



Senator Maria Kovacic
Liberal Senator for New South Wales

2 November 2023

Mr Ray Griggs AO CSC
Secretary
Department of Social Services
Via email: Ray.Griggs@dss.gov.au

Mr Chris Birrer
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Services Australia
Via email: chris.birrer@servicesaustralia.gov.au

Dear Secretary and Mr Birrer,

I write on behalf of the Opposition Senators ahead of the additional 2023-2024 Supplementary Senate Budget Estimates hearings for Services Australia, which will take place November 7th, 2023.

As discussed at the previous Budget Estimates hearings, we require detailed information to be tabled at the beginning of the Estimates hearing and as requested during the hearing.

We have significant concerns around the inexplicable inability of Services Australia officials to present detailed information at the previous hearing. Unfortunately, Senators had no choice but to request an additional hearing so that the expenditure of Services Australia could be properly scrutinised.

Regrettably, I note that this continues the pattern of behaviour from the current government in being unwilling to provide Opposition Senators with requests for data and information, particularly through the return of Questions on Notice. I also note that, to date, every Question on Notice asked by Senators to Government Services Minister Bill Shorten and Services Australia has been returned late – in some cases, by months.

Ridiculously, the government appears itself to be unwilling to even detail how it engages with Services Australia over the handling of Questions on Notice, and attempts to ask the agency about these matters have resulted in glib and incomplete answers. This is most unfortunate.

It is essential that in the middle of this cost of living crisis, Senators are able to hold the Australian Government and Services Australia to account.

Accordingly, I request that you both come ready to provide data and information on the questions set down below.

QUESTIONS AND TOPICS FOR SERVICES AUSTRALIA

Questions the agency undertook to take on notice on 25 October 2023

- The handling of SQ23-000393.
- How, and when, the Minister for Government Services was first advised of the union-led strike on 9 October 2023.
- Current iteration of the active registered projects/programs list.
- For the last financial year and to date, per month, each corporate registered program's program status report and the status, be it green, amber and red, for each one.
- What is meant by a 'positive solution design outcome'.
- LGA-level data for clients accessing services and receiving payments in the Parramatta LGA.
- The handling of SQ23-000570.
- The median number of days to process a claim in the 2022-23 financial year and 2021-22 financial year respectively.
- What is the number of claims currently on hand.
 - What is this number per payment.
- What is the number of claims awaiting assessment currently on hand.
 - What is this number per payment.
- What is the median number of days to pay a claim in the 2022-23 financial year and 2021-22 financial year respectively.
- For each claim, list in table format the number of payments that took longer than six, six to 17, 18 to 25 weeks and greater than 26 weeks respectively to process in the 2022-23 financial year and the 2021-22 financial year respectively.
- List per claim type what the timeliness standard is for each and the percentage and number of claims that met the standard claim time in the 2022-23 year and 2021-22 financial year respectively.
- For claims processed outside the timeliness standard, how many of those took less than an additional month to process.
 - How many took one to three months to finalise.
 - How many took between three to six additional months to finalise.
 - How many took more than six additional months to finalise in the 2022-23 financial year and the 2021-22 financial year respectively.
- The handling of SQ23-000379.
- How the agency has progressed or otherwise recommendations arising from the Handling personal information: Services Australia's role as the identity exchange report.
- The presentation of the agency's latest Corporate Plan.

Additional requests for data and information

- For each of Services Australia's face-to-face sites for the 2022-23 financial year, what was the average daily: (a) number of customers attending; (b) waiting time for customers attending; (c) number of customers who left the service centre before contact with a service officer; and (d) number of customers attending who could not complete their transaction.
- How many face-to-face abandons were there at Services Australia's service centres in the financial year: (a) 2022-23; and (b) 2021-22.
- Listed per Service Zone, how many customers abandoned their visit and what was the average time to abandon a visit in the 2021-22 and in the 2022-23 FYs respectively?
- In the 2022-23 FY, per processing work types for Social Security and Welfare, Health, Child Support and Emergency Payments respectively, what was the average number of days taken to process a claim?
- In the 2022-23 FY, per processing work types for Social Security and Welfare, Health, Child Support and Emergency Payments respectively, expressed as a percentage and a figure, how many claims took longer to process than the agreed timeliness standard?

I request the Agency to promptly respond to the terms of the letter, in addition to confirming receipt of this correspondence.

Please note that this list of topics is not exhaustive, and Opposition Senators will likely have several other questions referring to expenditure across Services Australia.

Yours Sincerely,

Senator Maria Kovacic

Copy: Community Affairs Secretariat