

Joint Standing Committee on Implementation of the National Redress Scheme

Public Hearing – 18 September 2024

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Redress staff in Centrelink offices

Question reference number: IQ24-000201

Question asked by: Catryna Bilyk

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page/s:** Page 5

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 2 October 2024

Question:

CHAIR: Can you also quickly tell me what the department's been doing to promote the scheme at Centrelink offices? Do you have promotional displays? I went into my local Centrelink office and didn't see a thing—nothing. Are there any informational brochures or anything?

Ms Still: Not in Centrelink offices, no.

Mr Riley: We worked with Centrelink so that they have an officer who is their redress officer in most sites.

CHAIR: They wouldn't have in my local one, I can tell you. There are two people who work there and they're flat chat. I doubt there would be a redress officer there. On notice, can you give me a list of how many Centrelink offices have dedicated people for the scheme?

Mr Riley: Certainly. We can absolutely do that. We work with them so that, if an applicant or would-be applicant comes forward, it is handled sensitively and discreetly and not just as another of their more routine activities. That's in part why you don't see promotional material.

CHAIR: But surely there should be something there to let people know that the scheme exists. Mr Riley, once again, when I go into my local Centrelink I can hear every conversation in the private room. I know people's bank details and their bank numbers because I can hear that from the private meeting room.

Ms Hope: We'll certainly take that feedback back to Service Australia comms.

Answer:

Regarding promotional displays, please refer to the response provided in IQ24-000208.

Services Australia advise that all of their service centres have staff who act as Redress Contact Officers.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Medical ethicist report

Question reference number: IQ24-000203

Question asked by: Dean Smith

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page/s:** Page 5

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 2 October 2024

Question:

Senator DEAN SMITH: ... Which officials were involved in narrowing the applications so as to finally land on Professor Milligan?

Mr Riley: We'll undertake to provide you with the procurement details.

Senator DEAN SMITH: I'm just interested to know: was Professor Milligan in a class of her own, or was there less distinction between the suitability of various applicants?

Mr Riley: Okay.

Answer:

Consistent with departmental practice, a Deputy Secretary signed off on the Approach to Market.

The evaluation team consisted of 2 Assistant Directors and one Director who followed the prescribed evaluation methodology to assess the merits of the 2 responses to the Approach to Market. Their recommendation was endorsed by a Branch Manager.

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ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Medical ethicist report

Question reference number: IQ24-000204

Question asked by: Dean Smith

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page/s:** Page 5

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 2 October 2024

Question:

Senator DEAN SMITH: Yes. When the ethicist's report was received, was there a conscious discussion about whether that report should be peer reviewed by others? If not, why was it considered not necessary to peer review it, given the importance of the work that was being undertaken?

Mr Riley: I'd need to take that on notice. I don't believe it was peer reviewed, but I'm not aware of the background to that.

Senator DEAN SMITH: I think, from the perspectives of abundant care and thoroughness, a peer review mechanism might have been good.

Mr Riley: Yes, okay.

Senator DEAN SMITH: So, if it wasn't, why wasn't it? ...

Answer:

The Scheme's policy advice to Independent Decision Makers on abuse in medical settings, inclusive of intrusive internal examinations, is based on the definition of sexual abuse in section 6 of the *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse Act 2018* which is: *sexual abuse of a person who is a child includes any act which exposes the person to, or involves the person in, sexual processes beyond the person's understanding or contrary to accepted community standards*. The policy also reflects the deliberations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

The Department of Social Services engaged a highly qualified person to review the original Abuse in Medical Settings policy advice and to provide a report, which informed revised policy advice.

The ethicist's report was not peer reviewed.

Prior to settling the policy advice, the advice was shared in draft form with the Chief Independent Decision Maker panel, who provided comment. It was ultimately approved by Scheme executive (Group Manager and the 4 Branch Managers).

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Public Hearing – 18 September 2024

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Rejected claims

Question reference number: IQ24-000205

Question asked by: Catryna Bilyk

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page/s:** Page 7

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 2 October 2024

Question:

CHAIR: Is it common for claims to be rejected based on the premise that nobody noticed that the person was abused?

Ms Hope: I'm not sure I understand the question.

CHAIR: There have been some responses—and I obviously can't tell you who or where—that say, 'Nobody noticed that the person was abused, so I find that this doesn't count,' and that type of thing.

Ms Hope: No, that would be completely in the face of the point of the scheme.

CHAIR: I've got it here in front of me.

Mr Riley: We would be very keen to have some further details if there's a particular case that that happened in. There are a range of reasons a matter might be ineligible. In short order they are often that the person wasn't a child at the time, that the abuse did not occur in an institutional setting—

CHAIR: It was in a school.

Mr Riley: Yes, so that's not it. Most of the questions in the request for information go to placing the parties in the institution at the time and so forth. For something like that, the reasonable likelihood threshold would help us get through in most instances.

Ms Hope: Absolutely.

CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Hope: But, if there's something particular, we would take that in private, absolutely.

CHAIR: I'll talk to the person and see if they're happy for us to do that.

Mr Riley: Yes. I'm quite concerned by that evidence, so it would be very—

Answer:

It is not common for Independent Decision Makers (IDMs) to reject applications based on the premise that nobody noticed that the person was abused.

IDMs assess applications on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the person's individual circumstances and experience of institutional child sexual abuse.

In making their determination, an IDM has to be satisfied that it was reasonably likely that all the eligibility criteria under section 13 of the *National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse 2018* (the Act) is met. IDMs consider all the information available to them, which may include:

- the applicant's account of abuse and its impact;
- any supporting documents provided by the applicant; and
- responses from the institution to the request for information.

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Public Hearing – 18 September 2024

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Promotion of Scheme at Centrelink offices

Question reference number: IQ24-000208

Question asked by: Catryna Bilyk

Type of Question: Written. **Hansard Page/s:** N/A

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 2 October 2024

Question:

2. Given that most applicants to the NRS self-lodge, what has the department been doing to promote the Scheme at Centrelink offices?
 - a. What, if any, promotional displays or informational brochures on the NRS are supplied to Centrelink offices?
 - b. Are there any specific barriers to increasing the level of promotion at Centrelink offices?

Answer:

2. Between June and October 2023, the Department of Social Services sent approximately 78,000 printed copies of redress-related communication products to Services Australia for distribution across its network.
 - (a) The products included a DL brochure, A5 flipbook, A3 poster, a fact sheet and wallet-sized information card.
 - (b) There are no specific barriers to providing Services Australia with promotional communication products. The Scheme works closely with Services Australia to ensure promotional displays are trauma-informed and uphold survivors' privacy.