

Senate Select Committee on COVID-19
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Australian Taxation Office
Public Hearing, Friday 30 July 2020

Department/Agency: ATO

Question: 16

Topic: JobKeeper breakdown by postcode

Reference: Spoken – Hansard pg. 29

Senator: Senator Gallagher

Question:

CHAIR: Yes, absolutely. Effectively, as the parliament has been cancelled, this will be the main parliamentary scrutiny mechanism for the COVID-19 response that everyone's working on, so it is extremely important, and we look forward to seeing Commissioner Jordan at the next appearance. I'll just kick off with some questions and then hand the call around as I've been doing, if that's okay with colleagues. Mr Hirschhorn, I will just follow up on some data the committee requested. We requested some information about JobKeeper, and we appreciate the answers to questions on notice that we have received, but we haven't been able to receive the information on the employee level data based on their postcode. You've given it to us on state, age and gender basis, but will there be a time when the postcode information will be available?

Mr Hirschhorn: As I understand it, the reason why that has not been answered is that that's actually a hard task to do, because we have to do a big matching of different databases. If the committee would find it useful, we can certainly explore how long that will take.

CHAIR: Yes, okay.

Mr Hirschhorn: It's not been provided because it's quite a hard task, because you're matching two different large databases.

CHAIR: Okay.

Mr Geale: Perhaps I can just add to that as well. There are other data searches which we have done. It's also the accuracy of that data, because people don't always record their personal address in their records. It might be the address of the tax agent. If you have a tax agent in Sydney with a thousand clients, you may well get a thousand clients being clustered in that spot in Sydney. So, even if we could produce that data, the accuracy of it would have to be taken into account.

CHAIR: Okay. If it is something that's too difficult to do, perhaps that can be the answer, explaining why. But we'll see what you come back with in response.

Mr Hirschhorn: Yes.

Answer:

A key design feature of the JobKeeper Payment is that it is largely delivered through employers at an organisational, not employee level. A priority of the ATO in implementing the JobKeeper program is therefore to ensure the delivery of payment to employers efficiently and effectively while ensuring integrity.

The full details of employees receiving JobKeeper payments have to be extracted from the ATO tax system to produce detailed reporting. To answer specific questions at a postcode level requires matching between this employee JobKeeper data and the broader ATO taxpayer database where more demographic information is held. Given the number of people benefiting from JobKeeper (approximately 3.5 million) and the number of postcodes in Australia, this is an exercise that requires considerable resources in terms of time and data extraction, assurance and confidentialisation.

However, as Treasury has advised, analysis on the demographics of employees will still be undertaken.