October 2024)
Average in 2024–25 FY to date	1.2 million per day
Average in 2023–24 FY	864,000 per day

### MYGOV APP REGISTRATIONS

Total registrations to date (2 November 2024)	6.2 million
Registrations for the week ending 1 November 2024	51,000

### ACTIVE DISASTER PAYMENTS

#### Far West NSW Storms and Power Outages – October 2024

• Claims Granted	20
• Paid	\$0
• Individuals supported	20
• Portion of online claims	98 per cent
• Calls answered	<20

### CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Michelle Saunders, A/g National Manager, Business Intelligence and Performance  
 Consulted: Robert Williams, A/g General Manager, Face to Face Services, s47F(1)  
 Angela Diamond, Chief Financial Officer (CFO), s47F(1)  
 Cleared by: Tenille Collins, A/g Chief Data Officer, s47F(1)  
 Date created: 24 January 2024 | Last Updated: 3 November 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### KEY DATES AND PRIORITIES

#### UPCOMING PRIORITIES

November 2024	
<b>5 November</b>	
Data.gov.au – Data Open Release	The Agency will begin publishing data on data.gov.au covering the information most frequently asked for by Senators and the media, before and throughout the Estimates process.
December 2024	
<b>1 December</b>	
Commencement of the Digital ID Act (2024)	The Digital ID Act (2024) is due to be enacted from 1 December 2024.
<b>19 December</b>	
Cessation of Foreign Cheques and International Money Orders	Customer who reside overseas will need to use an electronic payment method or Australian currency cheque to repay a Centrelink debt, as foreign cheques and international money orders will no longer be able to be cleared.
<b>December</b>	
Completion of the proof-of- concept for Digital ID System	The proof-of-concept will be completed by the end of the year. The proof-of-concept will be assessed by the Department of Finance to consider impacts of the Digital ID Act (2024).
Sorell Service Centre	The Agency is on track to expand services in Sorell (Tasmania), with a new purpose-built face to face service centre offering a range of government services in late 2024. The Agency continues to collaborate with Service Tasmania to define and develop the service offer within this site.

## **CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION**

Contact: Sam Fogarty, A/g National Manager, s47F(1)  
Cleared by: Jason Lucchese, General Manager, Enterprise Strategy and Governance,  
s47F(1)  
Date created: 24 January 2024 | Last Updated: 29 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### SERVICE DELIVERY

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) has achieved its target to get claims volumes down to usual levels by mid-year.
- From 27 November 2023, in a record 10 weeks, 3,000 additional frontline staff were progressively onboarded and trained to accelerate claims processing times and improve access for customers.
- During the 2023-24 financial year, these new staff have completed 1.2 million Centrelink claims and Medicare activities and answered 1.7 million customer calls.
- Reducing nearly a million Centrelink and Medicare claims on hand has helped to bring down call wait times, as fewer people will contact the Agency regarding the progress of their claim.
- The Agency is now answering Centrelink calls around 11 minutes faster and Medicare customer calls over 17 minutes faster than in January. Congestion messaging has reduced by 91 per cent on Centrelink lines.
- These reductions have enabled further improvements, like offering callbacks on some phone lines when demand is high, so customers don't have to stay on the phone while waiting to get to the front of the queue.
- Since 10 August, over 1.2 million customers have accessed the Medicare Claims Tracker more than 1.8 million times, removing the need to call to check on claim progress.

Additionally, most customers (68 per cent) are being served within 15 minutes at 318 service centres across Australia.

#### PROCESSING AND CALL WAIT TIMES

- During the 2023–24 financial year, the Agency processed more than 468.4 million Centrelink claims and Medicare services, and 4 million Child Support activities, supporting families to help with the costs of raising children.
- The Agency hosts approximately 9.2 million Centrelink, Child Support and Medicare customer contacts each week across face-to-face, digital and telephony channels.
- Of these, approximately 87 per cent arrive by digital channels and 13 per cent by face-to-face service centres or over the phone.
- In the week ending 4 November 2024, 1.3 million customer outcomes were completed by staff:
  - 164,000 people were served in person at one of 318 face-to-face service centres.
  - 211,000 Centrelink calls were answered, 64,900 claims and 293,000 non claim work items were finalised.
  - 132,000 Health calls were answered, and 292,000 work items were completed.
  - 23,200 Child Support calls were answered, and 73,000 work items were finalised, and
  - 320,000 calls received were self-managed by customers through phone self-service.



- For the week ending 4 November 2024, the average speed of answer for:
  - Centrelink was approximately 20 minutes,
  - Medicare Public was approximately 11 minutes,
  - Medicare Provider was 4 minutes, and
  - Child Support was 18 minutes.
- As at 4 November 2024, the Agency has made significant inroads to eliminate the backlog. Across Social Security and Welfare, Agency processing times are now:

SSW Service Reason	2023–24	FYTD 2024–25
ABSTUDY - Non-Schooling A	28	21
ABSTUDY - Pensioner Education Supplement	11	6
ABSTUDY - Schooling A	22	6
Additional Child Care Subsidy Child Wellbeing Application	11	4
Additional Child Care Subsidy Child Wellbeing Certificate – Exceptional Circumstances	12	4
Additional Child Care Subsidy Child Wellbeing Determination - Exceptional Circumstances	12	4
Additional Child Care Subsidy Grandparent	47	19
Additional Child Care Subsidy Temporary Financial Hardship	51	19
Additional Child Care Subsidy Transition to Work	68	21
Age Pension	76	45
Assistance for Isolated Children	0	0
Austudy	56	34
Carer Allowance	42	11
Carer Payment	54	14
Child Care Subsidy	24	8
Crisis Payment	3	1
Dad and Partner Pay	63	3
Disability Support Pension	93	69
Double Orphan Pension	8	4
Essential Medical Equipment	42	17
Ex-Carer Allowance (Child) Health Care Card	8	3

SSW Service Reason	2023–24	FYTD 2024–25
Family Tax Benefit Lump Sum	13	3
Family Tax Benefit New Claim	47	7
Fares Allowance	0	0
Farm Household Allowance	48	42
Foster Child Health Care Card	22	13
Home Equity Access Scheme	65	46
JobSeeker Payment	22	6
Low Income Card	53	12
Mobility Allowance	29	21
Paid Parental Leave	25	3
Parenting Payment Partnered	52	17
Parenting Payment Single	28	15
Pensioner Education Supplement	20	20
Seniors Health Card	42	18
Special Benefit	20	10
Stillborn Baby Payment	8	6
Tertiary Access Payment	42	16
Youth Allowance Apprentice	62	38
Youth Allowance Jobseekers	26	10
Youth Allowance Students	54	28

#### PROCESSING IMPROVEMENTS – DISABILITY SUPPORT AND AGE PENSIONS:

- The Agency is committed to improving service delivery for older Australians and people with disability.
- Age and Disability Support pension claims are very complex and take longer to assess. They are both lifelong payments, and as such, more information is often required than for support payments.

- Since 29 March 2024 (as at 4 November 2024), Disability Support Pension (DSP) claims on hand have reduced by 18,100 (49 per cent) and over standard claims by 12,400 (74 per cent).
  - Of the 18,800 claims on hand 900 (5 per cent) are actionable and 17,900 (95 per cent) are on hold.
  - Around 76 per cent of customers receive another payment (e.g. Jobseeker payments) while waiting on a DSP outcome.
  - Agency decisions on DSP claims are informed by comprehensive assessments by its qualified health professionals.
  - Assessments are based on each person's circumstances and consider all available medical evidence from treating doctors and health professionals, including specialists.
  - To ensure sound assessments, the Agency assessors contact treating Doctors where required to discuss the medical evidence.
  - The Agency prioritises and fast-tracks DSP claims for people experiencing financial hardship or for those who are likely to be manifestly eligible, including due to a terminal illness.
  - Some DSP claims can take longer than others for varying reasons, including the need for comprehensive medical assessments, or due to complex circumstances, or time required to get more details to help finalise claims.

Disability Support Pension Claims on Hold	
Awaiting the return of an external medical assessment	6,800
Awaiting an internal Medical Assessment (MAT)	900
Referred for a Job Capacity Assessment (JCA)	8,700
Awaiting customer to supply information	700
Other	800

- Since 29 March 2024 (as at 4 November 2024), Age Pension claims on hand have reduced by 25,500 (59 per cent) and over standard claims by 20,200 (77 per cent).
- Of the 17,700 claims on hand 7,800 (44 per cent) are actionable and 9,900 (56 per cent) are on hold.
  - Claims may be placed on hold due to additional information required from the customer. Many customers have complicated financial affairs (e.g. family or business trusts, investments, superannuation, real estate assets, foreign pensions and inheritances) requiring assessment against the income and assets test.
  - These assessments can take an extended period to conduct and complete the corresponding report/s.
- Delays can often occur if customers fail to provide all the required documentation in a timely manner.
- The Agency continues to train more staff in this complex work, and we expect to see the average processing time to fall even further as their proficiency grows.

- We urge anyone waiting on these claim types to go online and check there are no tasks that need to be completed.
- Those nearing Age Pension age can apply up to 13 weeks earlier so their claim can be assessed before they turn Age Pension age.
- Online is the easiest and fastest way to apply.

Age Pension Claims on Hold	
Awaiting customer to supply information	4,600
Awaiting complex assessments of income and assets for specialised staff	4,200
Awaiting Centrelink International Services Assessment	100
Other	800

- Since 27 November 2023 (as at 4 November 2024), the Agency has made significant inroads to eliminate the backlog. Across Health, the average days to process activities are as follows:

Health Services - Claims	2023–24	2024–25
Aged Care - Customer	52	67
Aged Care - Customer - Home Care	42	31
Aged Care - Customer - Resi Care	46	32
Aged Care - Provider	10	8
Aged Care - Provider - Home Care	33	1
Aged Care - Provider - Resi Care	0	2
Australian Immunisation Register	6	4
Australian Organ Donor Register	10	3
Bulk Bill	3	1
Complex Drugs	6	1
Continence Aids Payment Scheme	49	24
Disaster Health Care Assistance Scheme	14	12
eBusiness	19	13
External Breast Prosthesis	6	2
Healthcare Identifiers	8	8
Incentives	0	1
Medicare Eligibility & Enrolment	49	8

Health Services - Claims	2023–24	2024–25
Medicare Entitlement statement	82	30
Medicare Safety Net	15	28
Organisation Register	12	20
Patient Claims	9	2
PBS Patient Refunds	119	38
PBS Safety Net	98	17
Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme	6	4
Provider Registration	17	6
Simplified Billing	4	2
Veterans Affairs Processing	5	3
Health Services – Non Claims	2023–24	2024–25
Aged Care - Customer	18	17
Aged Care - Customer - Resi Care	148	120
Aged Care - Provider	96	34
Aged Care - Provider - Home Care	70	28
Aged Care – Provider – Resi Care	0	0
Australian Immunisation Register	10	2
Australian Organ Donor Register	20	2
Boutique	36	3
Bulk Bill	154	213
Complex Drugs	4	2
Continence Aids Payment Scheme	60	21
eBusiness	89	68
eServices	75	18
Healthcare Identifiers	16	31
Home Vacation Review	151	134
Incentives	11	4
Medicare Eligibility & Enrolment	29	13
Medicare Entitlement statement	69	22
Medicare Payments - Customer	54	15
Medicare Payments - Provider	172	138
Medicare Safety Net	194	301
Organisation Register	66	4
Patient Claims	63	107
Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme	7	3
Provider Registration	8	41
Simplified Billing	247	352
Veterans Affairs Processing	30	44



- Since 27 November 2023 (as at 4 November 2024), the Agency has made significant inroads to eliminate the backlog. Across Child Support, the Agency has reduced:
  - Intrays on hand by 20 per cent and over standard Intrays by 24 per cent.

**IF ASKED ABOUT 2024–25 BUDGET: INCREASING SERVICE DELIVERY CAPABILITY**

- The Government is investing \$1.8 billion into the Agency over three financial years to 2025–26 to:
  - maintain a customer service workforce to deliver timely services and payments to Australians experiencing vulnerability in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis
  - sustain emergency response capability, and
  - support other aspects of the Agency's operations.
- There will be an additional 4,030 staff in 2024–25 and 3,530 staff in 2025–26. The additional staff will better position the Agency to meet government and community expectations of service delivery performance.

**IF ASKED ABOUT SERVICE DELIVERY PRESSURES**

- The Agency entered the 2023–24 financial year with a reduced budget following the cessation of pandemic-era funding.
- Furthermore, in 2023, policy changes that expanded eligibility for some payments and services resulted in a higher volume of claims overall.

## **CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION**

Contact: Bo Robertson General Manager Operations Management, s47F(1)  
Cleared by: Jarrod Howard, Deputy CEO Customer Service Delivery Group, s47F(1)  
Date created: 25 January 2024 | Last Updated: 5 November 2024



## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### SECURITY RISK MANAGEMENT REVIEW

#### KEY POINTS

- The Government is committed to safety and security for all staff working to provide vital services for the Australian community.
- The Government has invested \$361 million to continue to improve the safety of Service Australia's (the Agency's) staff and customers.
- This funding is enabling Services Australia to implement the recommendations of the Security Risk Management Review (the Review) in full.
- The Agency is progressing significant action against the recommendations of the Review:
  - Continuing the legislative amendments, developing a Commonwealth Workplace Protection Order Scheme which enables Commonwealth agencies to seek a Workplace Protection Order in response to physical or non-physical violence directed at staff or at Commonwealth workplaces.
  - The provision of up to 606 security guards to ensure there are two guards at service centres at risk of high levels of customer aggression.
  - Transforming an additional 35 service centres at risk of high levels of customer aggression, to the contemporary service centre design including enhanced security features.

- Establishing a centralised Security Operations Centre to help the Agency respond in real time to customer aggression incidents.
- Expanding the roll out of Customer Self Check-in Kiosks to minimise frustrations caused by queues, and to provide real time information to service centre leaders about presenting customers and any known risks.
- Continuing the delivery of Advanced Customer Aggression training to all frontline service delivery staff.
- Implementing a new Agency wide system to better record, view and manage incidents of customer aggression.
- Liaising more closely with law enforcement to ensure better intelligence so that the Agency can service customers safely.
- The introduction of a new digital Electronic Benefits Transfer Card to reduce customer traffic and safely service customers who do not have access to a bank account.
- This ongoing activity builds on the work already undertaken to deliver immediate improvements. Progress to date includes:
  - Fourteen of the 44 Review recommendations implemented in full.
  - The Criminal Code Amendment (Protecting Commonwealth Frontline Workers) Bill 2024 enacted on 9 July 2024 to strengthen offences for acts of violence and aggression against Commonwealth frontline staff.
  - Security guard deployments reflect the assessed risk of customer aggression at each service centre, including two security guards at service centres at risk of high levels of customer aggression.

- 708 frontline staff have received Advanced Customer Aggression training, skilling them to respond to and de-escalate customer aggression.
- Upgrades to the Airport West Service Centre to include the security design recommended in the Review. An additional five service centres (Inala, Yarra, Beenleigh, Bankstown and Liverpool) have been retrofitted to deliver physical and service improvements that enhance staff and customer safety. This financial year 16 refurbishments (construction works) are planned and a further two remediations, the first refurbishment was Cannington Service Centre which became operational with enhanced security features on 19 August 2024.
- The customer online appointment booking system was rolled out nationally on 24 June 2024. Customers can now go online and book their own 15-minute phone appointment or a 30-minute face-to-face appointment. This will streamline interactions, reducing customer wait times and frustration.
- The safety of all staff is paramount, and the Agency is committed to ensuring that all staff can serve the Australian public without fear of violence.

## BACKGROUND

- On 24 May 2023, the Review was initiated immediately following an incident at the Airport West Service Centre in Melbourne, where a staff member was seriously injured by a customer on 23 May 2024.
- The Review was informed by significant staff consultation and outlines the extensive range of measures the Agency already had in place to protect staff and in addition offers recommendations to improve these measures.
- The Key Findings and 44 Recommendations cover security capabilities, service centre design, managed service plans and the adequacy of legislation to prevent and respond to customer aggression.

## MEDIA

- There was significant broadcast and print media about the incident when it occurred, with the volume of activity reducing markedly within the following week.
- There was media activity associated with the press conference and media release on 13 October 2023. This includes a print media article by the Herald Sun interviewing the staff member and Mr Ashton.
- There was media activity associated with the early 2024–25 Budget announcement on 3 May 2024. Broadcast coverage included ABC Radio National, Sky News, The Canberra Times and The Age.

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Jodie Robinson, General Manager, Security Risk Management Review | s47F(1)

Cleared by: Jarrod Howard, Deputy CEO, Customer Service Delivery Group | s47F(1)

Date created: 30 January 2024 | Last Updated: 23 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### INCOME APPORTIONMENT

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) and the Department of Social Services (DSS) became aware of issues regarding the use of income apportionment in late 2020 and have worked in close consultation to seek legal advice on the issues.
- Since July 2021, the Agency has paused internal reviews, explanations of decision, and the investigation of potential overpayments that may be affected by income apportionment, pending receipt of instructions from DSS.
- From 30 October 2023, the Agency began a pause on recovery of debts potentially impacted by income apportionment.
- In April 2024, DSS provided the Agency with the General Guidance for Decision Makers (General Guidance), which is used in assessing a social security recipient's entitlement.
- Based on the General Guidance, the Agency updated its staff guidance materials, business processes, and customer communications to support the recommencement of paused activities.
- From 29 April 2024, the Agency started contacting a small number of customers about their outstanding reviews or debts.
- On 28 August 2024, the Administrative Appeals Tribunal handed down its decision in *Secretary DSS v FTXB*, to set aside a debt that was

calculated using the General Guidance. The decision has since been appealed to the full Federal Court by the customer.

- On 22 October 2024, DSS issued the Agency with updated instructions to re-pause activities, which included explanations of decisions, internal reviews and raising of new debts potentially affected by income apportionment, except in certain circumstances.
- In line with these instructions, the Agency re-paused the work on debts potentially affected by income apportionment, pending the outcome of the Federal Court appeal.
- The Agency also developed a resolution pathway for any customers seeking to have their matter addressed, noting that a debt can impact a range of issues in an individual's life.
- The Agency website has also been updated to ensure people have access to the most up to date information about income apportionment, including the latest development on 22 October 2024.

**IF ASKED**

***How many customers have been affected by income apportionment?***

- The Agency is still determining the total number of customers who may be affected by income apportionment.

***What actions has the Agency undertaken regarding income apportionment?***

- The Agency previously paused the raising of undetermined debts (potential debts not yet raised) and reviews relating to income apportionment, while awaiting policy and legal clarity. These pauses were implemented between July and September 2021.
- As at 20 October 2024, these pauses related to approximately 15,000 formal reviews, 8,000 explanations on how debts were calculated, and approximately 89,000 undetermined debts.
- After receiving updated General Guidance from DSS, the Agency has developed new processes, new letters, and updated its staff training materials related to income apportionment affected cases.
- In April 2024, the Agency restarted work on cases.
- Following instructions from DSS on 22 October 2024, this work has been paused.
- The Agency has also paused recovery of debts potentially impacted by income apportionment. Approximately 112,000 debts were paused from 30 October 2023, with another approximately 42,000 debts paused from 11 April 2024. These debts will remain paused at this time.

***What does Income apportionment mean for people who have been prosecuted?***

- The Agency only makes a referral to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP) for serious matters that are supported by a brief of evidence and are never referred for overpayments alone.
- Conviction and prosecutions are matters for the CDPP.
- The Agency is working closely with CDPP in relation to historical matters which may be impacted by income apportionment.

***What next steps is the Government taking to resolve this issue?***

- The Agency and DSS are working to resolve the complex policy and legal issues this matter presents, including addressing the Ombudsman's recommendations.
- Once these issues have been resolved, DSS and the Agency will prepare options for remediation for the Government to consider.



## BACKGROUND

- In 2023, the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Office (the Ombudsman) conducted two investigations in relation to income apportionment.
- On 2 August 2023, the Ombudsman highlighted in a statement that since at least 2003 until 7 December 2020, when legislative amendments were made, the Agency was apportioning income across two or more Centrelink instalment periods in circumstances where this was not permitted by Social Security law.
- Income apportionment should not be confused with income averaging, which was central to the unlawful Robodebt Scheme. This was confirmed by the Ombudsman following his investigations.
- The Ombudsman's recommendations for the Part 1 investigation 'Lessons in Lawfulness' were:
  - **Recommendation 1A:** DSS in consultation with the Agency seek Solicitor-General opinion, through an Attorney-General referral under the *Law Officers Act 1964*, on two issues, or
  - **Recommendation 1B:** DSS and the Agency, seek Federal Court opinion, through referral by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, under the *Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975*.
  - **Recommendation 2:** DSS, in consultation with the Agency develop a policy position on Secretary-initiated reviews.
  - **Recommendation 3:** The Agency, in consultation with DSS and the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (CDPP), develops a strategy for how agencies will approach historic, current, and future criminal prosecutions associated with administrative debts involving income apportionment.
  - **Recommendation 4:** The Agency and DSS provide the CDPP with copies of the Solicitor-General's opinion if obtained in recommendation 1, draft and finalised advises from the Australian Government Solicitor and the Ombudsman finalised investigation report and any formal responses from the agencies.
- The Agency and DSS jointly accepted Recommendation 1 (preferring Option A), and Recommendations 3 and 4. Recommendation 2 was partially accepted.
- The Ombudsman's Part 2 Own Motion report, "Accountability in Action: identifying, owning and fixing errors", included eight recommendations:
  - **Recommendation 1:** Develop a strategy for sampling potentially affected historic debts, underpayments, AAT decisions and CDPP referred debts.
  - **Recommendation 2:** Develop an overarching remediation strategy for income apportionment affected decisions.
  - **Recommendation 3:** Develop strategy for managing income apportionment affected reviews.
  - **Recommendation 4:** Update decision making procedures.

- **Recommendation 5:** Develop communication plan.
- **Recommendation 6:** Amend communications.
- **Recommendation 7:** Develop and implement a policy to capture all income apportionment complaints.
- **Recommendation 8:** Develop regular complaint reporting requirements.
- The Agency and DSS jointly accepted all eight recommendations.

## MEDIA

Date	Item
16 September 2024	<i>Welfare Law in Australia – A Path out of the Morass</i>
9 December 2023	<i>The Saturday Paper – Apportioning blame</i>
7 December 2023	<i>The Guardian – Two people were jailed for welfare debts that Centrelink may have calculated unlawfully</i>
4 December 2023	<i>The Guardian – Centrelink should consider waiving 100,000 debts that may be unlawful, ombudsman report finds</i>
2 November 2023	<i>The Guardian – Dozens of Centrelink fraud prosecutions dropped due to unlawful welfare debt calculations</i>
30 October 2023	<i>The Guardian – Services Australia forced to pause Centrelink debt repayments for 86,000 people amid legality concerns</i>
23 September 2023	<i>The Saturday Paper – Exclusive: Australia’s welfare agency at risk of collapse</i>
31 August 2023	<i>The Guardian – Centrelink payments much more inaccurate than Services Australia claims, audit office finds</i>

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Dan Blackmore, National Manager, Income Apportionment Response, s47F(1)  
 Consulted: Leo Lahey, National Manager, Fraud Investigation, s47F(1)  
 Cleared by: Rachael Clarke, General Manager, Integrity Response, s47F(1)  
 Date created: 29 January 2024 | Last Updated: 22 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### ROBODEBT ROYAL COMMISSION – GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

#### KEY POINTS

- On 7 July 2023, Commissioner Catherine Holmes AC SC, presented the Report of the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme, to the Governor-General, His Excellency General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd).
- On 13 November 2023, the Australian Government released its response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme.
- The Government accepted 49, or accepted in-principle seven, all 56 recommendations made by the Royal Commission. Services Australia (the Agency) leads implementation on 26 recommendations.
- The work that the Agency is undertaking to implement the Government's response to the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme is an opportunity to build on the work the Agency has already done to improve processes and customer interactions since the end of the Robodebt Scheme in 2019. This includes better engagement with vulnerable members of the community and advocacy groups.
- One of the key recommendations of the Royal Commission into Robodebt outlined that the Government should facilitate "easy and efficient engagement with options of online, in person and telephone communication which is sensitive to the particular circumstances of the customer cohort".

- On 6 November 2023, the Government announced an immediate \$228 million funding for the Agency's frontline and service delivery staffing. This means an extra 3,000 service delivery staff to assist with the current demand on its services while also improving access to its telephony services for customers.
- The impact has been considerable with claims on hand significantly reduced, enabling the Agency to focus on processing complex claims and more recent new claims.
- The public is entitled to trust that the Government, and the Australian Public Service, will act with integrity, in accordance with the highest standards of ethical leadership and good government.
- Many of the Royal Commission's findings are aimed at rebuilding trust in government, investing in a capable public sector, delivering strong institutions, and ensuring people are at the centre of service delivery.

#### **PROGRESS – SERVICES AUSTRALIA**

- The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) leads the coordination of the whole-of-government response to the recommendations of the Robodebt Royal Commission.
- The Agency has taken considerable steps to improve the delivery of services and embed the customer voice in the early stages of decision making.
- This includes having dedicated functions with expertise in research, human-centred design and service design regularly working with customers to gather insights on services.

- The Agency also continues to work across government and with key stakeholders such as advocacy groups, to implement the recommendations.
- The Agency invited 55 peak advocacy Organisations to participate in a consultation exercise with the Agency on recommendations of interest to them.
- This engagement is ongoing with the Agency hosting in-depth Royal Commission Response workshops with stakeholders in both June and August 2024. These events enabled the Agency to conduct further consultation and engagement with key stakeholder groups, including peak advisory organisations, independent bodies, and partner departments/agencies.
- The Agency also piloted an Advocates' Channel with Economic Justice Australia and is using the pilot's finding to design a long-term solution to enhance how advocates engage with the Agency.

**IF ASKED**

***When will the sealed section of the Report be published/released?***

- The Chapter of the Report that deals with referrals pursuant to section 6P of the *Royal Commissions Act 1902*, is subject to a Direction Not to Publish made by the Commissioner.
- It would not be appropriate to comment on any individual who may or may not be the subject of a referral, as this may prejudice the interests of the individual or any future inquiry or investigation.

***Why is Gordon Legal appealing the Robodebt Class Action settlement?***

- It would be inappropriate to comment on matters before the courts.

***Why did the NACC decide not to commence a corruption investigation into the six public officials referred to it by the Robodebt Royal Commission?***

- This is a matter for the National Anti-Corruption Commission.  
It wouldn't be appropriate for me to comment.
- I am unable to discuss individual details of referrals as nondisclosure orders are in place.
- What I can say is, the Government has done its utmost to be responsive to the Royal Commission. Work to implement the Government's response to the recommendations is well underway.

***Amendments to the Freedom of Information Act***

- The Commissioner made a closing observation in respect of the confidentiality of Cabinet documents and potential adjustments to the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act).
- The Government will not be amending section 34 of the FOI Act.

- Cabinet, the key decision-making body of Government, must have the benefit of comprehensive, frank, and fearless advice from Ministers and senior public servants.

***Are there going to be any actual changes from the Agency?***

- Since the Robodebt Scheme ended in November 2019, the Agency has stopped using averaged ATO income information as the basis of raising debts.
- All existing Robodebts are being zeroed, and refunds have been issued to people who repaid money towards them.
- Settlement payments from the class action have also been distributed to further reimburse those who were affected.
- As part of the implementation of the recommendations, the Agency continues to focus on lessons learnt and tangible changes for the Agency to embed into its culture.
- The Agency has stopped using external debt collection agents. All debt recovery is now managed in-house by APS staff who understand individual customer circumstances.
- A tailored servicing contact model is in place for debt raising which includes making multiple outbound contact attempts to customers prior to a debt being manually raised.
- The Agency has also established an Adverse Customer Event Response team as an enterprise-wide approach to the resolution of highly sensitive incidents impacting customers.

## BACKGROUND

- The Income Compliance Programme (the Robodebt Scheme) was initiated in 2015, and was supported through Budget measures between 2015–16 and 2018–19. The Scheme was ceased in November 2019.

## TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- 19 November 2019: The former Government announced it would no longer rely solely on averaged ATO income data to raise debts in the program.
- 29 May 2020: The former Government announced that debts raised under the Scheme which were based in whole or in part on averaged ATO income data would be repaid or reduced to zero.
- 16 November 2020: The Class Action settlement was agreed and announced.
- 11 June 2021: The Federal Court of Australia approved the Class Action Settlement agreement, including the Distribution Scheme.
- 25 August 2022: Announcement confirming the establishment of the Robodebt Royal Commission, its Terms of Reference and reporting date.
- 7 July 2023: The Report of the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme was presented by the Commissioner and tabled in Parliament.
- 10 July 2023: The Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Australian Public Service Commissioner announced that a taskforce would be established led by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Attorney-General's Department, and the Australian Public Service Commission to support Ministers in preparing the Government's response.
- 8 September 2023: The then CEO of Services Australia, Ms Rebecca Skinner PSM, apologised to all Services Australia staff for Robodebt and how it affected them.
- 13 November 2023: The Government released its response to the Royal Commission's recommendations, which was tabled in Parliament.
- 6 June 2024: National Anti-Corruption Commission announced decision to not pursue Robodebt Royal Commission referrals but focus on ensuring lessons learnt.
- 19 August 2024: Government considered the Whole of Government interim status report on implementation progress. The Agency's input into the mid-year progress report, led by PM&C, reflected updates on progress as at 30 June 2024, and was developed in consultation with partner policy departments/agencies for shared recommendations.
- 5 September 2024: Australian Public Service Commissioner published the Report of the Code of Conduct Inquiry Taskforce which found a number of current and former APS officials breached the APS Code of Conduct.



- 24 September 2024: Gordon Legal seek to have the Federal Court reopen the class action settlement , making new claims of misfeasance in public office against the officials who knew that Robodebt was unlawful, but went ahead with it anyway.
- 26 September 2024: Inspector of the National Anti-Corruption Commission, Ms Gail Furness SC, announced she will review the decision not to investigate referrals from the Robodebt Royal Commission.

## **CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION**

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Consulted: Nil  
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Date created: 25 January 2024 | Last Updated: 28 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### EMERGENCY RESPONSE

#### KEY POINTS

- The Australian Government is committed to supporting people impacted by natural disasters. Services Australia (the Agency) plays a key role in the delivery of support and services for those affected.
- The Agency has worked closely with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to prepare for the 2024-25 disaster season and has finalised preparedness activities to ensure readiness to respond to potential disasters.
- In the case of an emergency event, the Minister for Emergency Management, Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister, has the delegation to activate Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payments (AGDRP), the Disaster Recovery Allowance (DRA), and their equivalents for eligible New Zealand citizens.
- Once an emergency response has been activated, the Agency can provide the following disaster payments to eligible persons in declared areas as directed by NEMA:
  - AGDRP provides \$1,000 per eligible adult and \$400 per eligible child directly into bank accounts.
  - DRA provides assistance for claimants who have lost income for a period of up to 13 weeks, starting from the first day their income was impacted which can be from the event start date, as written in the signed Instrument.

- NZ DRP provides one-off financial assistance to eligible New Zealand citizens residing in Australia who hold a non-protected Special Category Visa (subclass 444) visa.
- NZ DRA provides short-term income support to eligible New Zealand citizens residing in Australia who hold a non-protected Special Category Visa (subclass 444).
- There are different ways for people to claim disaster support:
  - the fastest way to claim is online. People with internet access can claim online via myGov
  - the Agency has staff on the ground, who can assist people face-to-face, and
  - people can also call to claim on 180 22 66, between 8 am and 5 pm local time Monday to Friday.
- The Agency can tailor a response that is targeted and provides accessible services for customers in remote or isolated communities. For example, the Agency can:
  - establish temporary offices and provide access to mobile devices for customers to lodge their claims
  - provide on the ground support to assist customers with how to claim and provide any additional assistance where required
  - provide information in-language, or link people with interpreters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customers
  - offer dedicated culturally sensitive remote servicing staff to help streamline the claiming process.

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- For the 2023–24 financial year, emergency payments were activated for the following events:
  - 19 February 2024: Western Victoria Bushfires, February 2024 (AGDRP only)
  - 12 February 2024: Heavy Rainfall and Flooding, City of Moreton Bay, January 2024 (AGDRP only)
  - 4 January 2024: Southeast Queensland Severe Storms and Flooding, December 2023 to January 2024 (AGDRP and DRA)
  - 18 December 2023: Tropical Cyclone Jasper, December 2023 (AGDRP and DRA), and
  - 27 October 2023: Western and Darling Downs Bushfires, October 2023 (AGDRP and DRA).
- As at midnight 3 November 2024, 58,700 disaster recovery claims have been granted and \$80.2 million paid for disaster events activated in the 2023–24 financial year:
  - 55,100 claims for AGDRP and NZ DRP have been granted and \$64.1 million paid
  - 3,600 claims for DRA and NZ DRA claims have been granted, with \$16.1 million paid
  - 36,700 calls were answered on the Australian Government Emergency Information Line (180 22 66)
  - 95 per cent of daily claims received by the Agency are made through a Centrelink online account through myGov.

- In the 2024-25 financial year to date, emergency payments have been activated for the following event:
  - 31 October 2024: Far West NSW Severe Storms and Power Outages, October 2024 (DRA).
- As at midnight 3 November 2024, 20 disaster recovery claims have been granted and \$0 paid for disaster events activated in the 2024–25 financial year:
  - 20 claims for DRA and NZ DRA claims have been granted, with \$0 paid
  - Less than 20 calls were answered on the Australian Government Emergency Information Line (180 22 66), and
  - 98 per cent of daily claims received by the Agency are made through a Centrelink online account through myGov.

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Clementine Prisc, A/g National Manager, Emergency Response Branch | s47F(1)  
Consulted: Brenton Halliday, General Manager, Service Delivery Optimisation Division | s47F(1)  
Tenille Collins, A/g Chief Data Officer, Data and Analytics Division | s47F(1)  
Cleared by: Jonathon Thorpe, Deputy CEO, Service Delivery Excellence | s47F(1)  
Date created: 25 January 2024 | Last Updated: 3 November 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### SCAMS

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) takes the protection of customer information seriously. The Agency holds personal information for most Australians, and myGov accounts remain a valuable target.
- The Agency is committed to protecting customers from scams, disrupting scam activity, and supporting customers when their personal information has been lost, stolen or exposed by a third party.
- Scams are constantly evolving and becoming increasingly sophisticated. The Agency continues to observe significant increases in scams targeting customers by impersonating trusted organisations or brands (including myGov).
- The Agency undertakes significant scam prevention and disruption activity. The Agency aims to help customers avoid scams and disrupt scams to prevent further harm.
- The Agency has scams intelligence processes, including a customer facing scam reporting process, and specialised staff and technology that allows the Agency to analyse and disrupt scams.
- The Agency provides support and advice to victims of scams. Many scams are reported to the Agency from customers seeking assistance from the Agency's support service.
- The Agency shares intelligence and collaborates across government to reduce, disrupt, and respond to scams that are targeting Australians.

- The Agency collaborates across government, including the National Anti-Scams Centre (NASC), and is an active member of the Scams Awareness Network (SAN), which is made up of government regulatory agencies and departments in Australia and New Zealand, that work alongside private sector, community and non-government partners to raise awareness about scams and disrupt them.

#### KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- The Agency observed, analysed and responded to 10,060 unique Agency impersonation scams in 2023-24. This is a significant increase compared to 3,936 in 2022-23.
  - The Agency observed, analysed and responded to 3,068 unique Agency impersonation scams for July 2024 to September 2024. This does not include additional malicious websites identified and actioned directly by intelligence partners.
- myGov is the most targeted Agency brand, with over 80 per cent of these scams in 2023-24 referencing myGov in some way.
- The Agency's Scams and Identity Theft Helpdesk (SAITH) responded to 22,451 calls in 2023-24, compared to 18,412 in 2022-23.
  - SAITH responded to 6,576 calls for July 2024 to September 2024.
  - Demand for SAITH support is increasing significantly, with 18,935 entered call attempts for July 2024 to September 2024.

## BACKGROUND

- Raising scam awareness and educating staff and customers is one way the Agency actively respond to scams. The Agency's purpose is to help customers recognise and avoid scams. The Agency engages with internal and external stakeholders, as well as community groups, to promote awareness about scams. This is done by:
  - presenting to external government groups such as not-for-profits supporting vulnerable cohorts
  - running the Services Australia Scams Awareness booth at expos
  - maintaining and enhancing messaging via the Agency's website and the myGov site on how to avoid scams and protect identity, and
  - scam alerts on the websites and social media accounts.
- The Agency is implementing measures to help protect customers from scams impersonating myGov. In July 2024, the Agency introduced a phishing resistant sign-in security method, known as a passkey, to provide myGov users greater protection from scams.
- A passkey will only work with the genuine website or app that the passkey is connected with and will not work with fake websites. This means users cannot 'accidentally' sign-in to a fraudulent version of myGov using their passkey.
- The Agency is participating in the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA)'s pilot SMS Sender ID Register. This pilot builds on earlier initiatives (Telstra – Cleaner Pipes; Optus – Trusted Sources) and provides protections by blocking fraudulent text messages that target customers by impersonating Agency brands, such as, myGov or Medicare.

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Peter Timson, General Manager, Fraud Control and Investigations Division, s47F(1)  
Consulted: Sharna Bartley, National Manager, Fraud and Identity Assurance Branch, s47F(1)  
Cleared by: Peter Timson, General Manager, Fraud Control and Investigations Division, s47F(1)  
Date created: 30 January 2024 | Last Updated: 25 October 2024



## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### MYGOV

#### KEY POINTS

- myGov is Australia's primary digital services platform. It has been instrumental in supporting Australians to access nationally critical government services online through a central secure portal.
- On average over 864,000 people sign in daily to myGov.
- The average daily sign-in has been nearly 1.2 million for this financial year to date, as at 23 October 2024, with 1 July 2024 exceeding 3 million sign-ins in a single day.
- Through Government's Response to the myGov User Audit, and the Data and Digital Government Strategy Government has set their vision to deliver a primary digital front door to access government services, through myGov.

#### ORGAN DONOR CARD

- From 20 October 2024, as part of the expansion of the myGov app to include additional government-issued cards and credentials, individuals have been able to add their organ donor card to the app wallet.
- Since release, 4,676 Organ Donor cards have been added to the myGov app wallet.
- This is a convenient and secure way to store this information alongside other government-issued digital cards, such as the Medicare card. Individuals can also use the myGov app to manage their donation preferences. Over 6 million individuals currently use the myGov app.

- The organ donor card shows that someone has registered as an organ and tissue donor and can support individual's discussions with their family about their registration.
- Adding the organ donor card to the app is optional. A physical card will still be sent when individuals register their donation decision.
- A physical or digital organ donor card is not a requirement for organ and tissue donation in Australia.
- The individual's family will always be asked to support their decision before donation goes ahead.
- There are currently over 7.7 million registered organ and tissue donors in Australia, but while four in five individuals say they support organ donation, only one in three have registered.
- Adding the organ donor card to the myGov app is quick and easy if individuals have already linked their Medicare online account to myGov. After adding the digital card, individuals are also encouraged to take a few moments to check their organ and tissue donation preferences are up to date.
- The organ donor card shows that someone is currently registered as an Organ Donor. The Agency is testing different ways where individuals need to provide their cards to access services and share information about themselves through the Trust Exchange proof of concept.
- myGov app users have now added over 1.7 million digital cards and certificates to the wallet.

## 2024–25 BUDGET: ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR MYGOV

- In the 2024–25 Budget, Government reinforced their commitment to sustain the myGov platform as critical national infrastructure with a long-term investment of \$580.3 million over four years from 2024–25 and \$139.6 million per year ongoing. This funding will:
  - support the ongoing operation and maintenance of myGov to keep it available, secure, and safe, and
  - give people confidence that myGov remains stable and contemporary in line with community expectations.
- In addition, a further \$50.0 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$5.2 million per year ongoing) was secured by Services Australia (the Agency) for enhancements to the myGov platform. This funding allows for whole-of-government initiatives to be delivered to address recommendations from the myGov user audit, allowing for improvements to:
  - support people to better secure their myGov accounts
  - strengthen myGov fraud detection capabilities
  - improve digital communications through myGov, and
  - support the Agency’s staff to deliver critical assistance to customers when they contact myGov through enhancements to staff tools.
- As part of a separate submission, the Agency also received \$9.1 million over three years from 2024–25 to support delivery of the 2026 Census, including activities to increase engagement and participation and facilitating access to the Census through myGov.

- The Agency will continue to progress towards the vision for myGov and deliver incremental, low risk and fiscally responsible investment opportunities, which deliver value and benefit Australians.
- People will benefit from the investment earlier through smaller more frequent initiatives being delivered to make services simple, connected and secure – rather than long-term large ICT projects.

#### **INTERIM INDEPENDENT ADVISORY BOARD**

- On 9 November 2023, the Interim Independent Advisory Board (the Advisory Board) was announced, with the first meeting held on 18 December 2023.
- Establishing an Independently Chaired Advisory Board was a key action from the Audit (Recommendation 7) to put in place citizen centred governance for myGov to drive inclusion and performance.
- In the 2024–25 Budget, the Government invested in the Advisory Board, until June 2028, to provide the independent expertise and insights to progress towards making public services more accessible, ethical and effective.
- Contracts for the Advisory Board members have been extended temporarily, while the formal process to establish an enduring Board is undertaken.
- The Advisory Board will continue to provide the Minister for Government Services with advice and assurance on designing, prioritising, and investing in people-centred services and improvements.

## PROTECTING AUSTRALIANS AGAINST SCAMS

- On 18 December 2023, the Government announced further investment to strengthen the security of myGov and the government services available through myGov.
- On 21 June 2024, a phishing resistant sign-in security method, known as a passkey, was introduced to give myGov users greater control of their myGov login credentials.
- Since implementation on 21 June 2024, and as at 23 October 2024, over 362,000 myGov users had added a passkey to their myGov account.
- Passkeys let users sign into online accounts the same way they unlock their devices, for example using a biometric, such as fingerprint or face scan.
- A passkey will only work with the genuine website or app that the passkey is connected with and will not work with fake websites, just like a physical key will only work in the right lock. This means users cannot 'accidentally' sign-in to a fraudulent version of myGov using their passkey.
- To steal a passkey, a criminal would need physical (in person) access to a user's device plus access to their biometric or PIN. This makes passkeys superior to a username, password, and SMS one-time codes.
- By introducing passkeys as a sign in method to myGov, the Agency aims to reduce the volume of unauthorised access to myGov accounts.

- While myGov users can already use their Digital ID to sign in to myGov, passkeys give myGov users another option in how they choose to access government services.
- As part of these changes, a myGov user can now turn off their password and choose to use only their passkey and/or Digital ID to access their myGov account, if this is their preferred approach.

#### IF ASKED

##### ***Digital Commonwealth Statutory Declaration delivered into the myGov Platform and myGov app***

- On 9 February 2024, the Digital Commonwealth Statutory Declaration was delivered into the myGov platform and myGov app. This was announced in a joint media release on 12 February 2024 by the Minister for Finance, the Attorney General Cabinet Secretary, and the Minister for Government Services.
- Since implementation, and as at 23 October 2024, over 60,000 Statutory Declarations have been completed within myGov.

##### ***myGov Adobe Contract***

- The Adobe myGov contract has been in place since August 2021.
- The contract was due to cease on 22 December 2023. However, two one-month extensions were exercised under existing terms to ensure due diligence prior to executing a two-year contract extension on 22 January 2024.
- Adobe provides some of the core technology components of the Digital Experience Platform which underpins myGov.

- The value of the extension (two years and one month) is \$30.7 million and is published on AusTender.

#### KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- As at 23 October 2024, over 6.2 million people have downloaded and are using the myGov app.
- There has been a growth in active myGov accounts from 11.7 million in June 2017 to over 27 million as at 23 October 2024.
- On average more than 864,000 people sign in daily to myGov. However, daily sign-in often exceeds 2 million during peak usage periods, such as the yearly tax peak, and when supporting access to emergency payments. On 1 July 2024, the platform saw over 3 million sign-ins in a single day.
- As at 23 October 2024, over 362,000 people have created a passkey for their myGov account, following its release on 21 June 2024.
- As at 23 October 2024, more than 20,000 people have added the DVA Card to the myGov app wallet, following its release on 21 June 2024.

## BACKGROUND

### MYGOV USER AUDIT

- The myGov User Audit (the Audit) delivered on the Government's election commitment to ensure better reliability, functionality, and a user-friendly experience of myGov.
- The Audit was undertaken by Chair, David Thodey AO, and panel members Professor Edward Santow, Professor Emily Banks, Amit Singh and Julie Inman Grant (the Panel).
- The Audit found myGov to be indispensable national digital infrastructure and presented government with ten findings and ten recommendations that would shape the future of digital government services.
- The Government published their response to the Audit in December 2023 agreeing, or agreeing in-principle, to nine of the ten recommendations.
- One recommendation was noted 'to legislate myGov as national service delivery infrastructure' agreeing to undertake further discovery work to inform future action towards this recommendation.

### INTERIM INDEPENDENT ADVISORY BOARD

- On 9 November 2023, the Advisory Board was announced.
- The Advisory Board is Chaired by the Hon Victor Dominello, other members include:
  - Professor Johanna Weaver – expert in governance and funding
  - Dr Simon Longstaff – expert in the ethics of service delivery
  - Professor Edward Santow – expert in human centred service delivery
  - Mr Amit Singh – expert in economic benefits for Australia and citizens
  - Ms Leanne Ho – expert citizen advocate
  - Professor Angie Abdilla – expert citizen advocate and first nations representative
  - Ms Caroline Edwards – expert citizen and staff advocate, and
  - Ms Karen Batt – expert staff advocate.



## TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

- On 30 April 2022, the Labor Party announced that if elected, it would launch a user audit of myGov.
- On 16 September 2022, the Minister announced the panel of experts leading the myGov User Audit.
- On 13 October 2022, the Minister announced the opening of the myGov User Audit consultation.
- On 23 December 2022, the draft Audit report was provided to Minister Shorten and Minister Gallagher, and the final report was delivered on 20 January 2023.
- On 31 January 2023, Minister Shorten and Minister Gallagher publicly released the Audit report.
- As part of the 2023–24 Federal Budget, the Government provided \$134.5 million to sustain myGov. This investment ensures myGov remains contemporary, secure, and easy to use.
- On 9 November 2023, the Minister announced the establishment of an independently chaired Advisory Board.
- On 9 November 2023, the Minister announced further investment in myGov to strengthen the security of myGov and the government services (passkeys).
- On 18 December 2023, Minister Shorten and Minister Gallagher publicly released the Government's Response to the myGov User Audit.
- On 18 December 2023, the first full meeting of the Advisory Board was held.
- On 20 December 2023, Minister Shorten released a media statement about a new service joining myGov.
- On 12 February 2024, Minister Shorten, Senator Gallagher and Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus released a joint media statement about Digital statutory declarations now available in myGov.
- On 27 June 2024, Minister Shorten and Minister Keogh released a media statement about Digital Veteran Card being rolled out in the myGov app.
- On 4 July 2024, Minister Shorten released a media statement about simpler sign ins to myGov with passkeys.
- On 13 August 2024, Minister Shorten released a media statement about Trust Exchange (TEx) driving digital services.
- On 14 August 2024, Minister Shorten released a media statement about popularity growing in the myGov app.
- On 26 September 2024, Minister Shorten released a media statement about new digital features making Medicare easier.

**CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION**

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Cleared by: Jonathan Thorpe, Deputy CEO Service Delivery Excellence Group | | s47F(1)  
Date created: 21 January 2024 | Last Updated: 28 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### DATA BREACHES

#### KEY POINTS

- Third party organisations and individuals continue to experience data loss, often as the result of a cyber-incident. These incidents can result in the exposure of personally identifiable information, including identity credentials. This can expose individuals to the risk of identity theft.
- Services Australia (the Agency) takes the protection of customer information seriously. The Agency is committed to protecting customers from identity theft, and supporting customers if their personal information has been lost, stolen, or exposed by a third party.
- The Agency has procedures for how it responds to third party data breaches or compromise events. These outline how the Agency works with the compromised third-party entity to enable the Agency to strengthen its controls around customer records.
- Many data breaches are high profile, receive significant media commentary and/or resulted in large-scale impacts to mutual customers and organisations.
- The Agency collaborates with the National Office of Cyber Security and other Australian Government agencies and industry experts, such as IDCARE, to respond to data breaches and support impacted customers.

- The Agency provides information to customers about steps they can take to safeguard their personal information, which is publicly available on the Agency's website or by calling the Agency's Scams and Identity Theft Helpdesk.
- Where appropriate, the Agency applies additional security measures to affected customer records to increase security and reduce the risk of future misuse.

## BACKGROUND

- Third parties are responsible for managing their own data breaches. The Agency is not responsible for the handling of the incidents, including customer contact.
- Under the Notifiable Data Breaches Scheme, any organisation or agency covered by the *Privacy Act 1988* must notify affected individuals and the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner (OAIC) when a data breach is likely to result in serious harm to an individual whose personal information is involved.
- The Agency works with the OAIC to prepare any required program protocols for data breach events, which allows the Agency to match data provided with customer records in a way that complies with the Australian Privacy Principles and the *Privacy Act 1988* and remains consistent with good privacy practice.
- The data matching process enables the Agency to identify customer records at increased risk of identity compromise and allows the Agency to apply additional security measures to these records.

## TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Date	Event
<b>August 2024</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 26 August 2024, the Agency was made aware of a ransomware event affecting a national hearing specialist – Bloom Hearing Specialist.</li> <li>The Agency is working with Home Affairs Cyber Security Response Coordination Unit who leads the whole of government response to the incident.</li> </ul>
<b>May to July 2024</b>	<b>MediSecure</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 15 May 2024, the Agency was made aware that MediSecure, a large Australian e-Script provider had incurred a cyber incident.</li> <li>The Agency worked with Home Affairs and the National Office of Cyber Security (NOCS) who led the whole of government response to the incident.</li> </ul>
<b>February 2024</b>	<b>ZircoData</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 23 February 2024, the Agency received intelligence relating to a ransomware event affecting a records and information management company.</li> <li>The Agency worked with ZircoData, Home Affairs Cyber Security Response Coordination Unit and other government entities in regard to the data breach.</li> </ul>
<b>November 2023</b>	<b>Quantum Radiology</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On 27 November 2023, the Agency was made aware that Quantum Radiology had incurred a cyber incident.</li> <li>The Agency worked with Home Affairs Cyber Security Response Coordination Unit, other government entities and Quantum regarding the data breach.</li> </ul>

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

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 Date created: 30 January 2024 | Last Updated: 25 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### COVID-19 VACCINE CLAIMS SCHEME

#### KEY POINTS

- The COVID-19 Vaccine Claims Scheme (the Scheme) provides compensation in cases of moderate to severe adverse reactions for Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) approved COVID-19 vaccines.
- The Scheme demonstrates the Government's ongoing commitment to supporting individuals throughout the approved vaccine program.
- AstraZeneca, Pfizer, Moderna and Novavax COVID-19 vaccines are covered under the Scheme.
- Services Australia (the Agency) administers the Scheme on behalf of the Department of Health and Aged Care (the Department), which maintains policy responsibility.
- Ten clinical conditions and administration-related injuries are covered under the Scheme. Compensation is payable where all eligibility criteria are met, including the hospitalisation requirement and minimum losses.
- Claim processing timeframes will vary due to complexity of evidence provided and where medical or legal expertise is deemed necessary.
- On 24 September 2024, the Department updated the Scheme policy to broaden the review of decision rights for customers.
- On 30 September 2024, the Scheme closed to new claims.
- The Agency will continue to assess all claims received by 30 September 2024. If individuals have queries on the progress of their

claim, the Agency can be contacted on 1800 813 167 or by email at:  
[COVID19.vaccine.claims.scheme@servicesaustralia.gov.au](mailto:COVID19.vaccine.claims.scheme@servicesaustralia.gov.au).

**KEY FACTS AND FIGURES (as at 30 September 2024)**

Claims in Progress	In progress	625	
	Need further information	281	
	Total claims in progress		906
Claims Finalised	Withdrawn	1,039	
	Not payable	2,394	
	Paid	396	
	Total claims finalised		3,829
Total Claims Received			4,735

- As at 30 September 2024, 396 claims have been paid to the value of \$34.1 million.
- The Scheme is demand-driven and payout estimates are determined based on the applications received.
- The Scheme does not have an overall cap on compensation paid to eligible claimants. The Commonwealth pays all payable claims under the Scheme.



IF ASKED

***What role will Services Australia play in response to the inquiry into establishing terms of reference for a COVID-19 Royal Commission?***

- The Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee completed its inquiry into establishing the proposed terms of reference for a COVID-19 Royal Commission, handing down its report on 19 April 2024.
- The report recommended the establishment of a Royal Commission to examine the Australian response to the COVID-19 Pandemic and adoption/further public consultation on the proposed terms of reference. A dissenting report from Government Members did not support the report's recommendations.
- The Committee is best placed to comment further on the inquiry.

***How has Services Australia addressed concerns found in the Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee report into the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Amendment (Vaccine Indemnity) Bill 2023, which recommended that the Australian Government review the COVID-19 Vaccine Claims Scheme?***

- In August 2023, the Agency on-boarded additional staff to the Scheme to assist with claim processing and quality assurance.
- A large majority of Scheme claims are now finalised.
- The Government has committed to considering the report tabled in the Senate on 18 March 2024.

## BACKGROUND

- The Government established the COVID-19 Vaccine Claims Scheme to provide further assurance and confidence to patients and health professionals in the COVID-19 vaccine rollout.
- The Scheme responded to calls from peak bodies including the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, and medical indemnity insurers, for extended medical indemnity coverage for health professionals and their patients given the unique nature of the pandemic and response.
- The Scheme is intended to provide a similar level of compensation to what individuals would receive through a court-based personal injury claim, without the need to pursue costly and time-consuming litigation. However, individuals can seek compensation through the courts either as an alternative to compensation under the Scheme or simultaneously with the Agency.
- There has been parliamentary interest on Scheme payout amounts, calculations and timeframes for claim determinations with responses to these questions on notice having recently been published. The Agency releases data around the Scheme periodically, ensuring the privacy of individuals is not compromised.

MEDIA

Date	Item
2 October 2024	<p>'Cruel irony': COVID vaccine injury compensation scheme brought to an end as government delivers budget surplus</p> <p><a href="https://canberradaily.com.au/cruel-irony-covid-vaccine-injury-compensation-scheme-brought-to-an-end-as-government-delivers-budget-surplus/">https://canberradaily.com.au/cruel-irony-covid-vaccine-injury-compensation-scheme-brought-to-an-end-as-government-delivers-budget-surplus/</a></p>
29 September 2024	<p>COVID-19 vaccine Cut-off date looms for compensation under injury scheme</p> <p><a href="https://thewest.com.au/news/health/covid-19-vaccine-compo-cut-off-date-looms-for-compensation-under-injury-scheme-c-16189871">https://thewest.com.au/news/health/covid-19-vaccine-compo-cut-off-date-looms-for-compensation-under-injury-scheme-c-16189871</a></p>
24 September 2024	<p>In the rare event of a vaccine injury, Australians should be compensated, available at:</p> <p><a href="https://theconversation.com/in-the-rare-event-of-a-vaccine-injury-australians-should-be-compensated-232396">https://theconversation.com/in-the-rare-event-of-a-vaccine-injury-australians-should-be-compensated-232396</a></p>
22 September 2024	<p>Australia's COVID vaccine compensation scheme is closing. Here's how much it has paid out, available at:</p> <p><a href="https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/australias-covid-vaccine-compensation-scheme-is-closing-heres-how-much-it-has-paid-out/vmsag6lb7">https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/australias-covid-vaccine-compensation-scheme-is-closing-heres-how-much-it-has-paid-out/vmsag6lb7</a></p>
21 September 2024	<p>I was a super-fit mum-of-two who ran triathlons – until I got the second Covid vaccine. I mourn my old self every day, available at:</p> <p><a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13826177/fit-mum-Covid-vaccine.html?ito=native_share_article-nativemenubutton">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13826177/fit-mum-Covid-vaccine.html?ito=native_share_article-nativemenubutton</a></p>
12 September 2024	<p>Keep the COVID-19 vaccination claims scheme open, available at:</p> <p><a href="https://www.themandarin.com.au/254647-keep-the-covid-19-vaccination-claims-scheme-open/">https://www.themandarin.com.au/254647-keep-the-covid-19-vaccination-claims-scheme-open/</a></p>
6 September 2024	<p>Integrity of excess mortality inquiry in question over high volume of suppressed submissions, available at:</p> <p><a href="https://canberradaily.com.au/integrity-of-excess-mortality-inquiry-in-question-over-high-volume-of-suppressed-submissions/">https://canberradaily.com.au/integrity-of-excess-mortality-inquiry-in-question-over-high-volume-of-suppressed-submissions/</a></p>
28 August 2024	<p>'1,000 pages': Aussie dad's 'cruel' three-year wait for vaccine injury compensation, available at:</p> <p><a href="https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/health/health-problems/1000-pages-aussie-dads-cruel-threeyear-wait-for-vaccine-injury-compensation/news-story/9fcbec0fb1524798523e396f4ad2ebae">https://www.news.com.au/lifestyle/health/health-problems/1000-pages-aussie-dads-cruel-threeyear-wait-for-vaccine-injury-compensation/news-story/9fcbec0fb1524798523e396f4ad2ebae</a></p>
28 August 2024	<p>Australians could get two new Covid vaccines as new strains run rampant, available at:</p> <p><a href="https://www.theaustralian.com.au/breaking-news/australians-could-">https://www.theaustralian.com.au/breaking-news/australians-could-</a></p>

Date	Item
	<a href="#">get-two-new-covid-vaccines-as-new-strains-run-rampant/news-story/a13dde8a91ad4015a54afb5f44161580</a>
25 August 2024	Willingness to review and learn necessary for post-COVID response, available at:  Editorial_ Willingness to review
25 August 2024	Payments for COVID vaccine injuries are ending. Patients want that changed, available at:  Payments for COVID vaccine injur
29 July 2024	'Teal' MP signs letter asking PM to expand COVID-19 vaccine compensation scheme, available at: <a href="https://australiannationalreview.com/state-of-affairs/teal-mp-signs-letter-asking-pm-to-expand-covid-19-vaccine-compensation-scheme/">https://australiannationalreview.com/state-of-affairs/teal-mp-signs-letter-asking-pm-to-expand-covid-19-vaccine-compensation-scheme/</a>
26 July 2024	Natalie Boyce death: Sad text after Melbourne woman died five weeks after Moderna vaccine Covid booster, available at: <a href="https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13646613/Natalie-Boyce-death-Sad-text-Melbourne-woman-died-five-weeks-Moderna-vaccine-Covid-booster.html">https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13646613/Natalie-Boyce-death-Sad-text-Melbourne-woman-died-five-weeks-Moderna-vaccine-Covid-booster.html</a>
30 June 2024	Covid-19 Lessons Learned – Vaccinations to Lockdowns   7News Spotlight, available at: <a href="https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oyEOb341a28">https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=oyEOb341a28</a>
25 June 2024	Canberra mother recounts severe Covid vaccine injury as anaesthetist claims jabs as potential culprit in excess deaths, available at: <a href="https://canberradaily.com.au/canberra-mother-recounts-severe-covid-vaccine-injury-as-anaesthetist-claims-jabs-as-potential-culprit-in-excess-deaths/">https://canberradaily.com.au/canberra-mother-recounts-severe-covid-vaccine-injury-as-anaesthetist-claims-jabs-as-potential-culprit-in-excess-deaths/</a>

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Robert Hall, A/g National Manager, Health Design and Complex Payments Branch | s47F(1)  
Cleared by: Eric Harper, A/g General Manager, Health Delivery Transformation Division | s47F(1)  
Date created: 24 January 2024 | Last Updated: 26 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### DEBT MANAGEMENT AND RECOVERY

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) provides support to customers to assist them in being paid the correct amount.
- However, when customers have been overpaid, the Agency provides a number of options to help people manage and repay their debt, taking into account the person's individual circumstances. These include:
  - withholding a percentage of payments for people in receipt of social security payments or allowances, and
  - providing the ability for people who are no longer receiving payments to use a number of repayment arrangement options.
- Flexible repayment options are also available where the person is experiencing family or domestic violence, financial hardship, or where there are other indicators of vulnerability.
- People with a debt are able to self-manage debt repayments online using the myGov app, the Agency's 'Money you owe' service, over the phone, or face to face in one of the Agency's Service Centres.
- From 19 December 2024, customers who reside overseas will need to use an electronic payment method, or Australian currency cheque to repay a Centrelink debt.
- This is due to the clearing service that was previously available to the Agency for foreign cheques and international money orders will no longer being provided from this time. This is part of a broader move

away from such payment arrangements both in Australia and many countries overseas.

- Alternative available options include, but are not limited to BPAY, Australia Post's POST Billpay and Electronic Bank Transfer.
- The Agency has made enhancements to online services to allow people the flexibility during a crisis or disaster event to change or pause their repayment arrangements.
- Anyone who owes a debt and is experiencing difficulty with repayments is encouraged to contact the Agency to discuss their circumstances. They can do this on the dedicated debt phone line (1800 076 072).
- If people who are no longer receiving payments refuse to enter into a repayment arrangement with the Agency, further recovery action can occur. This can include:
  - garnisheeing money held on behalf of, or owed to, a customer, for example, from wages, income tax refunds or money held with a financial institution
  - issuing a Departure Prohibition Order, or
  - through civil legal action.

### **Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) AUDIT**

- On 31 May 2023, the ANAO tabled its performance audit on *'Debt Management and Recovery in Services Australia'*.
- The Audit examined whether the Agency has fit-for-purpose debt management and governance arrangements, effective strategies and

processes, and assessed and reported on the effectiveness of activities undertaken.

- The ANAO made four recommendations, aimed at:
  - debt oversight arrangements
  - effectiveness and usability of policies and procedures
  - establishing a debt management strategy, and
  - developing internal targets for performance.
- The Agency acknowledges improvements can be made to the management and recovery of debts and is working with the relevant policy agencies to implement the recommendations.

#### **EXTERNAL COLLECTION AGENTS**

- As of 30 June 2023, the Agency ceased using External Collection Agents (ECAs) with all social security debt recovery managed by Agency staff.
- Customers are no longer repaying their debts through ECAs. The Agency is establishing repayment arrangements directly with customers.
- This change ensures customers deal with specialist Agency staff who understand their situation best, and who are experienced in supporting vulnerable people.

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- As at 30 September 2024:
  - the outstanding value of social security debts totalled \$4.98 billion, with 1.43 million debts owed by 825,959 customers, and
  - 106,059 debts are currently temporarily written off to a total value of \$392.83 million.
- For the 2024-25 financial year, as at 30 September 2024:
  - 547,013 debts have been raised with a total value of \$1.14 billion, and
  - of the raised debts, 165,589 with a value of \$8.61 million have been raised and waived.
- For the 2023-24 financial year there were:
  - 1.5 million debts raised to the total value \$2.5 billion
  - 939,029 debts raised for recovery
  - 603,348 debts raised and waived, and
  - 110,993 debts temporarily written off to the total value of \$405.41 million.
- As at 30 September 2024, there are approximately 434 customers previously registered with ECAs who are yet to establish a repayment arrangement with the Agency. The Agency will continue to seek to establish repayment arrangements with these customers.

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Shaun Thomas, National Manager, s47F(1)  
Consulted: Tenille Collins, a/g Chief Data Officer, s47F(1)  
Cleared by: Robert Higgins, General Manager, s47F(1)  
Date created: 25 January 2024 | Last Updated: 4 November 2024



## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### ENHANCED INCOME MANAGEMENT

#### KEY POINTS

- From 4 September 2023, Services Australia (the Agency) implemented changes to support the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management Reform) Act 2023*:
  - existing Income Management (IM) customers can choose to move to enhanced IM and access the SmartCard, or remain on IM (with a BasicsCard), and
  - newly identified customers are placed directly onto enhanced IM, rather than IM with a BasicsCard.

#### KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- As at 18 October 2024, there were 17,885 customers on enhanced IM, with 13,637 customers on IM across Australia.
  - 16,013 of the customers on enhanced IM reside in the Northern Territory.
  - 13,145 of the customers on IM reside in the Northern Territory.
- Since 4 September 2023:
  - 5,871 existing IM customers have chosen to move to enhanced IM, and
  - 12,014 customers have commenced on the enhanced IM program or were on prior to 4 September 2023 and recommenced.

**IF ASKED**

***How do customers commence enhanced IM?***

- Customers can choose to move to, or volunteer for, enhanced IM by calling the SmartCard eIM hotline, or by visiting a Services Australia (the Agency) Service Centre or Remote Servicing Team.
- All customers are provided with a personalised SmartCard from their chosen card issuer and have access to temporary SmartCards.

***What support is available for enhanced IM customers?***

- Enhanced IM customers are supported by experienced Agency staff by a dedicated SmartCard eIM hotline, rather than an external provider.
- The Agency holds comprehensive discussions with all IM customers who are considering moving to enhanced IM to ensure they understand how the change will apply to their circumstances.
- Customers are also offered further tailored support from the Agency, such as support using the SmartCard, available payment options (i.e. BPAY, direct debit and Centrepay), how deductions will be paid, and referrals to internal financial support services, such as Financial Information Service Officers.
- Information about the availability of enhanced IM is available across telephone, face-to-face, and community engagement channels by a tailored and culturally appropriate communication strategy.

***What is the difference between IM with a BasicsCard and enhanced IM with a SmartCard***

- The BasicsCard is a Personal Identification Number (PIN) protected card that can be used at approved businesses using the EFTPOS system. It does not support tap and go payments and cannot be used for online shopping. The card uses ageing technology and many large corporate merchants have indicated it will become obsolete in coming years.
- The SmartCard provides contemporary technological functionality that many customers are familiar with through the use of their personal bank product, with access to internet banking by an online account, allowing for customers to manage their own payments.
- The SmartCard can be used at approximately one million terminals that accept EFTPOS and Visa around Australia, allows customers to shop online and outside of Australia, and opt-in contactless payments (previously auto-enabled for the CDC) which adds additional protection for customers. It also has the ability to select between EFTPOS and VISA in the digital wallet (EFTPOS has lower surcharge than VISA transactions).

***What were the key outcomes from the ANAO Performance Audit: Transitional arrangements for the Cashless Debit Card?***

- The overall finding was that the transitional arrangements for the Cashless Debit Card program to the enhanced Income Management program were largely effective, and that the Agency's limited tender procurement was largely compliant with the Commonwealth Procurement Rules.

- The Agency will continue to work with the Department of Social Services to further strengthen our governance and performance monitoring arrangements related to the enhanced Income Management program.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Enhanced Income Management**

- The Agency provides all customers with support for the SmartCard and enhanced IM accounts through a dedicated hotline.
- IM program rules apply under the enhanced IM program. This means:
  - the quarantine rate is 50 per cent (except for Child Protection customers and Cape York and Doomadgee regions), and
  - restrictions apply to the purchasing of tobacco products, pornography, alcohol, gambling products, and cash and cash-like products.
- Under the enhanced IM program, the Family Responsibilities Commission continue to be responsible for referring participants in the Cape York and Doomadgee region. Participants have a quarantine rate between 60 and 90 percent, determined by the Family Responsibilities Commission.

### **Income Management**

- Income Management is a tool to help customers manage their money to meet essential household needs and expenses.
- Customers supported by Income Management have a percentage (varies between 50 percent or 70 percent) of their income support payment set aside in an Income Management account.
- Customers on Income Management can make payments from their income managed account for priority needs such as rent, bills or food by:
  - using their BasicsCard, and
  - asking the Agency to set up regular or one-off payments to approved organisations.

## TIMELINE OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Date	Milestone
6 March 2023	All CDC participation ended. Enhanced Income Management commenced.
9 March 2023	The Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management Reform) Bill 2023 (the Bill) was introduced in the House of Representatives and referred to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee.
29 March 2023	The Bill was considered by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights.
6 June 2023	The Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee report delivered.
22 June 2023	Legislation passed in the Senate and the House of Representatives.
3 July 2023	Royal Assent received.
4 September 2023	Continuation of the current enhanced IM regime, expansion of the enhanced IM program to all previous IM declared areas and closure of the IM program to new entrants on 4 September 2023.
4 September 2024	The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights Inquiry into compulsory IM report was published.

## MEDIA COVERAGE

Date	Source	Item
27 July 2024	<i>Weekend Australian</i>	Cashless card's axing unleashes carnage (see <a href="#">Article</a> )
19 July 2024	<i>Bundaberg Today</i>	Renewed calls for a Cashless return (see: <a href="#">Article</a> )
13 July 2024	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i>	Vikki Champion Indigenous Kids' welfare had plummeted since cashless card was abolished (see: <a href="#">Article</a> )
12 July 2024	<i>ABC News</i>	Anxiety as Morrison-era Cashless Debit Card is flagged as possibly returning amid cost-of-living crisis (see: <a href="#">Article</a> )
8 July 2024	<i>ABC News</i>	Cashless debit card debate reignites after a university review into its removal highlights social harm (see: <a href="#">Article</a> )
8 July 2024	<i>The Advertiser</i>	SA Voice Member and Former Ceduna Mayor call for changes to Cashless Debit Card (see: <a href="#">Article</a> )
6 July	<i>The Guardian</i>	Abolish Cashless Debit card still divides, two years after Labor ordered its demise (see: <a href="#">Article</a> )

Date	Source	Item
11 June 2024	<i>The Mandarin</i>	Cashless Debit Card another consultation failure. The Indue card is gone, but it has left a lingering affect on the Indigenous communities it has touched. (see: <a href="#">Article</a> )
23 April 2024	<i>SBS/NITV Radio</i>	Study finds Compulsory Income Management is doing more harm than good in the Northern Territory (see: <a href="#">Article</a> )
23 January 2024	<i>Daily Mail Australia</i>	Women trying to flee DV held back by income management (see: <a href="#">Women trying to flee DV held back by income management   Daily Mail Online</a> )
16 November 2023	<i>MIX 104.9</i>	Katie Woolf reads a submission about a man who has been told by Centrelink that he will be put on the cashless debit card if he misses one phone call or appointment from Centrelink (see: <a href="#">Stream</a> )
26 October 2023	<i>ABC Goldfields</i>	MP Rick Wilson talks to host Ivo da Silva about the results of the Voice to Parliament referendum and how to support Indigenous communities after Australia voted 'No'. He says the cashless debit card made a difference and would like to pursue the same line of thinking (see: <a href="#">Stream</a> )
19 October 2023	<i>Sounds of the Mountains 96.3</i>	Michael McCormack MP is interviewed by David Eisenhower discussing calls to reinstate the Cashless Debit Card, alcohol abuse and domestic violence. Mr McCormack says Indigenous community leaders report better outcomes under the Cashless Debit Card program (see: <a href="#">Stream</a> )
16 October 2023	<i>ABC Eyre Peninsula</i>	Opposition's Rowan Ramsey talks to host Tom Mann about the Voice to Parliament referendum and calls to address inequality and economic issues facing the Indigenous population. He says that the majority of Indigenous communities wanted to keep the Cashless Debit Card and that the government didn't listen to their voice when it decided to remove the scheme (see: <a href="#">Stream</a> )
16 October 2023	<i>ABC Riverina</i>	Opposition's Michael McCormack talks to host Sam Robinson about the Voice to Parliament referendum results and how to assist Indigenous

Date	Source	Item
		communities after Australia voted 'No'. He says that Indigenous communities benefited from the Cashless Debit Card Scheme and that it should be reinstated (see: <a href="#">Streem</a> )
12 October 2023	Seven	7NEWS visited Laverton in February, following Prime Minister Anthony Albanese's alleged refusal to visit the town as local leaders wished for him to see the consequences of his decision to remove the Cashless Debit Card (see: <a href="#">Streem</a> )

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Ben Gallie, National Manager, Customer Financial Capability Branch | s47F(1)  
Cleared by: Cathy Toze, General Manager, Working Age and Pension Programs | s47F(1)  
Date created: 25 January 2024 | Last Updated: 25 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### SHOPFRONT CLOSURES

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) is committed to maintaining and modernising the service centre network. The Agency regularly reviews progress to ensure we deliver a sustainable, accessible, and fit-for-purpose network to meet both community and customer needs.
- To help deliver improved government services that are simple, helpful, respectful and transparent, the Agency undertakes detailed research and analysis when considering the various factors for service centre placement including:
  - assessing the needs of customers and the community to deliver a comprehensive range of services
  - ability to deliver a range of government services in a location that is easy to access
  - proximity to other existing Services Australia Service Centres, as well as other government services in the surrounding area
  - offering improved government services through a mix of channels such as online and face to face
  - state and local government growth opportunities to partner with community and other government agencies, and
  - availability of public transport options.



## FACE TO FACE SERVICES

- To meet the needs of the Australian public, face to face services are available through various points to deliver essential government services including:
  - 318 service centres
  - 376 agent service locations
  - 192 access points, and
  - four Mobile Service Centres.
- Mobile Service Centres travel extensively throughout rural and regional Australia and to disaster affected areas to provide help and support.
- Staff from the Agency travel with the Mobile Service Centres to help Australians with Centrelink and Medicare payments and services. Mobile Service Centres also have disabled access.
- From time to time, representatives from other government agencies also travel with the Mobile Service Centres.
- Agent service locations offer face to face information, helping customers with digital services, finding information online about payments and services, and a phone 'Silver Service' for help with uploading identity confirmation documents for certification.
- Access points provide self-help facilities for customers to conduct their business with the Agency including self-service equipment, free internet-enabled computers and printers, document upload capabilities, self-service phones, and free Wi-Fi for connecting to government services on personal devices.

## CUSTOMER CONTACTS AND SELF-SERVICE USAGE

- The way people access Agency services has changed significantly due to business and IT transformation, resulting in an increased uptake of digital services offered by the Agency, including the myGov website or mobile app.
- Customers can access and complete most of their Centrelink and Medicare business at a time and place convenient to them, using a range of digital services, including mobile applications.
- Phone self-service offers a range of options for customers to access and update their information over the phone 24 hours a day, seven days a week. For those who prefer not to go online, phone self-service offers a quick, easy, and convenient way to conduct business.
- Customers can also go online and choose a time that suits them for an appointment, either on the phone or at their chosen service centre, and they don't have to spend time in a queue.
- Centrelink customers can now pre-book a 15-minute phone appointment or 30-minute face to face appointment with a staff member at a Services Australia Service Centre of their choice. They can book, reschedule or cancel some appointments using their Centrelink online account through the myGov website or mobile app.

## FACE TO FACE TRANSFORMATION

- As of 28 October 2024, 142 service centres have been transformed.
- The Face to Face Transformation Program commenced in October 2019, focusing on human-centered research and design to enhance the customer experience.

## IF ASKED

### *Sorell Service Centre*

- The Agency is on track to expand services in Sorell, (Tasmania), with a new purpose-built face to face service centre offering a range of government services in late 2024.
- The Agency continues to collaborate with Service Tasmania to define and develop the service offer within this site.

### *South Melbourne Service Centre*

- The lease for the South Melbourne Service Centre (Victoria) ended in October 2023, and the centre was consolidated into the Windsor Service Centre after unsuccessful attempts to find a suitable alternate location in South Melbourne.
- 27 October 2023 was the last day services were offered to customers at the South Melbourne Service Centre.

### *Cowes Agent (Phillip Island)*

- The Phillip Island Community and Learning Centre (PICAL) is contracted to provide agent services to the community on Phillip Island.

- The Agency has been notified that PICAL may cease providing agent services. The Agency is working with PICAL to confirm the closure details.
- The Agency has initiated an approach to market, to ensure services continue for the community on Phillip Island. Advertisements will be placed in local print media, with dates yet to be confirmed.
- Neighbourhood Houses Gippsland (NHG) is working with PICAL to identify alternative solutions to maintain essential agent services.
- NHG would be offered a temporary contract while an approach to market exercise is conducted.
- The Bass Coast Shire Council has confirmed they will allow access to the room housing the Agency's equipment to assist NHG in continuing an agent service.
- Phillip Island residents will continue to have access to service centres located at Hastings (17 km) and Wonthaggi (34 km), with agent services available at Grantville (26 km) and Access Point services at Lang Lang (31 km).

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Belinda Gloyne, National Manager Face to Face Property Transformation Branch  
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Consulted: Leigh Russell, A/g National Manager Face to Face Service Transformation Branch  
s47F(1)

Cleared by: Bianca Ruut, General Manager Service Design and Face to Face Transformation  
s47F(1)  
Jonathan Thorpe, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Service Delivery Excellence  
s47F(1)  
Jarrod Howard, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Customer Service Delivery  
s47F(1)

Date created: 25 January 2024 | Last Updated: 24 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### SERVICES AUSTRALIA STAFFING

#### KEY POINTS

- As at 30 September 2024, Services Australia (the Agency) had a workforce of approximately 36,400 staff. This includes approximately:
  - 34,600 (95 per cent) Australian Public Service (APS) staff
  - 1,800 (5 per cent) non-APS staff (labour hire and contractors), and
  - 45 (< 1 per cent) other Commonwealth employees seconded to the Agency.
- This workforce is supplemented by two Service Delivery Partners (SDPs) that allows the Agency to scale up and down quickly, comprising an estimated 716.7 Full Time Equivalent staff, as at 30 September 2024.
- Between 1 December 2020 and 30 September 2024, approximately 4,300 non-APS employees, including labour hire, contractor, and SDP staff, have transitioned to APS employment in the Agency.
- In the last 12 months (1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024), approximately 1,800 APS employees (non-ongoing and Intermittent/Irregular) have transitioned to APS ongoing employment.
- Between 1 May 2022 and 30 September 2024, the Agency has employed (commenced) approximately 300 additional staff in Far North

Queensland<sup>1</sup>, and is continuing to recruit to work towards the Government's election commitment.

## **2024–25 POSITION**

- The Agency's YTD Average Staffing Level (ASL) as at 30 September 2024 is 30,618, which is 382 ASL above the 2024–25 Budget ASL portfolio allocation of 30,236.
- The Agency's current ASL is 2,099 above the 28,519 ASL in 2023–24 published in the 2024–25 Budget papers.

## **ADDITIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY STAFF**

- As part of Budget 2024, the Agency received \$1.8 billion over three financial years to 2025–26 to:
  - maintain a customer service workforce to deliver timely services and payments to Australians experiencing vulnerability in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis
  - sustain emergency response capability, and
  - support other aspects of the Agency's operations.
- This has improved claim processing times, and shorter call wait times for customers.
- Between 1 October 2023 to 30 September 2024, approximately 8,400 commenced in Customer Service Delivery in customer contact roles.

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<sup>1</sup> Far North Queensland includes Atherton, Cairns, Innisfail, Mareeba and Yarrabah locations.  
QB24-000016

## FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

- The Agency offers a range of flexible working options to staff.  
These include, but are not limited to, home-based work, part-time or flexible work hours, and working from different Agency sites.
- The Agency supports staff to work flexibly, and all requests are considered on a case-by-case basis.
- As at 30 September 2024, approximately 11,300 (31 per cent) APS and non-APS staff accessed working from home arrangements.

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

Category	30 June 2021	30 Jun 2022	30 Jun 2023	30 Jun 2024	30 September 2024 % Total APS and non-APS
APS ongoing	26,900	27,500	27,800	32,600	<b>34,000 (93%)</b>
APS non-ongoing	3,900	1,300	2,500	200	<b>140 (&lt; 1%)</b>
APS irregular/ intermittent (casual)	3,200	3,400	2,000	700	<b>400 (1%)</b>
<b>Total APS headcount</b>	<b>34,000</b>	<b>32,300</b>	<b>32,400</b>	<b>33,600</b>	<b>34,600 (95%)</b>
Non-APS labour hire	1,000	1,100	47	23	<b>16 (&lt; 1%)</b>
Non-APS contractor	3,300	3,500	1,800	1,600	<b>1,800 (5%)</b>
<b>Total non-APS headcount</b>	<b>4,300</b>	<b>4,600</b>	<b>1,800</b>	<b>1,700</b>	<b>1,800 (5%)</b>
<b>Total Secondees**</b> (Commonwealth employees including APS and non-APS)	<b>91</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>45 (&lt; 1%)</b>
<b>Total headcount</b>	<b>38,400</b>	<b>37,000</b>	<b>34,300</b>	<b>35,300</b>	<b>36,400</b>
<b>Service Delivery Partners</b> Estimated personnel headcount (not FTE) only,	5,400	3,600	1,300	720	770

Category	30 June 2021	30 Jun 2022	30 Jun 2023	30 Jun 2024	30 September 2024 % Total APS and non-APS
provided by Procurement Branch					
Full-time (APS only)	23,100	21,600	23,400	26,200	27,300 (79%)
Part-time (including casuals) (APS only)	11,000	10,700	9,000	7,300	7,300 (21%)

\* Parliamentary rounding rules apply

\*\*All secondees are captured in a separate category, as not all secondees are APS. For example, employees from the Australian Federal Police are captured as 'non-APS,' as they are not employed under the *Public Service Act 1999*.

## BACKGROUND

- All workforce data has been rounded as per the Parliamentary rounding rules for Executive reporting.
- APS staff, whether ongoing, non-ongoing, or casual, remain the core of the Agency's workforce. They are the current and future leaders, who hold the institutional knowledge and expertise central to the culture of the Agency.
- The Agency's non-APS workforce (comprising of labour hire personnel and contractors) and its outsourced Service Delivery Partner providers, give the Agency additional flexibility to engage short-term specialist or surge services, to support day-to-day operations and workload requirements.
- The Agency's workforce size and composition will fluctuate based on forecasted and actual customer volumes and is heavily impacted by events such as natural disasters, pandemic events, and changes to government policy.

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Jade Cordell, National Manager, Workforce Strategy and Planning | s47F(1)  
 Consulted: Matthew O'Loughlin, A/g National Manager, Procurement s22, Chief Financial Officer Division | s22  
 Cleared by: Goran Stojanovski, A/g General Manager, Workforce Capability Division | s47F(1) Date  
 created: 1 February 2024 | Last Updated: 23 October 2024



## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### ELECTED MEMBERS REPRESENTATIONS TO MINISTER SHORTEN

#### KEY POINTS

- Since commencing as Minister for Government Services on 1 June 2022, Minister Shorten has received a total of 1,661 written representations from Elected Members, as at 30 September 2024.
- Senators who made the most representations were:
  - Senator Gerrard Rennick (19)
  - Senator Janet Rice (11)
  - Senator Anne Urquhart (9)
  - Senator Nita Green (7)
  - Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm (3)
  - Senator Catryna Bilyk (3)
  - Senator David Pocock (3)
  - Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher (3)
  - Senator Larissa Waters (3)
  - Senator the Hon Murray Watt (3)
- Members of Parliament who made the most representations were:
  - The Hon Darren Chester MP (122)
  - Dr Gordon Reid MP (63)
  - The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP (58)
  - Ms Jenny Ware MP (50)
  - Mr Dan Repacholi MP (44)

- Services Australia (the Agency) provides Members of Parliament, Senators and their staff with the details of a contact officer in their local service centre to assist with constituent enquiries, noting that in some electorate offices there may be more than one contact officer due to its geographical size.
- The contact information provided relates only to Ministerial and Electorate Officer Correspondence and does not include data where Senators and Members use their local contact officer to progress matters directly with the Agency, or matters escalated through the Minister's Office directly with the Service Recovery Team (External Complaints Resolution).

#### KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

Initiator	Total
Senators	95
Members of Parliament	1,566
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,661</b>

#### REPRESENTATIONS FROM SENATORS

Senator	Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)
Senator Penny Allman-Payne	0
Senator Alex Antic	2
Senator Wendy Askew	0
Senator the Hon Tim Ayres	0
Senator Ralph Babet	0
Senator Catryna Bilyk	3
Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham	0

Senator	Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)
Senator Andrew Bragg	0
Senator Slade Brockman	0
Senator the Hon Carol Brown	1
Senator Ross Cadell	0
Senator the Hon Matthew Canavan	0
Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash	0
Senator Claire Chandler	0
Senator the Hon Anthony Chisholm	3
Senator Raff Ciccone	0
Senator the Hon Richard Colbeck	0
Senator Dorinda Cox	2
Senator Lisa Darmanin	0
Senator Perin Davey	1
Senator Patrick Dodson	1
Senator the Hon Jonathon Duniam	0
Senator the Hon Don Farrell	0
Senator Mehreen Faruqi	0
Senator the Hon David Fawcett	0
Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher	3
Senator Varun Ghosh	0
Senator Nita Green	7
Senator Karen Grogan	0
Senator Pauline Hanson	2
Senator Sarah Hanson-Young	0
Senator the Hon Sarah Henderson	1
Senator Steph Hodgins-May	0

Senator	Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)
Senator Hollie Hughes	2
Senator the Hon Jane Hume	1
Senator Maria Kovacic	2
Senator Jacqui Lambie	1
Senator Kerryanne Liddle	0
Senator the Hon Sue Lines	1
Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister	0
Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy	2
Senator Susan McDonald	0
Senator the Hon James McGrath	1
Senator the Hon Bridget McKenzie	0
Senator Nick McKim	0
Senator Andrew McLachlan	0
Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price	0
Senator Deborah O'Neill	1
Senator Matt O'Sullivan	0
Senator James Paterson	0
Senator Fatima Payman	0
Senator Marise Payne	1
Senator Barbara Pocock	0
Senator David Pocock	3
Senator Helen Polley	0
Senator Louise Pratt	0
Senator Gerard Rennick	19
Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds	0
Senator Janet Rice	11

Senator	Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)
Senator Malcolm Roberts	1
Senator the Hon Anne Ruston	0
Senator Paul Scarr	0
Senator Dave Sharma	1
Senator Tony Sheldon	2
Senator David Shoebridge	0
Senator Dean Smith	0
Senator Marielle Smith	0
Senator Jordon Steele-John	0
Senator Glenn Sterle	2
Senator Jana Stewart	0
Senator Lidia Thorpe	0
Senator Tammy Tyrrell	0
Senator Anne Urquhart	9
Senator David Van	0
Senator Jess Walsh	1
Senator Larissa Waters	3
Senator the Hon Murray Watt	3
Senator Peter Whish-Wilson	0
Senator Linda White	1
Senator the Hon Penny Wong	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>

**REPRESENTATIONS FROM MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT**

<b>Member</b>	<b>Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)</b>
The Hon Anthony Albanese MP	6
The Hon Dr Anne Aly MP	5
Dr Michelle Ananda-Rajah MP	3
The Hon Karen Andrews MP	1
Mrs Bridget Archer MP	3
Mr Adam Bandt MP	1
Mr Stephen Bates MP	9
Ms Angie Bell MP	2
Ms Jodie Belyea MP	0
Mr Sam Birrell MP	4
The Hon Chris Bowen MP	7
Mr Colin Boyce MP	9
Mr Russell Broadbent MP	28
The Hon Scott Buchholz MP	1
The Hon Tony Burke MP	1
Mr Matt Burnell MP	33
The Hon Linda Burney MP	7
Mr Josh Burns MP	0
The Hon Mark Butler MP	8
Ms Alison Byrnes MP	15
Mr Cameron Caldwell MP	0
The Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP	6
Mr Max Chandler-Mather MP	2
Ms Kate Chaney MP	2
Dr Andrew Charlton MP	14
The Hon Darren Chester MP	122

Member	Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)
Ms Lisa Chesters MP	19
The Hon Jason Clare MP	15
Ms Sharon Claydon MP	27
Ms Libby Coker MP	13
The Hon David Coleman MP	6
The Hon Julie Collins MP	6
Mr Pat Conaghan MP	5
The Hon Pat Conroy MP	16
The Hon Mark Coulton MP	7
Ms Zoe Daniel MP	2
The Hon Milton Dick MP	8
Ms Mary Doyle MP	6
The Hon Mark Dreyfus MP KC	6
The Hon Peter Dutton MP	2
The Hon Justine Elliot MP	15
The Hon Warren Entsch MP	10
Ms Cassandra Fernando MP	2
The Hon Paul Fletcher MP	29
Dr Mike Freeland MP	20
Dr Carina Garland MP	3
The Hon Andrew Gee MP	23
Mr Steve Georganas MP	28
The Hon Andrew Giles MP	1
The Hon Dr David Gillespie MP	11
Mr Ian Goodenough MP	6
The Hon Patrick Gorman MP	0
Mr Luke Gosling OAM MP	4

Member	Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)
Dr Helen Haines MP	21
Mr Garth Hamilton MP	5
The Hon Andrew Hastie MP	1
The Hon Alex Hawke MP	2
The Hon Julian Hill MP	5
The Hon Kevin Hogan MP	16
The Hon Luke Howarth MP	2
The Hon Ed Husic MP	2
The Hon Stephen Jones MP	7
The Hon Barnaby Joyce MP	13
The Hon Bob Katter MP	15
The Hon Ged Kearney MP	9
Mr Simon Kennedy MP	1
The Hon Matt Keogh MP	9
Mr Peter Khalil MP	2
The Hon Catherine King MP	29
The Hon Madeleine King MP	25
The Hon Michelle Landry MP	0
Ms Tania Lawrence MP	3
Mr Jerome Laxale MP	10
Ms Dai Le MP	1
Mr Julian Leeser MP	2
The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP	27
The Hon Sussan Ley MP	2
Mr Sam Lim MP	5
The Hon David Littleproud MP	12
The Hon Nola Marino MP	2



Member	Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)
The Hon Richard Marles MP	5
Ms Zaneta Mascarenhas MP	12
The Hon Kristy McBain MP	10
The Hon Emma McBride MP	4
The Hon Michael McCormack MP	13
Mrs Melissa McIntosh MP	6
Ms Zoe McKenzie MP	4
Ms Louise Miller-Frost MP	22
Mr Brian Mitchell MP	18
Mr Rob Mitchell MP	12
The Hon Scott Morrison MP	1
Dr Daniel Mulino MP	7
Ms Peta Murphy MP	1
The Hon Shayne Neumann MP	24
Mr Llew O'Brien MP	24
Mr Ted O'Brien MP	4
The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP	3
The Hon Clare O'Neil MP	3
Mr Tony Pasin MP	6
Ms Alicia Payne MP	0
Mr Gavin Pearce MP	2
Mr Graham Perrett MP	18
Mrs Fiona Phillips MP	34
Mr Henry Pike MP	4
The Hon Keith Pitt MP	10
The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP	58
The Hon Melissa Price MP	3

Member	Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)
Mr Sam Rae MP	11
Mr Rowan Ramsey MP	8
Dr Gordon Reid MP	63
Mr Dan Repacholi MP	44
The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP	26
The Hon Stuart Robert MP	4
Ms Tracey Roberts MP	15
The Hon Michelle Rowland MP	8
Ms Joanne Ryan MP	8
Dr Monique Ryan MP	2
Dr Sophie Scamps MP	4
Ms Marion Scrymgour MP	5
Ms Rebekha Sharkie MP	7
The Hon Bill Shorten MP	0
Ms Sally Sitou MP	13
Mr David Smith MP	4
Ms Allegra Spender MP	6
Ms Anne Stanley MP	21
Ms Zali Steggall OAM MP	3
Mr James Stevens MP	9
The Hon Michael Sukkar MP	0
Ms Meryl Swanson MP	8
The Hon Angus Taylor MP	1
The Hon Dan Tehan MP	4
Ms Susan Templeman MP	14
The Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP	15
Mr Phillip Thompson MP OAM	1

Member	Representations to Minister Shorten (Ministerial Correspondence)
The Hon Kate Thwaites MP	16
Ms Kylea Tink MP	7
The Hon Alan Tudge MP	1
Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP	1
Mr Bert van Manen MP	5
Mr Ross Vasta MP	3
Mr Aaron Violi MP	7
Mr Andrew Wallace MP	0
Ms Jenny Ware MP	50
Ms Elizabeth Watson-Brown MP	1
The Hon Tim Watts MP	5
Dr Anne Webster MP	5
The Hon Anika Wells MP	8
Mr Andrew Wilkie MP	11
Mr Andrew Willcox MP	0
The Hon Josh Wilson MP	0
Mr Rick Wilson MP	1
Mr Keith Wolahan MP	10
The Hon Jason Wood MP	2
Mr Terry Young MP	6
Mr Tony Zappia MP	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,566</b>

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Susanne Lander, National Manager | s47F(1)  
 Consulted: N/A  
 Cleared by: Jason Lucchese, General Manager | s47F(1)  
 Date created: 25 January 2024 | Last Updated: 23 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### TIMED BREAKS

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) operates one of largest contact centre networks in the southern hemisphere with over 79 contact centre locations across Australia. Contact centres undertake telephony and processing work in Child Support, Medicare, and Centrelink. This is complemented by 318 face-to-face service centres.
- As at 30 September 2024, there was approximately 24,200 APS and non-APS<sup>1</sup> staff in the Customer Service Delivery Group, including approximately 3,500 leadership and enabling roles (APS5 to EL2). Staff work in, or support the delivery of, Centrelink, Child Support, and Medicare undertaking telephony, processing, and face-to-face servicing.
- To ensure that the Agency can deliver customer outcomes on such a large scale, industry standard contact centre tools are used, including schedules and auxiliary codes (AUX codes). This ensures that the right staff are in the right place at the right time to meet customer demand.
- AUX codes are used by Service Officers to indicate if they are available to take customer calls or process work when they are rostered to do so. This helps to balance staff wellbeing, breaks and learning opportunities.
- AUX codes are used to enable the Agency to provide accessible, quality, and timely services.

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<sup>1</sup> Non-APS includes contractors, labour hire and secondees.  
QB24-000019

- The Agency does not instruct leaders to monitor bathroom breaks or undertake surveillance of staff use of bathroom facilities.
- The Agency is proactive in managing the impacts of work demands, and promotes healthy workplaces, which include the physical environment, psychosocial environment, health and wellness and work-life balance.
- Staff can access the bathrooms as and when needed, or step away from their desk for other reasons, and use an AUX code so the system does not direct calls to them whilst they are away from their desk.
- A staff member who works 7.5 hours in a day may access up to 50 minutes of paid breaks, and a minimum 30 minute unpaid lunch break, and can go to the toilet when they need to do so.
- The selection of an AUX code for those breaks ensures staff members will not have calls delivered to them during their break.
- The Agency encourages leaders to consider staff performance holistically, through contemporary coaching approaches aimed at supporting Service Officers to achieve customer outcomes.
- Contemporary leadership development has been a focus for the Agency, including training leaders in psychological safety and human-centred performance in a contact centre environment.
- There are numerous initiatives in place across the Agency to support staff health and wellbeing.
- From November 2023, over a period of 10 weeks, a record 3,000 additional frontline staff were progressively onboarded and trained to accelerate claims processing times and improve access for customers.

## BACKGROUND

- At Senate Estimates in February 2024, the Agency received questions regarding the alleged monitoring of toilet breaks. The CEO and Deputy CEO Customer Service Delivery Group (CSDG) advised that they would look into the allegations to ensure that it was not occurring.
- On 16 February 2024, Deputy CEO Jarrod Howard wrote to all staff in the CSDG, reiterating that the monitoring of toilet breaks does not align to our culture or leadership expectations. He invited all staff to reach out to him or other senior leaders in the group if they have any concerns to ensure that we could solve any issues as they arise.
- On 19 February 2024, the CEO David Hazlehurst wrote to all Agency staff to reiterate that the monitoring of toilet breaks is not our policy, and not our practice. Mr Hazlehurst encouraged staff to report any occurrences to their senior leaders if it ever occurs.
- In February and March, Mr Howard met with leaders at all levels across the CSDG reinforcing the expectations set out in previous communications, including the focus on human-centred leadership.
- On 4 March 2024, Mr Howard again wrote to all staff in the CSDG thanking them for their feedback and advising that there were a very small number of areas that needed extra support, and that conversations with those leaders had occurred.
- At Senate Estimates on 3 June 2024, Senator David Pocock commented “I've heard from staff that they no longer feel like they're being monitored on their toilet breaks, so thank you for taking those concerns seriously.”

## AUX codes and schedule adherence

- Contact centre staff schedules contain information of start and finish times, tea break and mealtimes, activities (work queues and types) and exceptions (off phone events) undertaken for the day.
- Schedule adherence is a critical piece of information which helps the Agency meet its service delivery requirements, by trying to closely match Service Officers' working arrangements to forecast demand.
- AUX codes are entered by Service Officers to inform what they are doing each day, including activities that are unanticipated. The information captured through AUX codes supports the Agency's continual planning processes including forecast demand and handle time.
- AUX codes also support the Agency to create a healthy and balanced work environment. For example, the Workplace Health and Safety AUX code enables the Agency to understand customer aggression incidents and how they can best support staff.

## Reporting

- The Agency has a range of performance reporting. This includes information for staff on their own individual performance and views for team leaders and service managers.
- This information is available daily, by week and by settlement period. Leaders can access operational insights including trends over longer ranges of time. This access aligns to their Australian Public Service (APS) level and span of responsibility including location.

## APS Employee Census results and attrition

- When comparing Agency separation rates with other APS agencies, the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) excludes those employees that leave the Agency to join another APS agency.
- The Agency's ongoing separation rate of 15.2 per cent for the 12 months to 30 June 2024.
- This comprised of 5.6 per cent that left for another APS agency, and 9.6 per cent that separated for other reasons (including retirement or resignation).
- 9.6 per cent for the Agency is well within normal separation rates for Australia when compared to:
  - The overall APS was 6.9 per cent<sup>1</sup>.
  - On average 7.0 per cent for other APS extra large agencies.
  - The Australian workforce sector was 14 per cent<sup>2</sup>.
- From 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2024, 6,188 APS employees (4,971 ongoing, 673 non-ongoing and 544 casual) have left the Agency. Of the 4,971 ongoing separations, 1,837 (37 per cent) left to join another APS agency.

The average Agency tenure for our ongoing employees is 13 years, with the lowest average in our APS3 cohort at 6 years. This has remained consistent from the previous financial year.
- The Agency is committed to creating a safe and healthy environment for all its employees and continually looks for opportunities to build healthier workplaces.
- The Agency has a range of resources to promote mentally healthy workplaces. These include strategies and tools to identify and manage work-related risks, build capability to respond and promote positive aspects of work that contribute to good mental health, including:
  - leader wellbeing conversations toolkit
  - mental health training
  - safe service focus – a trauma informed approach
  - mentally healthy learning bites
  - my wellbeing plan
  - staff distress response toolkit, and

- APS mental health capability framework.

[1] APS sourced from APS Employment Release Tables – 31 December 2023

[2] Australian Human Resource Institute (AHRI) March 2024 Quarterly Australian Work Outlook Report

## MEDIA

Date	Item
<b>14 February 2024</b>	ABC News - Services Australia employees publicly shamed for toilet breaks over 5 minutes
<b>18 January 2024</b>	The Guardian - Centrelink staff claim toilet breaks are being timed by management in crackdown

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Melissa Brotherson-Clarke, A/g General Manager Smart Centres Operations, s47F(1)  
Data Contact: Goran Stojanovski, A/g General Manager Workforce Capability, s47F(1)  
Cleared by: Jarrod Howard, Deputy CEO Customer Service Delivery, 02 6133 0337 | s47F(1)  
Date created: 25 January 2024 | Last Updated: 25 October 2024



## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### SERVICES AUSTRALIA'S RESPONSE TO PEOPLE RELEASED FROM IMMIGRATION DETENTION

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) continues to work closely with the Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs) regarding people who have been released from immigration detention because of the High Court decision.
- This support includes assisting people, who upon release, decide to apply for the Special Benefit (SpB) payment.

#### KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- As of 30 September 2024, the number of people released from immigration detention who have sought support from the Agency is 190.
- The total number of customers in this cohort in receipt of SpB was 131 as of 30 September 2024.
- The total number of customers in this cohort who are enrolled in Medicare was 161 as of 30 September 2024.

#### IF ASKED

***How many customers remain in receipt of the Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) payment?***

- Any questions regarding this matter should be referred to Home Affairs.

***When did the SpB payment start for the NZYQ cohort? Were SpB claims for this cohort prioritised by the Agency?***

- There is no single date this cohort started receiving this payment.
- The Agency aims to finalise all SpB new claims within the timeliness standard which is 80 per cent within 21 days.
- Those released from held detention were advised by their service provider to test their eligibility for SpB.
- Some people did this on release, others waited, and some have not claimed.

***When did the SRSS payment start for NZYQ cohort?***

- There is no single date that this cohort started receiving this payment.
- Prior to the NZYQ decision, people released from residence determination arrangements, may have already been in receipt of the SRSS payment from the Agency.
- Upon release, customers in this cohort, were eligible to apply for SpB if they chose to do so.

***Does the Agency hold details about the individuals receiving the payment like we would for other payments we administer? Or is this only held by Home Affairs?***

- The Agency collects and holds the data of SRSS and SpB customers to assess their initial and ongoing eligibility for payment.
- The information held for SRSS and SpB customers is similar to that held for customers in receipt of JobSeeker Payment or Youth Allowance.

***What is the breakdown of people released from held detention or residence determination?***

- Any questions regarding the breakdown of individuals released from held detention or residence determination should be referred to Home Affairs.

***Has Home Affairs engaged with the Agency regarding newly launched class actions?***

- Any questions regarding newly launched class actions, including stakeholder engagement, should be referred to Home Affairs to respond.

***Does the Agency have any information regarding new launched class actions?***

- Any questions regarding newly launched class action should be referred to Home Affairs to respond.

## BACKGROUND

- On 9 November 2023, the Agency was contacted and held a meeting with Home Affairs regarding this cohort.
- On 13 and 15 of November 2023, the Agency, Home Affairs, and the Department of Social Services (DSS) met to discuss the impacts of the High Court decision regarding people in held detention or residence determination arrangements. These discussions included the level of support needed for people impacted by this ruling, including eligibility for Income Support Payments (ISP) administered by the Agency.
- Service Providers contracted by Home Affairs work closely with people impacted by this decision and support them in lodging their claim for SpB with the Agency.
- Customers in receipt of SRSS payments from the Agency were eligible to receive payments until their claim for SpB was granted or Home Affairs cancelled their payment.
- People who have been released from held detention will be financially supported by Service Providers contracted by Home Affairs.
- The Agency has put in place processes to assist in the identification of people in this cohort who lodged SpB claims.
- The Agency continues to work closely with DSS and Home Affairs to provide information to support impacted people. This includes:
  - the process Service Providers need to follow to assist a person to initiate a SpB claim
  - Proof of Identity requirements
  - the application of a 13-week activity test exemption by the Agency for people in this cohort to ensure no impacts to payment, and
  - other payments and support that people may be eligible for outside of SpB, including Health Care Card, Family Tax Benefit, Parental Leave Pay, Child Care Subsidy, and Medicare.

## STATUS RESOLUTION SUPPORT SERVICES PAYMENT (SRSS)

- On 1 April 2014, the Agency commenced the administration of the SRSS payment on behalf of Home Affairs.
- The SRSS payment provides financial support to asylum seekers, as part of the broader SRSS program administered by Home Affairs.
- The SRSS program provides temporary, needs based support to asylum seekers who are unable to support themselves while resolving their immigration status.
- Home Affairs determines a person's eligibility for the SRSS payment.
- The rate of payment depends upon the customer's circumstances, and includes:

- Living Allowance
- Rental Assistance Allowance – where a customer is paying for private accommodation, and
- Dependent Child Allowance – where a SRSS family has one or more dependent children.
- Customers who are granted a bridging visa may be eligible for Medicare.
- SRSS payments are paid to eligible customers on a fortnightly basis.
- The SRSS payment is not a social security payment and customers receiving the payment do not have access to other Agency payments or services.
- SRSS payments are calculated as a percentage of equivalent social security and family assistance payments made to Australian residents and citizens.
- Timeliness standards for processing SRSS new claims is 85 per cent within 14 days.

### **SPECIAL BENEFIT (SPB)**

- The SpB payment has been available to eligible customers since 1945.
- The Agency administers the SpB payment on behalf of DSS.
- SpB is a discretionary payment for eligible people who:
  - for reasons beyond their control, are in financial hardship, or
  - are not able to earn enough income to support themselves and their dependants.
- To be eligible for SpB, a person must be:
  - unable to receive any other social security payment, and
  - in financial hardship and unable to obtain or earn a sufficient livelihood for themselves and any dependents, and
  - be in Australia throughout the period for which payment is sought, and
  - be an Australian citizen or Australian resident under 16 years of age, or
  - be the holder of a temporary visa subclass 060, 070, 309, 449, 785, 786, 790, or 820, or
  - the holder of a Criminal Justice Stay Visa.
- There are a range of reasons customers may be eligible for SpB including (but not limited to):
  - The person has an illness or disability or is of Age Pension age but does not meet the 10 years' residence requirement to claim Disability Support Pension or Age Pension.
  - The person has suffered a substantial change in circumstances beyond their control, such as family or domestic violence, or the death of a partner during the newly arrived residents waiting period.

- The person holds an eligible temporary visa and has no other means of financial support.
- The Agency collects and holds the data of SpB customers to assess their initial and ongoing eligibility for payment.

## MEDIA

Date	Item
8 OCTOBER 24	The ABC published an article detailing an alleged visa breach by a person from the NZYQ cohort. <a href="#">NZYQ detainee allegedly breached conditions not to go near schools or childcare centres eight times - ABC News</a>
11 JULY 24	The ABC published an article detailing an alleged visa breach by a person from the NZYQ cohort. <a href="#">NZYQ detainee allegedly breached conditions not to go near schools or childcare centres eight times - ABC News</a>
13 JUNE 24	<i>The Guardian</i> published an article on asylum seekers being held on Nauru. <a href="#">‘What is our future?’: the Nauru detention centre was empty. Now 100 asylum seekers are held there   Australian immigration and asylum   The Guardian</a>
11 JUNE 24	<i>Riotact</i> published an article on the new Ministerial Direction given over visas and deportations. <a href="#">New ministerial direction given over visas and deportations   Riotact (the-riotact.com)</a>
14 MAY 24	<i>News.Com</i> published an article detailing an alleged visa breach by a person from the NZYQ cohort. <a href="#">AFP lays charges in Western Sydney over alleged visa breach following NZYQ decision   news.com.au — Australia’s leading news site</a>
30 APR 24	The ABC published an article regarding the family injured because of a home invasion in which a person from the NZYQ cohort was allegedly involved. <a href="#">THE BLOODIED AND BRUISED IMAGE THAT PUTS A HUMAN FACE ON THE HIGH COURT FALLOUT - ABC NEWS</a>
8 NOV 23	<i>ABC News</i> published an article on Landmark High Court ruling paves way to end indefinite detention for asylum seekers with nowhere to go. <a href="#">Landmark High Court ruling paves way to end indefinite detention for asylum seekers with nowhere to go - ABC News</a>

## **CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION**

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Date created: 22 March 2024 | Last Updated: 25 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### CENTREPAY

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) is committed to keeping customers protected and is concerned about any potential exploitation of customers using the Centrepay service.
- Centrepay is a valuable budgeting tool for income support recipients. It helps reduce vulnerability by ensuring payments occur on time, protects against late fees, and allows customers to access goods and services they may otherwise not get without the guarantee of payment by the Centrepay service.
- The Agency acknowledges recent concerns raised regarding Centrepay and is focused on ensuring Centrepay remains a fit for purpose budgeting tool.
- Priority reform work has commenced in collaboration with government, industry, peak advisory groups, and customers. This includes extensive consultation activities with Centrepay customers (including those in remote communities), businesses, advocacy groups and other government agencies.
- The Agency is already making tangible improvements to better support customers to reduce any potential exploitation, including the use of mandated target amounts for certain goods and providing greater support to customers receiving monies back as a result of overpayments.



- The Agency welcomes the strong message sent to businesses by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) with the announcement of two recent stop orders on Centrepay businesses.

**INDY-C-FASHION ACCESSORIES PTY LTD (INDY-C)**

- On 30 September 2024, ASIC issued an interim stop order against Indy-C, a registered Centrepay Business, this interim stop order was valid for 21 days unless revoked earlier.
- This stop order prevents Indy-C from establishing any new arrangement to pay for goods on credit through Centrepay deductions.
- The stop order was issued as ASIC considers the nature of Indy-C's business and its reliance on this Centrepay credit arrangement means it must comply with the design and distribution obligations (DDOs) administered by ASIC.
- During a hearing on 16 October 2024, ASIC made a further interim stop order prohibiting the same conduct covered by the initial interim order. This order is indefinite and will remain in place while ASIC considers submissions by the business.
- The Agency is considering the impact of the ASIC decision on existing Centrepay customers and to support them with next steps.
- The business cannot enter into any new arrangements and the Agency's focus is on ensuring existing customers are not subject to further financial risk.

**CORAL COAST DISTRIBUTORS (CAIRNS) PTY LTD TRADING AS URBAN RAMPAGE.**

- On 24 April 2024, ASIC ordered that Coral Coast Distributors (Cairns) Pty Ltd (CCDC) cannot offer Centrepay to customers in its Urban Rampage stores.
- Neither the business or their customers can enter into any new Centrepay arrangement or increase any existing arrangements.
- The business sought a stay order on the ASIC decision which was heard in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) on 3 June 2024.
- On 12 June 2024, the application made by CCDC to the AAT for the stay order was denied. The more substantive AAT hearing on the ASICs decision is expected to be heard in early 2025.

**ENERGY PROVIDER OVERPAYMENTS**

- The Agency is currently working with a number of energy providers to support returning monies back to customers.
- These are at various stages of the return process. The Agency is working closely with customers and the businesses to ensure this process is as seamless as possible.
- Three energy providers have been referred to the regulator and are now subject to additional mandatory reporting requirements that will allow both the business and the Agency to closely monitor any potential overpayments and ensure these are addressed quickly.
- The Agency is also considering options to apply these additional reporting requirements to more businesses in this sector.

- The Agency has implemented a range of strategies to better manage overpayments, including:
  - outbound engagement strategies to provide customers with additional support with managing their money, as required
  - updating procedural information to ensure there is better support for staff and customers, and
  - placing additional compliance and reporting obligations on businesses where there is a higher risk of ongoing or systemic issues that result in overpayments.

***IF ASKED***

***What is Services Australia doing to reform Centrepay?***

- As part of the Agency's reform of Centrepay, extensive community engagement and consultation has been undertaken to ensure that Centrepay meets the ongoing needs and expectations of customers and the broader community.
- As part of this reform, the Centrepay policy is being reviewed with a particular focus on strengthening the safeguards and protections for customers to reduce financial harm.
- To support the Agency's reform work, a dedicated Centrepay Reform Peak Advisory Reference Group has been established which includes financial counsellors who provide support to customers, many from First Nations backgrounds.
- The Centrepay Reform Discussion Paper was released for public consultation on 20 May 2024, inviting public submissions from key

stakeholders and the community to support (and inform) the Agency's reform work.

- The paper was open for public submissions for a seven-week period, 117 submissions were received during this period. Analysis and reporting on these submissions was published on DSS Engage on 28 October 2024, outlining trends, issues and potential areas of reform.
- In June 2024, the Agency commenced Market Research activities with Centrepay registered businesses to seek input and feedback on reform of Centrepay.
- In September and October 2024, in partnership with ETM Perspective – a First Nations owned external provider, the Agency undertook consultation and engagement activities with customers living in regional and remote locations. The Agency visited communities in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, to talk with customers on how they use Centrepay and how the service could be improved. This has helped to crystallise some of the additional support customers in these communities will need to transition off Centrepay for some services.

***What actions is the Agency taking to combat predatory behaviours?***

- The Agency has written to all Centrepay businesses reminding them of their obligations and informing them of the Agency's intention to reform Centrepay.

- The Agency has implemented mandated target amounts of \$250 per deduction authority for all businesses using Centrepay for the supply of basic household items.
- The Agency has implemented ongoing processes to withdraw inactive businesses from Centrepay. As at 27 September 2024, more than 3,000 businesses have been removed from the program.
- The Agency works closely with regulators, including ASIC to ensure the protection of Centrepay customers.
- The Agency provides regular data to ASIC on Centrepay businesses to support their regulatory functions and continues to work with ASIC where they have identified high risk businesses.

***Was the Agency investigating CCDC prior to the ASIC stop order decision.***

- The Agency was aware of complaints and concerns raised about CCDC in several communities and has been engaging directly with this business regarding their Centrepay obligations.
- The Agency worked closely with ASIC prior to the stop order decision being made and continues to do so.

***What is Services Australia doing to ensure similar businesses aren't also failing to comply with the Design and Distribution Obligations of the Corporations Act?***

- The Agency relies on relevant regulators to enforce actions where a business may be in breach of their regulatory requirements. The Agency will use these enforcements to inform Centrepay consequences.
- ASIC have provided advice on the application of the Design and Distribution Obligations (DDO's), however it is beyond the Agency's

remit to assess whether a particular product offered by a Centrepay business complies with the DDO's. This is a matter under the *Corporations Act 2001* and regulated by ASIC.

- The Agency does work closely with regulators including ASIC, to refer businesses for potential regulatory action when a Centrepay audit indicates a possible regulatory concern.
- The Agency has been working closely with ASIC regarding the application of DDO's, including how the Agency can assist by identifying some businesses using Centrepay where DDO's may apply.
- The Agency will continue to engage ASIC as it seeks to further understand and clarify the potential application of the DDOs.

***What processes are currently in place to avoid overpayments to Centrepay customers?***

- Businesses have an obligation under the Centrepay Policy and Terms to ensure that an overpayment does not occur.
- If a customer no longer receives services from a Centrepay business, the business must cancel the deduction before the next scheduled payment if the customer has not already done so.
- Customers receive SMS messages once their Centrepay arrangement has been in place for 12 months. This prompts customers to assess if the arrangement still suits them so they can adjust accordingly.
- Compliance reviews are undertaken with registered Centrepay businesses to review customer records, to ensure the business is

compliant with the Centrepay Policy and Terms, and to ensure no overpayments have occurred.

- If overpayments do occur, businesses must take remedial action including refunding amounts to the customer. If the business is unable to contact the customer, they must advise the Agency to request assistance to refund the amounts to the customers.
- Additional reporting requirements have been implemented for businesses identified with ongoing issues with overpayments. These additional requirements include monthly reporting to manage and track any instances of overpayments.

***If asked on Centrepay overpayments to AGL?***

- The Federal Court of Australia's decision of 23 August 2024 reinforces the importance of businesses prioritising protections for consumers.
- The Agency has implemented mandatory reporting requirements on AGL to ensure ongoing monitoring and protections for Centrepay customers.
- The Agency will not make further comment as the matter may be subject to appeal.

***If asked on Centrepay and Rent4Keeps?***

- The Federal Court of Australia's decision on 4 September 2024 reinforces the importance of businesses prioritising protections for consumers.
- The Agency welcomes the Federal Court's decision and the work undertaken by ASIC on this important matter.

- The Agency remains focused on Centrepay reform including how it can further strengthen protections for its Centrepay customers.
- The Agency is reviewing the decision and will monitor the case noting proceedings are still underway to determine the final orders.



## BACKGROUND

### Indy-C-Fashion Accessories Pty Ltd (Indy-C)

- Indy-C is a clothing and homewares retailer located in Katherine, NT.
- In November 2023, the Agency referred this business to ASIC for investigation after identifying their practices were possibly non-compliant with the Design and Distribution Obligations (DDO's) of the *Corporations Act*.
- On 30 September 2024, ASIC issued an interim stop order against Indy-C, a registered Centrepay Business.
- The stop order was issued as ASIC considers the nature of Indy-C's business and its reliance on this Centrepay credit arrangement means it must comply with the DDOs administered by ASIC.
- This stop order prevents Indy-C from establishing any new arrangement to pay for goods on credit through Centrepay deductions.
- On 16 October 2024, ASIC made a further interim stop order prohibiting the same conduct covered by the initial interim order, this order is indefinite and will remain in place while ASIC considers submissions by the business.
- The Agency is considering the impact of the ASIC decision on existing Centrepay customers and to support them with next steps.

### Coral Coast Distributors Cairns (Pty Ltd) (CCDC)

- CCDC operates a chain of stores trading as Urban Rampage in locations across the Northern Territory, Western Australia, and Queensland.
- Urban Rampage sell a range of household items, including clothing and footwear, toys, and small household goods.
- On 28 February 2024, ASIC issued an interim stop order against CCDC, a registered Centrepay Business.
- On 15 March 2024, ASIC made a further Interim Stop Order to remain in place indefinitely whilst the delegate considered the case.
- On 21 March 2024, in response to the further order, the Agency issued a temporary Centrepay suspension notice to CCDC, revoking their approval to utilise the Centrepay Service for the duration of ASIC's interim stop order.
- The suspension in place by the Agency means the business cannot enter into any new Centrepay arrangements and cannot increase existing arrangements.
- On 26 April 2024, ASIC imposed a permanent Stop Order on CCDC, as the business failed to comply with the Design and Distribution Obligations of the *Corporations Act*, restricting them from offering Centrepay in Urban Rampage stores.

- CCDC has lodged an application against the Stop Order at the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT), this is expected to be heard later this year.
- Pending this review, CCDC made an interlocutory application for a stay of the decision pending the final hearing and decision of the AAT.
- This application was heard on 3 June 2024 and on 12 June 2024, the AAT refused to stay the decision pending the final hearing expected to be heard in early 2025.

### **Energy Retailers**

- Overpayments usually occur when a customer does not update or end a deduction, for example a customer may set up a regular deduction for their energy provider and forget to update their Centrepay deduction when they move.
- If overpayments do occur, businesses must take remedial action including refunding amounts directly to customers. If the business is unable to return the overpayment, they must contact the Agency for assistance with returning payments to customers.
- The Agency has referred a further three businesses to the AER where overpayments have been identified.

### **AGL**

- In late 2020/early 2021, the Agency referred AGL Retail Energy Limited to the Australian Energy Regulator (AER).
- From 3 to 6 June 2024, the Federal Court of Australia heard the case of AER versus AGL Retail Energy Limited.
- On 23 August 2024, the judgement was handed down in the AER's favour, stating that AGL had breached the National Energy Retail Rules.
- The Federal Court found that AGL overcharged 483 Centrepay customers between December 2016 to November 2021 and that AGL failed to notify and refund these customers within the required timeframes. In total, the court found that AGL committed 16,156 breaches of the Rules.

### **Rent4Keeps (Darranda Pty Ltd)**

- Darranda Pty Ltd is a franchise of Rent4Keeps and is a registered and active Centrepay business.
- ASIC alleged that between 1 April 2019 and 30 June 2019, the business was operating a business model designed to avoid consumer protections and commenced proceedings against the business.
- At the time the National Credit Code contained a prohibition on lenders entering a credit contract where the annual cost rate exceeded 48 per cent, but this cap did not apply to consumer leases.

- The matter went to trial in the Federal Court from 5 to 14 February 2024 with closing submissions heard on 18 March 2024.
- On 4 September 2024, the Federal Court handed down its judgement, confirming that the business model used by the business breached the Credit Act.

### **CENTREPAY OVERVIEW**

- Centrepay is a free and voluntary service that customers can use to pay for ongoing expenses such as rent and utility bills.
- From 1 July to 30 June 2024:
  - Centrepay made 23.3 million deductions totalling \$2.9 billion
  - an average of 604,208 customers per month used the Centrepay service, and
  - as at 30 June 2024, there were 13,375 approved Centrepay businesses.

## MEDIA ARTICLES

Date	Item
1 Oct 2024	ASIC bans Katherine shop Indy-C store from using Centrepay over concerns for vulnerable Aboriginal consumers.   <i>The West Australian</i>
1 Oct 2024	Katherine store Indy-C banned from Centrelink credit scheme   <i>Daily Telegraph</i>
1 Oct 2024	ASIC Halts NT Business Over First Nations Financial Risk   <i>Mirage News</i>
04 Sep 2024	Rent4Keeps consumer goods 'leases' breached law, court rules   Centrepay   <a href="https://businessnewsaustralia.com">businessnewsaustralia.com</a>
24 Aug 2024	AGL breached rules 16,000 times in wrongly taking welfare money from hundreds of people, court rules   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i>
23 Aug 2024	AGL overcharged customers after services were stopped   <i>Narromine News</i>   Narromine, NSW ( <a href="https://narrominenewsonline.com.au">narrominenewsonline.com.au</a> )
03 Aug 2024	<u>Media exposure has forced the government's hand on Centrepay. The contrast with robodebt could not be more stark   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
02 Aug 2024	<u>Consumer watchdog urges crackdown on businesses using Centrepay to cause financial harm   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
24 July 2024	<u>Corporate regulator urges crackdown on Centrepay after more than 40% of businesses found to be non-compliant   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
18 July 2024	<u>'Unscrupulous' businesses abused Centrepay to take welfare money from dead Australians, advocacy groups claim   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
20 June 2024	<u>Clothing store pulls in 11m before ban</u>
18 June 2024	<u>Urban Rampage sales fall 70 per cent after Centrepay welfare scheme ban   <i>The West Australian</i></u>
6 June 2024	<u>AGL thought it was doing welfare recipients a 'favour' when refunding money it wrongly collected, court hears</u>
3 June 2024	<u>Origin Energy wrongly took \$2.5m from nearly 3,000 ex-customers via Centrepay   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>

Date	Item
21 May 2024	<u>Centrepay scandal: Labor to reform debit scheme to combat 'predatory behaviour'   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
21 May 2024	<u>Centrepay reform targeting exploitation   Department of Social Services Ministers (dss.gov.au)</u>
13 May 2024	<u>Centrepay scandal: energy firm Origin wrongly received funds from welfare payments of former customers   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
4 May 2024	<u>Financial rights advocates 'seriously concerned' about how Youpla support scheme will be spent   Australia news   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
2 May 2024	<u>Centrepay ban is permanent   <i>Broome Advertiser</i></u>
1 May 2024	<u>ASIC bans firm's Centrelink deductions  <i>North West Telegraph</i></u>
1 May 2024	<u>AGL's use of Centrepay not audited for two years despite allegations it wrongly took \$700,000 from vulnerable Australians   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
27 April 2024	<u>First Nations Retailer to Sue ASIC Over Centrepay Ban - <i>Toorak Times</i></u>
26 April 2024	<u>Urban Rampage considers appealing against ASIC's permanent ban on the retailer using Centrepay - <i>ABC News</i></u>
26 April 2024	<u>Urban Rampage ramps up legal action against corporate watchdog   <i>National Indigenous Times</i></u>
26 April 2024	<u>ASIC bans Urban Rampage from charging customers through Centrepay   <i>Pilbara News</i></u>
26 April 2024	<u>Urban Rampage banned from using Centrepay to sign up mostly Indigenous customers to credit arrangements   Australia news   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
26 April 2024	<u>24-084MR ASIC orders end to Centrepay credit arrangements in Urban Rampage stores   ASIC</u>
19 April 2024	<u>Landlords charging Centrepay transaction fees to vulnerable tenants against scheme policy   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
11 April 2024	<u>How Centrepay plunged vulnerable Australians into debt - podcast   Australia news   <i>The Guardian</i></u>

Date	Item
4 April 2024	<u>ASIC's Discriminatory Centrepay Ban &amp; Delay Tactics Against First Nations Shoppers Set for AAT Legal Challenge   <i>The National Tribune</i></u>
3 April 2024	<u>AGL was warned it was wrongly taking welfare payments from former customers but failed to act, court hears   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
1 April 2024	<u>Second energy firm wrongly received money from welfare payments under Centrepay scheme   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
30 March 2024	<u>'I just kept paying': Indigenous people are being exploited by businesses using Centrepay debit scheme   Centrepay   <i>The Guardian</i></u>
27 March 2024	<u>Urban Rampage accuses ASIC of discrimination against First Nations customers after Centrepay ban - <i>ABC News</i></u>
21 March 2024	<u>ASIC rejects claims Urban Rampage ban is hurting First Nation communities   <i>The Sydney Morning Herald</i></u>
19 March 2024	<u>'Click and pay for whites only, no credit for black fellas': First Nations shoppers slam ASIC decision to cut off Centrepay   <i>The National Tribune</i></u>
17 March 2024	<u>Urban Rampage controversy: Inside life of retail entrepreneur and founder Naomi Cuizon Hughes Morris   <i>The West Australian</i></u>
14 March 2024	<u>Centrepay ban sparks anger   <i>Broome Advertiser</i></u>
7 March 2024	<u>Urban Rampage defends business practices in remote communities amid regulatory scrutiny   <i>The West Australian</i></u>
5 March 2024	<u>Services Australia urged to restrict businesses using Centrelink credit after ASIC stop order on Urban Rampage   <i>The West Australian</i></u>
1 March 2024	<u>ASIC issues retailer Urban Rampage interim stop order over use of Centrepay - <i>ABC News</i></u>

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

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Date created: 22 March 2024 | Last Updated: 28 October 2024  
QB24-000030

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### BUDGET MEASURES LED BY SERVICES AUSTRALIA

#### 2024–25 BUDGET MEASURES

##### Services Australia – Additional Resourcing

- The Government is investing \$2.8 billion into Services Australia (the Agency) from 2023–24 to 2027–28 to:
  - increase service delivery capability
  - improve safety for staff and customers, and
  - operate and enhance myGov.

##### Increasing service delivery capability

- The Agency has received \$1.8 billion over three financial years to 2025–26 to:
  - maintain a customer service workforce to deliver timely services and payments to Australians experiencing vulnerability in the midst of a cost of living crisis
  - sustain emergency response capability, and
  - support other aspects of the Agency’s operations.
- This will improve claim processing times, which will help decrease call wait times for customers.
- There will be an additional 4,030 staff in 2024–25 and 3,530 staff in 2025–26.
- The additional staffing includes continuing current emergency response capability of 850 staff.

## **Improving safety for staff and customers**

- The Government has invested \$314.1 million in 2024–25 and 2025–26 in improving safety for Agency staff and customers.
- The Agency will significantly improve security, as well as safety systems and practices. This includes:
  - increased use of security guards
  - upgraded and enhanced security features in all service centres
  - enhanced service centre design, and
  - improved technical data and capability.
- Through this measure, the Agency is continuing to implement recommendations of the Security Risk Management Review to curb the unacceptable incidents of violence occurring at Agency sites.
- The Government is also legislating additional penalties for addressing acts of aggression or violence towards frontline Commonwealth employees and a Commonwealth Workplace Protection Order Scheme.

## **Operate and Enhance myGov**

- This measure provides the Agency with ongoing resourcing to operate and maintain myGov, and deliver targeted improvements.
- Over the next four years, the Agency is receiving \$629.5 million from 2024–25 to 2027–28.
- This will fund the ongoing operation and maintenance of myGov to keep it available, secure, safe, and contemporary.



- This includes funding for the continuation of the Independent Advisory Board through to June 2028, and to deliver a whole-of-government approach to designing and prioritising initiatives with partner agencies which extend or enhance the myGov platform through to June 2028.
- This funding will:
  - support people to better secure their myGov accounts
  - strengthen myGov fraud prevention
  - improve digital communications through myGov, and
  - through enhanced staff tools, support Services Australia staff to deliver critical assistance to customers when they contact myGov.

## Other measures

- In addition to the Agency led Budget measures, there are a number of other measures that the Agency is undertaking on behalf of other agencies. The most significant of these are:
  - Improving Aged Care Support (led by Department of Health and Aged Care), with total funding of \$159.6 million, \$85.5 million in 2024–25.
  - Disability Employment Services Reform (led by Department of Social Services), with total funding of \$86.2 million, \$16.7 million in 2024–25.
  - Strengthening Medicare (led by Department of Health and Aged Care), with total funding of \$58.3 million, \$52 million in 2024–25.

- Digital ID (led by Department of Finance), with total funding of \$57.4 million, \$35.4 million in 2024-25.

## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT**

### **Establishment of the Administrative Review Tribunal**

- The Government has introduced legislation to abolish the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. It will establish a new, fit-for-purpose federal administrative body to be named the Administrative Review Tribunal (ART).
- The Agency has received \$43.9 million from 2023–24 to 2025–26 to support the Agency's readiness to engage with the new processes when the ART commences.
- This measure is subject to legislation passing.

## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY THE AUSTRALIAN BUREAU OF STATISTICS**

### **Delivering Census and modernising operations**

- The Agency has received \$9.1 million over three years through to 2026–27 to support the 2026 Census through myGov.
- This measure will allow myGov users to access the Census online through myGov and complete the Census on behalf of their household.

## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**

### **Child Care Subsidy Reform - further measures for strong and sustainable foundations**

- This measure:
  - Enables the Agency to build and enhance information in the Child Care Subsidy System.
  - Helps safeguard child care from fraud and non-compliance.
  - Provides funding to support a wage increase for the early childhood education and care sector.
- The Agency is receiving \$9.4 million over 2024–25 to 2027–28 to provide payments.

### **Australian Universities Accord - tertiary education system reforms**

- This measure introduces a cap on indexation of Higher Education Loan Payments (HELP) debts. From 1 June 2024 HELP debts will be indexed at whichever is the lower of Consumer Price Index and Wage Price Index.
- The Agency will receive \$0.5 million over 2023–24 and 2024–25 to ensure existing ICT systems support the indexation change.

## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS**

### **First Nations Prison to Employment Program**

- This measure will introduce a new program designed to achieve stronger prison to work transitions for First Nations people. It will replace the Time to Work Employment Service from 1 July 2025.
- On 1 July 2025, the new program will start in 27 select prisons and juvenile justice facilities, in every state and territory.
- From 1 July 2026, it will be expanded to all prisons and juvenile justice facilities, across both remote and non-remote areas. It is estimated that over time, more than 6,000 First Nations people will participate in the program each year.
- The Agency has received \$16.5 million over four years through to 2027–28 to support participants in the program.

### **Reforming Employment Services**

- This measure supports the Government's initial changes to Workforce Australia employment services and will:
  - strengthen the integrity of employment services, and
  - better recognise individuals' circumstances with more appropriate and consistent mutual obligation.
- The Agency has received \$16.9 million over four years through to 2027–28 to support this program.

## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY THE TREASURY**

### **Digital ID**

- The measure:
  - continues the Agency's Digital ID system administrator role, including ongoing delivery of the Oversight Authority Response System, and
  - provides ongoing funding for delivery of the Digital ID Exchange.
- The Agency has received \$57.4 million in 2024–25 and 2025–26 to continue its contribution to the Government's vision for Digital ID.

## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS**

### **Support to Individuals from Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories affected by the Hamas-Israel conflict**

- The Agency has received \$0.7 million in 2024–25 to implement the extension of Medicare eligibility to people from significantly affected areas of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories who have been granted a Bridging Visa E with work rights by the Department of Home Affairs. This includes their immediate family members on a Bridging Visa E.

### **Reforms to Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services**

- The Agency is implementing a new Humanitarian Integration and Settlement Program which is being led by the Department of Home Affairs, as the current humanitarian settlement service arrangements expire in June 2024.

- This measure also extends Medicare eligibility for Ukrainian nationals granted a Bridging Visa E by the Department of Home Affairs on or after 1 August 2022. This includes their immediate non-Ukrainian family members. Access to Medicare will extend for a further three years, from 1 July 2024 to 30 June 2027.

## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

### **Impact of the Douglas Decision on Social Security Means Testing**

- This measure will ensure the Federal Court of Australia’s decision in Commissioner of Taxation v Douglas (2020) doesn’t change income support entitlements for veterans who get a military invalidity payment and are affected by the decision.
- The Agency has received \$11.9 million from 2024–25 through to 2027–28 to implement a new income stream category called a ‘military invalidity pension income stream’, and a new means test.

### **Commonwealth Government-funded Paid Parental Leave – enhancement**

- This measure adds a superannuation guarantee payment to Paid Parental Leave. It also improves how employers interact with the Agency when they provide Parental Leave Pay to an employee on behalf of the Australian Government.
- The Agency received \$25.5 million from 2024–25 through to 2027–28 to implement these changes.

## **Endorsement of the Social Security Agreement between Australia and the Oriental Republic of Uruguay**

- The Agency has received \$11.9 million from 2024–25 through to 2027–28 to assist in the implementation of a Social Security Agreement with Uruguay, which will assist people to qualify for and claim pensions from Australia and Uruguay.
- The agreement also exempts employers and employees who are temporarily seconded to work from Australia to Uruguay or vice versa from paying into both their host and home country pension or superannuation schemes. This will apply for the duration of the secondment.

## **Disability Employment Services Reform**

- The Agency has received \$86.2 million through to 2027–28 to support the implementation of this measure, which will replace the existing Disability Employment Services with a new specialist disability employment program from 1 July 2025.
- The new program will help more people prepare for and find suitable employment, and more people will be eligible, including those with an assessed work capacity less than eight hours per week who are not on income support.
- The current two-year service limit will also be removed.
- There will be increased flexibility and tailored supports to help people with disability to find and keep a job. Employers will also be supported through a revised wage subsidy program.

## **A higher JobSeeker Payment rate for recipients with a partial capacity to work (0-14 hours)**

- The Agency has received \$21.5 million through to 2027–28 to support this measure, which will extend eligibility for the higher rate of JobSeeker Payment to single recipients who have an assessed partial capacity to work up to 14 hours per week.
- This cohort will also become eligible for the higher rate of Energy Supplement, which is currently \$9.50.

## **Commonwealth Rental Assistance - increase the maximum rates**

- This measure increases the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 10 per cent. Regular indexation will also be applied on top of the increase.
- The Agency has received \$18.2 million through to 2026–27 to support this measure.

## **Carer Payment - Increase Flexibility**

- The Agency has received \$12.2 million through to 2027–28 to support changes to the 25 hour per week rule, allowing carers to work up to 100 hours over a four-week settlement period.
- This measure will also remove education, volunteering activities and travel time from the participation limit, and allow carers to use single temporary cessation of care days.



## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGED CARE**

### **Improving Aged Care Support**

- The Agency has received \$159.6 million over five years to 2027–28 to deliver key aged care reforms and continue to implement recommendations from the Aged Care Royal Commission.
- This includes \$87.2 million over two years from 2024–25 and 2025–26 to further develop ICT infrastructure needed to implement the New Aged Care Act.

### **Health Workforce**

- This measure streamlines the process for internationally qualified health practitioners to get a Medicare provider number. The reduced wait time will allow appropriately credentialed internationally qualified health practitioners to start providing services sooner in the Australian health system.
- The Agency has received \$15 million through to 2025–26 to establish required system and business capabilities to automate issuing of Medicare provider numbers.

### **Strengthening Medicare - an effective and clinically appropriate Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS)**

- This measure introduces a reform to diagnostic imaging to both strengthen and provide increased affordability and access to Medicare.
- The Agency has received \$4.1 million in 2024–25 to introduce annual indexation of MBS amounts for nuclear medicine imaging services,

and remove the current magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) equipment eligibility requirements in the Diagnostic Imaging Services Table.

- This measure will also list new and amended services on the MBS.

### **Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS) - new and amended listings**

- The PBS provides subsidised access to medicines to Australian residents and overseas visitors from countries under Reciprocal Health Care Agreements.
- The Agency has received \$1.4 million from 2024–25 through to 2027–28 to list new medicines on the PBS and expands access to others.  
It will provide better treatment and improved health for Australians.

### **Strengthening Medicare**

- The Agency has received \$58.3 million from 2024–25 through to 2027–28 to deliver the following work to strengthen Medicare.
- Health Delivery Modernisation:
  - enhancements to MyMedicare
  - improve healthcare provider authentication
  - explore the expansion of the healthcare identifier service
  - examine use of the healthcare identifier service across the care sector to identify improvements and support greater use, and
  - enhance authentication within the Provider Digital Access system.
- Improve integrity of the Medicare Benefits Scheme:
  - introduce claiming restrictions for specific surgical items, and

- remove the ability for health care providers to submit bulk billed claims more than 12 months after the date of service.
- Wraparound primary care for frequent hospital users to reduce unplanned hospital attendances for patients that have complex, chronic conditions and frequently present at hospital.
- Reforming pathology application charging arrangements by repealing the *Health Insurance (Pathology) (Fees) Act 1991 (Pathology Fees Act)*, from 1 July 2025.

## **Women's Health**

- Under this measure, the Government will cover 100 per cent of the cost of claims for low-risk home births and intrapartum care outside a hospital. This will allow greater choice for women seeking access to low-risk home births and intrapartum services at home.
- The Agency received \$2.7 million through to 2027–28 to implement ICT and operational changes to support this measure.

## **Mental Health**

- The Agency received \$1 million from 2024–25 through to 2027–28 to improve the Better Access Initiative to better meet the needs of individuals and improve equity of access. It expands the range and reach of free mental health services available.

## **Strengthening Medicare - Medicare Urgent Care Clinics (Medicare UCC) - additional funding**

- The Agency has received \$3.2 million over 2024–25 and 2025–26 to support this boost to the Medicare UCC program.

- This measure will:
  - expand the program with a further 29 Medicare UCCs (taking the program to 87 clinics nationally)
  - cover Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) flow-on costs and authority associated with the additional clinics, where required, and
  - include MBS flow-on costs for the addition of appropriate non-vocationally registered general practitioner, echocardiogram, and pregnancy MBS items to the Medicare UCC program.

### **Securing Cheaper Medicines**

- The Agency received \$1.1 million in 2024-25 to:
  - introduce a temporary freeze on the indexation of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) co payment and remove the \$1 discount, and
  - expand access to the Closing Gap PBS co-payment program.

## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY THE NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE AGENCY**

### **National Disability Insurance Scheme - getting the NDIS back on track**

- The Agency has received \$23.5 million over 2024–25 and 2025–26 to extend the Agency's involvement in the Fraud Fusion Taskforce until 30 June 2026.
- This funding will be used to continue the work of Fraud Fusion Taskforce staff to gather intelligence, conduct fraud investigations and provide forensic services capability to member agencies.

- This includes funding for Australian Federal Police officers embedded within the Fraud Fusion Taskforce to support investigations.

## **BUDGET MEASURES LED BY THE NATIONAL INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS AGENCY**

### **Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program**

- The Agency has received \$11.2 million from 2024–25 to 2026–27 to support the implementation of this measure, which was announced as part of the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan on 13 February 2024.
- The Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program is being developed in partnership with First Nations people. It will start in the second half of 2024.

## **CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION**

Contact: Angela Diamond, Chief Financial Officer, s47F(1)  
Cleared by: Angela Diamond, Chief Financial Officer, s47F(1)  
Date created: 15 May 2024 | Last reviewed: 23 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### SPEECHWRITING

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) touches the lives of every Australian and needs to simplify complex information to help customers understand their entitlements and access services. Speeches and executive messaging are effective tools to ensure the right messages reach our customers, staff, and stakeholders.
- As the Agency and portfolio moved out of surge response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for high-quality content to support portfolio communication and engagement activities increased and intensified.
- Speechwriting is a highly specialised skillset.
- The Agency previously had a highly experienced speechwriter, who took extended leave due to ill health in late 2021 and didn't return to the role.
- The Agency attempted to bridge the gap with a part-time contractor, at a similar daily rate to the current speechwriter, from October 2021. However, they had limited availability which was insufficient to meet the growing requirements in 2022.
- Multiple market approaches failed to secure a suitable full-time candidate and confirmed a skills shortage for experienced, specialised speechwriters.

- Having exhausted all other options, in September 2022, an experienced speechwriter was directly sourced and contracted to allow the Agency to provide the necessary support.
- A part of the contract is capability building. This has included delivering five speech writing workshops and individual mentoring.
- Contractor rates recognise they are not employees and therefore on-costs such as leave are the responsibility of the contractor.
- On 8 August 2024, the Agency published a job advertisement on [apsjobs.gov.au](https://apsjobs.gov.au) for an Executive Level 2 speechwriter, to test the market again and assess capability that might be available.
- Applications closed on 23 August 2024.
- A successful candidate has been identified and pre-employment actions are underway.

#### ORDER TO PRODUCE DOCUMENTS

- Documents within scope of the Senate Order for Production of Documents - Services Australia – Speechwriting Services (Notice of Motion 538 and 585) were tabled with the Senate on Friday 4 October 2024.
- Responding to the Order involved searches of relevant email inboxes and hard drives, and extensive manual review and compilation to determine in-scope material and apply appropriate redactions (for example, to protect individuals' privacy).
- More than a dozen staff in Services Australia were involved.

- Total staff hours spent was 1,000, equivalent to one person working for half a year.
- A total of 20,000 pages (40 reams of paper) was tabled (two sets of 10,000 pages each).
- The effort involved was equivalent to the Agency processing nearly 3,500 crisis payments claims.

#### **IF ASKED**

- The daily rate is consistent with other highly skilled contractors, such as ICT and data specialist roles.
- From 20 September 2022 to 30 September 2024 there was an allowance in the contract for travel costs incurred by the contractor. This was paid in addition to the daily rate.
- If required to travel, the Agency covers domestic travel fees only. This does not include travel allowance. The contractor can seek reimbursement for associated travel costs, such as taxis and accommodation.



## **KEY FACTS AND FIGURES**

- The initial contract value was \$282,045 (GST exclusive) / \$310,250 (GST inclusive) for a one-year contract.
- The first variation amount was \$282,045 (GST exclusive) / \$310,250 (GST inclusive), exercising a first contract extension option to 30 September 2024.
- The Agency has paid \$546,787 (GST exclusive) through the contract from 20 September 2022 to 30 September 2024.

## **KEY DATES**

- The contract has been in place since 20 September 2022.

## BACKGROUND

- A component of this procurement is for the speechwriter to build the capability of Communications Division staff through mentoring, training, and skills transfer.
- The speechwriter reports to the Executive Communications team in the Communications Division.
- This work is in addition to the work done in-house to support executive communication, which includes speechwriting, video scripts, forewords, and all-staff emails.
- This procurement supports advancing the Agency's strategic positioning and messaging, both with staff and external audiences.
- Duties involve:
  - Develop and write speeches and talking points for the Minister, CEO and other senior executives for both external and internal audiences.
  - Manage competing priorities and quality of work to achieve effective outcomes within tight deadlines.
  - Devise and deliver skills transfer for select Communications Division staff to develop their writing capabilities, including mentoring and training.

## MEDIA

Date	Item
8 June 2024	<a href="#"><u>So Bill Shorten's speechwriter earns \$310,000 a year. Nothing to see here</u></a> , <i>Sydney Morning Herald</i> , Jacqueline Maley
7 June 2024	<a href="#"><u>Services Australia, where the minister's words are worth diamonds</u></a> , <i>The Mandarin</i> , Verona Burgess
7 June 2024	<a href="#"><u>Why Bill Shorten seems to living in a never-ending soap opera</u></a> , <i>Australian Financial Review</i> , Rowan Dean
6 June 2024	<a href="#"><u>Bill's \$620k speechwriter leaves us at a loss for words</u></a> , <i>Daily Telegraph</i> , Maria Kovacic
5 June 2024	<a href="#"><u>Comedy of errors</u></a> , <i>The Nightly</i> , Simon Birmingham
4 June 2024	Lost for words: Shorten's speechwriter earns \$620k, <i>Australian Financial Review</i> (paywalled – article attached).

Date	Item
4 June 2024	<u>Shorten speechwriter's \$620k deal - every word a gem,</u> <i>The Australian</i>
4 June 2024	<u>Shorten's \$620k speechwriter contract,</u> <i>Canberra Times</i>
4 June 2024	<u>Bill's big writer bill as Aussies struggle for payments,</u> <i>Daily Telegraph</i>
4 June 2024	<u>NDIS Minister Bill Shorten hired a speechwriter on a \$300k a year contract for two years,</u> <i>The Australian</i>
4 June 2024	<u>Speechwriter paid \$300k annually to assist Bill Shorten, despite department saying it has capacity,</u> <i>ABC Online</i>
4 June 2024	<u>Bill Shorten's speechwriter paid \$300,000 a year by Services Australia, Senate estimates told,</u> <i>The Guardian</i>
4 June 2024	<u>Government Services Minister Bill Shorten called out for 'inexcusable' \$620k taxpayer spend on speechwriter,</u> <i>Sky News Australia</i>
4 June 2024	<u>Interview with Opposition deputy leader Sussan Ley,</u> 6PR, Mornings
4 June 2024	<u>Bill Shorten denies any involvement in speechwriter's \$300k payday,</u> ABC Online, Jake Evans
4 June 2024	<u>Angus Taylor blasts NDIS Minister Bill Shorten for spending \$620,000 on speechwriter for just '28 speeches',</u> <i>Sky News Australia</i>
4 June 2024	<u>Questions about Shorten's \$300,000 a year speechwriter must be asked of more than just public servants,</u> <i>RiotACT</i>

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Daniel Hodgson, National Manager, s47F(1)  
 Consulted: N/A  
 Cleared by: Bevan Hannan, General Manager, s47F(1)  
 Date created: 4 June 2024 | Last Updated: 24 October 2024



04 JUN, 2024

## Lost for words: Shorten's speechwriter earns \$620k

Australian Financial Review, Australia

Page 1 of 1

# Lost for words: Shorten's speechwriter earns \$620k

**Tom McIlroy**  
Political correspondent

Services Australia is spending \$620,000 over two years for a speechwriter for Labor frontbencher Bill Shorten, despite the agency employing more than 180 people in its communications unit.

Sydney-based Julianne Stewart has been paid \$447,516 so far as part of her two-year communications contract with Services Australia, under temporary arrangements reported on the government's AusTender website. The contract was extended in September for a second year.

In a Senate estimates hearing yesterday, it was revealed Ms Stewart's duties include writing for the Minister for Government Services and the National

Disability Insurance Scheme, as well as some departmental writing and development of a staff training program.

Ms Stewart has previously written speeches for prime ministers including Kevin Rudd, Julia Gillard, Tony Abbott

and Malcolm Turnbull, as well as former Qantas boss Alan Joyce.

She describes herself as an apolitical "specialist speechwriter". She formerly worked as a scriptwriter for soap operas *Sons and Daughters* and *A Country Practice*.

"I have a true love of writing and editing, getting a kick out of carving elo-

quence from the clumsy and verbose," Ms Stewart says in an online profile.

"I'm a versatile writer and believe that the beauty of the English language is in its simplicity. The right words in the right order with the right intent can create the most powerful political

statement or melt a heart.

"I bring out the warmth and compassion as a strength in speakers, so they build a rapport with the audience."

Department officials clarified that the full contract amount is likely to be spent before it expires in September.

Ms Stewart was hired after an extensive recruitment process failed to find a suitable applicant.

The previous principal speechwriter retired due to ill-health and the agency had no other internal capability.

The decision to contract Ms Stewart coincided with the post-pandemic period when there was a significant increase in speeches by Mr Shorten and departmental bosses.

Liberal senators Linda Reynolds and Maria Kovacic expressed shock yesterday at the cost to Services Australia, asking officials to explain the contract.

The agency has nearly 200 people in its internal communications unit, including two full-time speechwriters, both employed on the executive level two band, earning a salary of about \$140,000 a year.

Senator Kovacic said shadow ministers and senators were paid less than Ms Stewart. "This individual is being paid more than double the best of the best in the department," she said.

"Senators who work in this building get paid about \$230,000 a year."

Senator Reynolds asked officials for a detailed explanation of how the contract was negotiated. She said it was "unprecedented" for taxpayers to fund a speechwriting position for a minister.

"We are clearly in the wrong business," she said.

Special Minister of State Don Farrell, who represented Mr Shorten in the hearing, said he was unaware of any other Labor ministers who employed stand-alone speechwriters for their portfolios. Services Australia chief executive David Hazlehurst told the

hearing he relied on officials in the agency to write his speeches, and drafted some of his own.

Deputy Liberal leader Sussan Ley said the contract cost was too high. "It is inexcusable and a shocking failure of judgment from Bill Shorten."



Julianne Stewart

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### OMBUDSMAN REPORT – KEEPING MYGOV SECURE

#### KEY POINTS

- On 6 August 2024, the Commonwealth Ombudsman, Mr Iain Anderson, published his final report following an ‘Own Motion Investigation’ into unauthorised access of customer accounts through myGov.
- The report focuses on fraud arising from unauthorised myGov member service account linking. The Ombudsman made four recommendations and two suggestions which are aimed at:
  - myGov’s security controls for unauthorised linking and high-risk transactions.
  - How shared risks are managed across the myGov eco-system.
  - Helping people whose member service accounts have been impacted by myGov fraud.
- Services Australia (the Agency), as the delivery agency for myGov, has accepted all of the Ombudsman’s recommendations and suggestions. Work is already underway to address the identified issues, as well as other security improvements to ensure myGov remains trusted, safe and secure.
- Maintaining the security of myGov and the protection of people’s personal information remains a top priority, and the Agency remains committed to ongoing improvement. This investigation provides helpful recommendations to further strengthen the security of the myGov platform and the role of member services to uplift security.

- These recommendations include measures already funded through the 2024-25 Budget, including:
  - A personal myGov security overview, which is a visual display of myGov users' current security settings and will prompt users to update their settings where needed, to better secure their account.
  - The myGov Incident Response System for fraud case management which will provide faster and more accurate information sharing between myGov and linked services.
- In a challenging global security environment, myGov is continually evolving to meet the ongoing challenges of increasingly sophisticated and numerous scams, identity theft and other cyber security threats.
- Since June 2024, over 362,000 customers have strengthened their myGov account security with a passkey, which helps protect against phishing attacks and other scams.
- The Agency provides education to people about identity theft and scams, and what they can do to help strengthen their account security.
- In August 2024, Services Australia formalised a forward workplan of 13 actions to address the recommendation and suggestions. Three actions are complete, a further three actions are on track for completion by December 2024, with the remaining seven actions expected to be delivered throughout 2025.

IF ASKED

- Full list of recommendations and suggestions:
  - **Recommendation 1.** Consistent with its responsibilities for driving improvement in fraud control practices, we recommend Services Australia:
    - a) Assess existing Proof of Record Ownership (PORO) processes across the myGov eco-system to identify and document, shared risks, and work with member services to agree and implement appropriate controls.
    - b) Consider establishing baseline PORO requirements which must be met by all member services.
  - **Recommendation 2a.** We recommend Services Australia implement additional security controls such as two factor authentication across its three member services for all high-risk transactions, including linking a member service account to myGov and updating contact and bank account details.
  - **Recommendation 2b.** Services Australia should ensure that a high standard of security settings for high-risk transactions applies consistently across all available service delivery channels for its member services.

- **Recommendation 3.** We recommend Services Australia establish formal processes for managing all shared risks across the myGov ecosystem, including identifying, assessing and documenting shared risks, periodically assessing the effectiveness of agreed controls and responding to indications that risk assessments should be updated.
- **Recommendation 4.** We recommend Services Australia seek external legal advice about options to facilitate a greater level of information sharing across linked member services and support member services to act proactively to reduce fraud risk or other unlawful activity while meeting their other legislative obligations.
- **Suggestion 1.** We suggest Services Australia share learnings and information about its authentication and PORO processes with other myGov member services to support them to build their capability.
- **Suggestion 2.** We suggest Services Australia regularly reviews and updates its communications regarding potential myGov and member service account breaches, including security notifications, staff guidance and online content, to ensure people are supported to take real time action to mitigate breaches to their myGov and or linked member service accounts.



## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- The Agency identifies and responds to over 300 scams per week that impersonate myGov.

## KEY DATES

Date	Action/occurrence
6 August 2024	The Ombudsman published his final report – Keeping myGov secure, which included the Agency's response.
8 April 2024	The Ombudsman wrote to CEO, David Hazlehurst, Services Australia notifying of an Ombudsman Own Motion investigation.
23 August 2023, 25 August 2023, and 4 October 2023	The Agency briefed the Ombudsman on matters relating to the security of myGov.

## ATTACHMENTS

Commonwealth Ombudsman Final Report:

[https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0015/304701/Keeping-myGov-Secure.pdf](https://www.ombudsman.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0015/304701/Keeping-myGov-Secure.pdf)

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Jordan Hatch, General Manager | s47F(1)  
Consulted: Jeff Derix, Chief Counsel  
Cleared by: Jonathan Thorpe, Deputy CEO, Service Delivery Excellence Group | s47F(1)  
Date created: 6 August 2024 | Last Updated: 23 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### TRUST EXCHANGE

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) is developing a proof-of-concept, Trust Exchange, that builds on the existing Digital ID system, allowing individuals to obtain verifiable credentials from government, and store them in digital wallets to use within the community. Trust Exchange is about choice, consent and trust.
- The proof-of-concept aims to give individuals control over the information they share.
- It will make it easier to securely share relevant personal details with a third party.
- It will limit the need for third parties to store government-issued credentials, including ID documents, cards and certificates - thereby reducing the potential privacy impact of data breaches.
- The proof-of-concept will explore:
  - Connecting digital wallets to the Digital ID exchange.
  - Connecting credential issuing authorities (for example Medicare for Medicare Cards) to the Digital ID Exchange.
  - Generating verifiable credentials from the Digital ID exchange and placing these into connected digital wallets.
  - A capability that would allow third parties (such as a business) to verify credentials held in digital wallets, and to request that relevant information be shared with them (with the consent of the individual).

- The proof-of-concept builds upon the framework established through the *Digital ID Act (2024)*, as well as expanding on the existing capability of the myGov app digital wallet.
- The proof-of-concept reflects the Agency's view that savings and efficiencies can be achieved by leveraging the investment to date in the existing Digital ID system and myGov, allowing these capabilities to complement one another.
- Approximately 6 million customers are already using the myGov app. There are over 12 million people with a myGovID Digital ID. Of these, nearly 3.9 million people have linked their Digital ID to their myGov account.
- The proof-of-concept will be completed by the end of 2024.  
The proof-of- concept will be assessed by the Department of Finance (Finance) to consider impacts of the *Digital ID Act (2024)* (due to be legislated from 1 December 2024), along with other legal, policy and accreditation considerations.
- Should the assessment of the proof-of-concept be favourable, Finance will consider opportunities to expand the proof-of-concept into live pilot testing of select use cases/organisations.
- The system will not create a 'honeypot' of ID documents, entitlement cards or credentials. The proof-of-concept is testing a decentralised solution, where the individual's credentials remain at the originating source, and are only made available on the individual's personal device.

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- The Government is investing \$288.1 million over four years from 2024-25 to support the expansion of Australia's Digital ID System. This makes a total of \$459.6 million that the Government has invested, ensuring that more Australians can realise the economic, security and privacy benefits of Digital ID.
- In the 2024-25 Budget, the Government invested \$23.4 million for the Department of Finance, the Australian Taxation Office and the Agency to pilot the use of government digital wallets and verifiable credentials. Of this, the Agency has received \$11.4 million to deliver the proof-of-concept.

## KEY DATES

- The *Digital ID Act (2024)* is due to be legislated on 1 December 2024, and will gradually expand Australia's Digital ID System across the economy. As new organisations join the system as providers and relying parties, Australians will have greater choice in where they can create a Digital ID, and more places where they can use their Digital ID to avoid the unnecessary sharing of their ID information.

## MEDIA

Date	Item
23 September 2024	<a href="#">Govt's online identity app gets a rebrand</a>
22 September 2024	<a href="#">Australia's new digital ID could change going out forever</a>
20 September 2024	Major overhaul under way for myGovID, what you need to know
9 September 2024	<a href="#">The government says more people need to use AI. Here's why that's wrong</a>
8 September 2024	<a href="#">The government says more people need to use AI systems</a>
7 September 2024	<a href="#">Shorten to leave a digital legacy</a>
7 September 2024	<a href="#">Too much trust in AI poses risks</a>
6 September 2024	<a href="#">Why government's push for AI adoption is flawed</a>
6 September 2024	<a href="#">After a string of government tech debacles, why this time could be different</a>
5 September 2024	<a href="#">Shorten quits politics to lead University of Canberra</a>
27 August 2024	<a href="#">InnovationAus: 'Daunting' tech, governance challenges ahead for digital ID</a>
20 August 2024	Australian Digital ID System Unveiled
19 August 2024	Government unveils 'Trust Exchange' for secure digital ID verification
19 August 2024	Merits of Trust Exchange model challenged
17 August 2024	How Australia's new 'digital ID' could change going out forever - but here's why some experts are worried
17 August 2024	Govt gives more detail on its plan to expand single digital ID for Australians
15 August 2024	<a href="#">AFR: The story behind the click-to-prove revolution</a>
15 August 2024	<a href="#">Pickr: What is the government's plan for the Trust Exchange digital ID?</a>
15 August 2024	<a href="#">West Australian: Letter to the editor – Trust 'em, they're pollies</a>
15 August 2024	<a href="#">Daily Telegraph: Digital ID will 'significantly increase' Australians security online</a>
14 August 2024	<a href="#">Sky News Live: Sharri Markson</a>
14 August 2024	<a href="#">Startup Daily: Why trust and protection from government snooping are central to its digital ID plans</a>

Date	Item
14 August 2024	<u>The Mandarin: Shorten blasts ‘plague of fiefdoms’ for APS digital woes</u>
14 August 2024	<u>iTNews: Government likens myGov to a garaged Ferrari</u>
14 August 2024	<u>InnovationAus: Shorten unpacks Tex, Australia’s answer to digital credentials</u>
14 August 2024	<u>Daily Telegraph: ‘Bad policy which ‘nobody’ asked for: Govt announces nationwide digital ID program</u>
14 August 2024	<u>News Daily: The government is developing a new digital ID system. It must first gain the public’s trust</u>
14 August 2024	<u>ABC RN Breakfast: ‘No one has been as tough’: Shorten defends gambling reform</u> (note: first part of this interview relates to the Tex announcement)
13 August 2024	<u>7News online: Major change coming to the way Aussies use their licences under new digital ID initiative TEx</u>
13 August 2024	<u>Yahoo! News: Major driver’s licence change for millions of Aussies with new ID verification system</u>
13 August 2024	<u>ABC Radio Melbourne with Ali Moore</u>
13 August 2024	<u>Startup Daily: A new digital ID system planned by the federal government will keep personal info in your phone’s myGov wallet</u>
13 August 2024	<u>ABC News Breakfast: The federal government will today unveil a plan to allow people to verify their ID through a QR code.</u>
13 August 2024	<u>ABC Radio AM: Report on the testing of a new digital identification system by the end of the year</u>
13 August 2024	<u>InnovationAus: Govt unveils ‘world leading’ identity exchange</u>
13 August 2024	<u>Radio 3AW Mornings: The Minister for Government Services wants to reawaken the debate about the Australia card from the 1980s.</u>

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

Contact: Jordan Hatch, General Manager | s47F(1)  
 Consulted: s22, Director, Media and Engagement | s22  
 Cleared by: Jordan Hatch, General Manager Customer and Staff Digital Programs | s47F(1)  
 Date created: 15 August 2024 | Last Updated: 23 October 2024

## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### GOVERNMENT ENTERPRISE RESOURCE PLANNING (GOVERP)

#### KEY POINTS

- On 28 November 2023, the Minister for Finance, Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, announced significant changes to the Shared Services Transformation Program and resultant impacts on the Whole-of-Government Enterprise Resource Planning (GovERP) Programme.
- It was announced that agencies are no longer mandated to utilise GovERP and are free to explore alternate appropriate solutions, with GovERP to be repurposed for use by Services Australia (the Agency) and any other interested agencies.
- As part of the 2023-24 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook process, the Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) has undertaken an Independent Reuse Assessment of the GovERP solution.
- The Independent Reuse Assessment Report acknowledged that 30 capabilities have been developed to date which provide a foundation for individual Government agencies to build on.
- Findings in the Reuse Assessment Report have been noted and factored into the planned development phases for Services Australia ERP.
- Phase 1 of Services Australia ERP will develop and implement SAP Success Factors Learning Management System (LMS) and the Recruitment and Onboarding modules.

## KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- The total GovERP Programme allocation was \$273.5 million, of which \$246.1 million was provided to the Agency and \$19.6 million to the Department of Finance (Finance).
- \$60 million of the Agency's \$246.1 million allocation was reprofiled to the 2023-24 Financial Year (FY).
- The Agency recorded \$203.5 million of expenditure against the GovERP Programme.

## KEY DATES

- On 30 June 2024, the DTA re-use assessment of the GovERP solution was completed.
- On 30 June 2024, funding for the GovERP Programme ceased.
- On 22 October 2024, the Agency's Portfolio Management and Investments Committee (PMIC) approved phase 1 of Services Australia ERP development for Learning Management System (LMS) and Recruitment and Onboarding.



## BACKGROUND

- In 2014, Finance became the lead for Shared Service Transformation Initiative (SSTI), including the development of initial guidance for the Commonwealth on Shared Services, which included policy setting, technology, and the delivery of service through the establishment of Provider Hubs.
- Finance currently operates one of the Provider Hubs, the Service Delivery Office (SDO).
- A decision was made in the 2021-22 Budget to transfer responsibility for the delivery of the GovERP Programme from Finance to the Agency, effective 1 July 2021.
- Finance retained the policy ownership for the SSTI and the continued operation of the SDO.
- The GovERP Programme was originally scoped to deliver the first wave whole-of-government SAP based technology solution and operating model that was required for the essential corporate capabilities of finance, Human Resource, procurement and reporting services to enable the Australian Public Service SSTI. The first wave of agencies to be onboarded were to be those within SDO.
- Prior to the 2022 Federal Election, significant work had been undertaken jointly with the former Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) to prepare for onboarding as the first agency to the GovERP platform by June 2023.
- Following Machinery of Government changes, the former DESE became the Department of Education and a new entity was created, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations. This change resulted in an adjustment to the GovERP onboarding schedule and timeframes.
- On 16 August 2022, it was agreed to amend the onboarding schedule that would see the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) as the first agency to onboard to the GovERP Programme rather than the former DESE.
- While the original scope included the onboarding of the SDO and the SDO's 14 client agencies, it was agreed to pause the onboarding of the SDO and its client agencies to allow the GovERP Programme to invest all effort toward the AGD onboarding readiness for a 2024 go-live.
- On 28 November 2023, the Minister for Finance, announced significant changes to the Shared Services Transformation Program and the GovERP Programme.
- On 5 January 2024, AGD advised that it would not proceed to onboard the GovERP solution and would assess alternative options.
- Since January 2024, the Agency has refocused efforts toward repurposing GovERP for Services Australia ERP.

- The Agency has assisted the DTA with its Independent Reuse Assessment, which concluded on 30 June 2024.
- The development of Services Australia ERP continues to be a focus for the Agency, as well as assisting other entities to explore and leverage existing capabilities for their own ERP solutions.

## MEDIA

Date	Item
22 August 2024	<i>AFR</i> : <u>GovERP shared services project a \$340m federal government IT disaster</u>
20 August 2024	<i>InnovationAus</i> : <u>Eye-wateringly expensive failure': \$341m GovERP coffin nailed shut</u>
20 August 2024	<i>ITnews</i> : <u>GovERP axed as reuse review finds demand for only for artifacts patterns</u>
15 December 2023	<i>InnovationAus</i> : <u>What next for shared services after GovERP decision</u>
6 December 2023	<i>InnovationAus</i> : <u>GovERP debacle: A predictable but valuable lesson</u>
28 November 2023	<i>InnovationAus</i> : <u>Gallaher pulls back naive \$344m GovERP Project</u>
28 November 2023	<i>ITNews</i> : <u>GovERP to be scaled back</u>
19 July 2023	<i>ITNews</i> : <u>GovERP program cost hits \$265 million</u>

## CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION

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## QUESTION TIME BRIEF

### SUPPORT FOR PERFECTION FRESH WORKERS

#### KEY POINTS

- Services Australia (the Agency) is working closely with the South Australian Government to support tomato industry workers impacted by the tomato brown rugose fruit virus (ToBRFV) and quarantine measures in place at the Perfection Fresh tomato operations facility.
- The South Australian Government advised approximately 500 Perfection Fresh workers were potentially impacted. The Agency has been advised these workers have not been stood down or made redundant at this stage.
- Agency staff were on-site to support staff at the Worker Assistance Hub at the Virginia Horticulture Centre from Thursday 26 September to Thursday 3 October 2024, and provided on-site support on Thursday 17 October 2024.
- Agency representatives included Financial Information Service Officers, Social Workers, Multicultural Service Officers, and Community Engagement Officers.
- Impacted workers can contact the Agency by phone, via online services or by attending a Service Centre for in-person support. Nearby Service Centres are located at Salisbury, Elizabeth and Gawler.

**IF ASKED**

***What payments would Perfection Fresh workers be eligible for?***

- Income support payments such as Job Seeker may be available, but individual circumstances can impact on eligibility, which is why tailored assistance can be so valuable.

***What interpreting and translation services are available for these workers?***

- The Agency provides comprehensive services for those that do not speak English as a first language, including free interpreting and translation services in over 200 languages.
- Customers can call the Multilingual Phone Service on 131 202 or visit the Agency website.

***How many workers did Services Australia support at the Workers Hub?***

- During the period from Thursday 26 September to Thursday 3 October 2024 and on Thursday 17 October 2024, the Agency spoke with seven workers.

***What support do Financial Information Service (FIS) Officers provide?***

- Services Australia FIS Officers help workers who may be facing retrenchment. FIS Officers provide financial information on government payment and services, lump sums (including redundancy payments), information on possible waiting periods, financial information to support budgeting and changes during significant financial changes. This supports people to make well informed, educated decisions about their current and future financial needs.

## BACKGROUND

- The South Australian Government quarantined greenhouses at Perfection Fresh in an attempt to stop the spread of ToBRFV that was detected in August.
- The lockdown bought all tomato growing and production to a halt, forcing Perfection Fresh to announce a “significant” number of jobs would be cut from its farm in Adelaide’s north.
- Impacted businesses also included Gawler River Tomatoes and SA Tomatoes, along with Perfection Fresh being all were placed into quarantine by the South Australian Government after ToBRFV was detected.
- The virus does reduce the yield and quality of produce.

## MEDIA

Date	Item
16 October 2024	<i>News.com.au</i> - Devastating virus appears in Australia and could decimate tomato crops
15 October 2024	<i>ABC News</i> - Tomato brown rugose virus is infecting Australian crops but farmers who are losing millions say the disease has no health impacts
04 October 2024	<i>The Bunyip</i> – Tomato trouble: fruit virus outbreak forces hundreds of job cuts
02 October 2024	<i>Bunyip</i> – Tomato trouble
02 October 2024	<i>Plains Producer</i> – Tomato jobs chopped
01 October 2024	<i>HRD Australia</i> - Income support, job assistance sought for quarantine-hit farm workers
01 October 2024	<i>Neokosmos</i> - Assistance hub opens for tomato virus crisis in South Australia
27 September 2024	<i>ABC News</i> - Tomato virus outbreak leaves hundreds of migrant farm workers facing battle to 'make ends meet'
25 September 2024	<i>Stock Journal</i> - Tomato virus quarantine measures force major lay-offs

## **CONTACT AND CLEARANCE INFORMATION**

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