



Centrelink

Centrelink to get 3,000 new staff in bid to deal with helpline and payment delays

Funding boost of \$228m aims to return workers to frontline roles after millions of calls went unanswered

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Centrelink call centres will get an additional 3,000 staff as part of an immediate \$228m funding boost to speed up claim payments after complaints of blown-out call wait times.

More than 800 workers have already been recruited, with the remaining 2,200 to be employed in centres across capital cities and regional New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria, the government services minister, **Bill Shorten**, announced on Sunday night.

It comes as Services Australia, the agency providing the **Centrelink** program, has been recalled to **provide further evidence to a Senate estimates hearing on Tuesday** after opposition and Greens senators were disappointed by an “unacceptable” first appearance.

The **central welfare agency had revealed** to senators it had failed to meet a number of its key targets, but failed to answer “basic questions” about what was behind the **growing call and payment wait times**.

Centrelink said it had issued about 2.8m busy messages to callers over July and August 2023, with less than a quarter of calls received being answered.

Shorten said the opposition, while in government, had “used the illegal robodebt scheme to decimate contact channels” at Services Australia”.

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“These 3,000 new staff are the first step in returning people to frontline Services Australia roles after 10 years of Liberal neglect,” he said.

“The new staff will be critical to reducing call wait times, speeding up claim payments and giving Australians back some time in their busy lives.”

Greens senator Janet Rice joined forces with shadow ministers Paul Fletcher and Kerryne Liddle and Liberal backbencher Maria Kovacic to force Services Australia officials back to front questions on Thursday.

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Centrelink told the estimates hearing it had received 41m calls across the 2022-2023 financial year, with more than nine million customers, or 22%, receiving a “congestion message”.

Almost 13m, or 31%, were answered, and 4m were terminated by the person calling.

The agency received 8m calls in July and August this year, with 2.8m calls receiving a congestion message. The data showed 1.8m calls were answered, while 800,000 were terminated by the customer.

Fletcher blamed Shorten, who he said had allowed Centrelink to become a “basket case with massive blowouts in wait times for payments and calls”.

“Bill Shorten has been eager to minimise scrutiny of the deteriorating conditions at the agency because it exposes the sad reality that he just does not care about customer service,” Fletcher said on Thursday.

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