

Please Quote: SDPT/L. Chan  
Telephone: (03) 9963 4456  
Fax: (03) 9963 4499



Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives Standing Committee on  
Employment, Education and Workplace Relations  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

8 March 2000

Dear Sir/Madam,

The attached paper provides additional information to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations in response to issues raised at the Committee Hearing held in Newcastle on 9 February 2000.

If you have any questions regarding this paper, please contact Louis Chan, Service Delivery Project Team on (03) 9963 4456.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Norman Walker".

Norman Walker  
National Manager  
Service Delivery Project Team



**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AS REQUESTED BY  
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION  
AND WORKPLACE RELATIONS  
FOLLOWING THE NEWCASTLE HEARING  
9 FEBRUARY 2000**

**“Inquiry into issues specific to older workers seeking employment,  
or establishing a business, following unemployment”**

## Introduction

This paper provides additional information to the Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Workplace Relations in response to issues raised at the Committee Hearing held in Newcastle on 9 February 2000.

The Committee sought additional information on:

1. Centrelink's service delivery model, particularly the one to one servicing arrangements;
2. Options for improving access to self-help facilities in Centrelink offices; and
3. The requirement for a business to notify Centrelink where its closure affected a large number of workers.

This paper provides information on the above matters.

## 1. Centrelink's Service Delivery Model

The Centrelink Board of Management at its 20 October 1998 meeting endorsed a new service delivery model for Centrelink. The concepts behind the new model express the type of organisation that Centrelink was set up to be and is becoming: one that is focused on 'providing exceptional service to the community by linking Australian government services and achieving best practice in service delivery' (Centrelink's purpose statement). The model endorsed by the Board:

- focuses Commonwealth Government service delivery on the **life events** experienced by people in the Australian community and assisting customer transitions to successful outcomes;
- is sufficiently flexible to allow an **integrated service offer** (from both government and community) and service delivery options, to be provided to meet an individual's needs; and
- fully meets the **entitlement rules** and **program output specifications** of client agencies.

The service delivery model is based on four strategic assumptions which underlie the existence of Centrelink and define, in the broadest sense, what the organisation is and how it conducts its business. These strategic assumptions are drawn from the Second Reading Speech of the Commonwealth Services Delivery Agency Bill (1996). The strategic assumptions are:

1. Centrelink has been established by the Government to be a one stop shop for people to access Commonwealth Government services.

2. Centrelink, through its life events approach, will deliver on the Government's commitment to put the needs of people for high quality service delivery above the boundaries of Commonwealth departments and agencies.
3. Centrelink will be a customer centric organisation, recognising that its customers have different needs, expectations and preferences.
4. Centrelink is the public presence and image of some of the most sensitive social responsibilities of the Government and is responsible for the administration of these programs by managing the mutual obligations of customers, community and the Government with openness and integrity.

### *The 'life event' approach*

The notion of 'life events' is a key mechanism by which Centrelink will fully deliver on the Government's intended one stop shop. Customers will be able to come to Centrelink with an understanding of their own circumstances and a willingness to tell the truth. The onus is not on the customer to know the questions to ask but on Centrelink to ask questions of the customer that will enable a complete and accurate service offer to be made to the customer. The customer will not need to shop around within Centrelink, irrespective of the access channel that they use to come to Centrelink.

Customers experience life events which are the things that happen to them which prompt their contact with us. Centrelink has developed a working list of these, which are currently expressed as:

Are you:

- planning for or needing help in retirement?
- responsible for children?
- changing your marital or partner status?
- needing help after someone has died?
- sick or do you have a disability?
- caring for someone who is sick or who has a disability?
- arriving in Australia to settle, or are you leaving Australia?
- looking for work?
- responsible for a farm, business or self employed?
- leaving, seeking or changing education or training?
- moving from school to work?
- changing accommodation?
- in a crisis situation or needing special help?

Customer validation of the language used to represent these life events is underway and is expected to be completed by April 2000.

### *How older workers will benefit from the life events approach*

Older workers seeking employment would benefit from the life events approach because it would mean that all they need to do is simply explain their circumstances. The Centrelink

One to One Customer Service Officer using the life events approach would be able to provide a service offer of products and services which best match the needs of the customer. This eliminates the need for the customer to have a knowledge or understanding of products or services they think they may be eligible to access.

Older workers seeking employment will find that their circumstances may be such that a number of those life events listed are relevant. For example an older worker may well be *looking for work* but that there are also implications in respect of their *responsibilities for children* or that they are *changing accommodation* or perhaps there is a need to look at *planning for retirement*. The life events approach will enable One to One Customer Service Officers to take all these variables into account in preparing the service offer - hence the notion of holistic service delivery that is integral to the life events approach.

Centrelink's service delivery model is not only designed to respond to the changing life events of customers but to generate a focus on the outcomes that need to be achieved for the customer. In matching products, services and tailored service delivery options to the customer's life event and their individual characteristics, Centrelink is seeking to maximize the contribution it makes to achieving client outcomes.

### ***Centrelink - a customer centric organisation***

For Centrelink, 'customer centric' means that it recognises that each of our customers has different needs, expectations and preferences and it will tailor its service, including the solution to be brokered, to suit the individual customer. Tailoring or customising its service delivery means taking into account:

- an individual's personal capabilities;
- an individual's needs, expectations and preferences;
- the critical points in life being faced by the customer; and
- the risk of non-compliance.

In being customer centric Centrelink will:

- provide the service that a customer is looking for which ensures that customers are only contacted when absolutely necessary;
- ensure its contact with customers observes the customer values of:
  - i. being understood and treated as individuals;
  - ii. receiving complete, accurate and reliable information that can be understood;
  - iii. receiving prompt, efficient and responsive service;
  - iv. having confidence in the process to get the results and the right answer the first time;
  - v. dealing with caring staff who have positive attitudes;
  - vi. having service delivered where and when it is needed;
  - vii. being treated with respect and as an equal;
  - viii. telling their story once only; and
  - ix. having personal information kept confidential;

- observe any contact rules set by client departments; and
- use the most cost effective channel consistent with these other objectives.

As noted earlier, Centrelink as a 'customer centric organisation' represents a major focus and is one of four strategic assumptions. Underpinning these are business assumptions which will guide the way Centrelink designs and implements business process or service change. In the case of older workers seeking employment, this means that Centrelink will provide inter alia:

- higher levels of appointments, and strong one to one service, the allocation of older persons to a One to One Customer Service Officer will take into consideration the officer's maturity, skills, and their understanding of the particular needs of older people;
- customers looking for work with access to a specified quiet area to allow them to use self service facilities (e.g. touch screen units, photocopiers, computers, newspapers, etc.);
- Job Network access (self help) facilities located in such a position and environment as to encourage their use by older jobseekers or those with special needs (such as wheelchair access); and
- a smooth and seamless process for repeat jobseekers wanting to obtain financial assistance.

Supporting Centrelink's efforts to be customer centric has been the use of customer surveys as a means of obtaining direct feedback about service delivery. Centrelink has engaged consultants to conduct customer satisfaction surveys three of which were conducted over the period November 1998 and November 1999. The data for the employment customer segment (no figures are available by age group), in which customers have rated Centrelink good to very good in a number of areas, shows an improvement over that period of time. These areas include:

- ease of access to government services provided by Centrelink - improved from 44% to 64%
- understanding of Centrelink information - 69% to 76%
- the application process - 65% to 74%
- the time taken to receive payment after lodging an application - 73% to 78%
- Centrelink's review processes - 60% to 66%
- standard of letters and publications - 69% to 76%

Whilst these are positive trends, there is obviously room for continued improvement, and one of the aims of the service delivery model is to ensure that there is continued and sustained improvement in customer satisfaction. Ongoing surveys and monitoring of issues raised by customers and the development of strategies to address these will be a regular feature of Centrelink's service delivery model.

## **Other key elements of the service delivery model**

### ***One to One Service***

The One to One Service initiative represents customer driven change - it is a direct result of customer feedback where customers have consistently told Centrelink that they want to be listened to, understood and treated as an individual and want to tell their story once and once only. Centrelink has implemented One to One Service in all customer service centres.

Under One to One Service, customers are allocated to a One to One Customer Service Officer (CSO) who will act as the main and ongoing point of contact. The One to One CSO is responsible for assessing a customers individual situation and needs, and working with the customer to develop and implement tailored service offers.

One to One Service arrangements are guided by a set of principles which include:

1. Customers only need to bring to Centrelink a knowledge of their situation and a preparedness to tell the truth.
2. Customer service officers will be allocated a 'pool of customers' with each customer being allocated to only one customer service officer.
3. Teams will accept the responsibility for all ongoing business for their customers.
4. Customers are to be encouraged to conduct most of their business through the call centre or at reception.
5. Customer choice will be the primary method of determining service options.
6. Community groups and providers will have a clear point of contact.

The One to One CSO role includes:

- assessment and profiling of a customers' life event situation, and brokering a tailored, holistic service offer;
- linking the customer to other government and non-government agencies as appropriate;
- dealing with compliance issues upfront by clearly communicating the customer's responsibilities and obligations and establishing a personal contact that would work to reinforce compliance;
- bringing in Centrelink or other specialist officers as required, including Social Workers, Financial Information Service Officers, Indigenous Services Officers, Disability Officers, JET Advisers, Multicultural Service Officers and interpreters. These services would be identified in the customer's profile and integrated seamlessly into customer management;
- being flexible about where, how and when assistance is provided, in line with the customer's preferences and with client agency requirements;
- being empathetic and compassionate, with well developed listening abilities and advanced interviewing skills; and
- being culturally aware and sensitive to individual customer needs.

In most areas One to One Service has been implemented in existing customer segment teams, such as Retirements, Employment Services, Youth or Disability and Carers. With these arrangements established there will be a gradual process to train and support customer service officers to move to the life events approach, where the customer service officer will be able to focus on the customer's whole circumstances, regardless of which products and services for which the customer may have an entitlement.

The major operational challenge for a whole of customer service approach under One to One Service is in fact to train and develop customer service officers to move from being knowledge experts in one program to being experts in accessing information across all programs to produce a complete, holistic service offer in response to the life event experienced by the customer.

In the short term the One to One CSO will 'broker' solutions for the customer. The concept of brokering provides a logical transition for staff and will encourage staff to work together as a team to ensure that the customer has only 'one main contact'; the One to One CSO who will act as the person linking the customer to a holistic solution. In the longer term, decision support systems will be developed and implemented to support One to One CSOs.

#### *Allocation of customers*

The allocation of customers to One to One CSOs takes into consideration an officer's capacity to deal with and understand specific customer segments and groups within a segment including those with diverse customer needs. As indicated at the hearing on 21 October 1999 and 9 February 2000 there have been some cases where an older jobseeker does not feel comfortable with a One to One CSO who is in his/her twenties. Where this is the case the customer can request a new One to One CSO. It is important that the One to One CSO and the customer are able to develop a good rapport so the customer can be provided with the appropriate package of products and services that best meets their needs.

Centrelink staff have and are continuing to undertake a range of training exercises to enhance staff skills when servicing particular customer groups and customers in general.

#### *Integrated Service offers*

In the longer term, Centrelink will integrate all of the relevant products and services of the client departments into a 'whole of customer' service offer. The integrated service offer will consist of the selection of products and services that best match the life event needs of the customer, delivered in a manner that is tailored to their particular situation. Service offers have a strong focus on the transitions customers wish to make to particular outcomes, and matching these with the intended outcomes of the government program(s) that the customer is accessing.

Delivery of Government products and services through integrated service offers directs efforts away from determining and processing payments, and towards finding a 'whole of customer' solution that not only includes entitlements to products and services but also access options, service preferences (such as time of day, or type contact whether mail or phone or other), patterns of future contact (prescribed and/or preferred), customer obligations, referrals and



other relevant information. The customer's integrated service offer will be continually reviewed to ensure the customer is receiving the best match in products and services.

### *Preparing for work initiative*

An example of how Centrelink is starting to move towards delivery of integrated service offers is the implementation of the *Preparing for Work* initiative which will be substantially in place before the end of this year. The Preparing for Work initiative continues the shift to job seekers' contacts with Centrelink focusing on finding and obtaining work from day one. It involves applying the activity test more rigorously to ensure that job seekers are genuine and to facilitate the identification of employment barriers and appropriate and suitable forms of assistance. Preparing for Work is focused on achieving positive work outcomes for customers by ensuring quality customer contacts which are designed to take a holistic and integrated approach to employment assistance and income support matters.

Feedback from Centrelink staff shows a positive reaction to the prospect of conducting interviews that offer the opportunity to make a difference to individual job seekers. All job seekers receive a Preparing for Work Plan at grant and have these plans periodically reviewed at every significant funded contact point thereafter. There have been no reports of adverse reaction from job seekers to this new approach. Instead there have been numerous instances of job seekers expressing satisfaction with the full exploration of their job seeking circumstances and a personalised plan that addresses these issues in a tangible way.

Early observations are that Centrelink staff are successfully motivating and refocusing job seekers in ways that will substantially improve their chances of returning to work. There is an expectation that this initiative will result in improved numbers and quality of referrals to the range of employment programs that are available.

### *Centrelink's service delivery - outcome focused*

Policy departments have responsibility for specifying and taking responsibility for outcomes. However, Centrelink's role in delivering products and services (outputs) to address the needs of a customer's life event and, which can significantly contribute to the customer's outcome in relation to that life event, means that Centrelink is uniquely positioned among Commonwealth government agencies to observe, understand and if necessary remedy (or ameliorate) the impact on an individual(s) of multiple programs owned by several policy departments.

As the public face of Government with expertise in service delivery, Centrelink can prevent people from falling through the cracks and develop the most appropriate program mix to suit the individual's situation and maximize their outcome. In some circumstances Centrelink assistance to the customer should not be constrained by what programs are available. Rather, Centrelink should have the flexibility to develop a very personal set of actions to meet the individual's particular needs as long as those actions achieve an outcome for the individual, in keeping with the outcomes being sought by the client departments. This is at the core of Centrelink's service delivery model.

One of the issues raised at the hearing referred to customers not being able to access programs which would have been more suitable. This issue reflects in some respects a focus within particular programs on *set eligibility criteria* rather than a broader focus on the *outcome* that any particular program(s) should achieve for any individual, irrespective of their particular characteristics. Centrelink's position and role in bringing together all of these separate, and sometimes disparate, programs gives it a unique perspective on where people 'fall through the cracks' and what causes the most frustration and disincentive in being able to achieve an outcome that both they and the government desire.

Centrelink's unique position in 'linking Australian government services' enables us to see where the interlinkages and interrelationships between programs break down in practice, and while these may be difficult to observe in the abstract, they certainly become transparent in dealing with customers and witnessing their positive or negative/neutral impact.

Under the new model, service delivery will become very much a holistic service to customers that will provide both immediate term solutions and longer term strategies to assist customers to deal with their particular life event(s). The model therefore has the potential to shift the relationship between Centrelink and its client departments away from a one-dimensional approach focusing on quantitative targets, to a multi-dimensional approach with a strategic view of customer outcomes and Centrelink's role in influencing the achievement of those outcomes.

## **2. Employment Self Help Facilities Available to Older Job Seekers in Centrelink Offices**

Centrelink staff currently have a role in ensuring there is access available to all individuals and groups (including older job seekers). This role includes :

- providing basic 'how to use' assistance for job seekers using the facilities
- ensure job seekers are confident in using the equipment while recognising it is not the role of a Customer Service Officer to train a job seeker to use the facilities
- ensure 'how to use' signs/instructions are located with each facility
- ensure all individuals and groups of job seekers are aware of other external agencies and the names and locations of these agencies for basic computer skills and resume preparation
- attend to general housekeeping, including keeping the area clean and tidy (thereby making the facilities more attractive to all groups of job seekers, including older workers)
- consider the need for privacy with the facilities
- review the location and arrangement of facilities as required, rearranging as necessary to improve job seeker access and use
- give consideration to matters of access and equity
- ensure equal access to equipment. This may involve booking of equipment, limiting use to set times etc.
- the Centrelink Helpline (located in Adelaide, but accessed by the telephones next to the personal computers) provides an excellent service for job seekers who are

unsure of how to operate the equipment, specifically the personal computers. This service provides a patient and understanding service for those job seekers who, not only have problems with the operation of the equipment but, have never used this type of software package before.

### **Options to Increase Access for Older Job Seekers**

Centrelink continually seeks to improve its service to older job seekers and additional initiatives being implemented or being developed in its customer service centres include:

- task and 'how to use' cards displayed;
- the Adelaide Helpline task cards and posters. This will include a *quick step* flowchart that will allow job seekers to immediately access the equipment with more confidence;
- as most sites have two personal computers available, one of these could be set aside and used only under a booking system. This will allow older job seekers to take their time (with the possible assistance of the Helpline) and learn to use the equipment. This is currently done at a number of Centrelink sites;
- there are clearly 'peak' times where the self help facilities are used by many job seekers. There are, however, times where the use of the facilities is minimal. Older job seekers are encouraged to talk to Centrelink staff to find out when these times are and use the facilities accordingly;
- the most used facility in the self help area is usually the 'employer phone' which allows job seekers to call employers about prospective employment. This phone could be moved away from the rest of the equipment which would allow for a quieter environment;
- referrals to external agencies that provide basic computer literacy skills can be made from Centrelink offices. Information advising job seekers of these agencies and the courses available is located around the self help facilities; and
- Encouraging job seekers to access to the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) Internet web site which provides access to Lodge-a-Resume, the Australian Job Search vacancies and other employment related facilities.

Provision of any other additional facilities in Centrelink sites and how older job seekers needs can be better met are the subject of ongoing discussions between Centrelink and the Department of Workplace Relations and Small Business.

Other forms of assistance from sources other than Centrelink are also available. For example assistance with resume writing, computer literacy etc is available through the Job Network. If eligible, older job seekers can be referred to Job Network members who are able to arrange general job search training skills or specific training courses in this area which will assist in their efforts in finding employment. Centrelink staff are able to advise older job seekers of the education, training and employment options open to them through the network of employment services.

### 3. Notification of Closure of Business

1. Under s170 (CL) of the *Workplace Relations Act*, an employer is required to notify the CES (Centrelink) in writing as soon as practicable after making a decision but before terminating 15 or more employees for reasons of economic, technological, structural or similar nature or for reasons including such things. The written notice must include the reason, the number and categories of employees to be affected, and when, or the period over which, the terminations are likely to be carried out.

However, certain employees are excluded from section 170CL and as such an employer is not required to notify the CES (Centrelink) in relation to those employees. For example:

- casual employees;
  - daily hire employees in the building and construction industry and in the meat industry; and
  - weekly hire employees in the meat industry whose termination of employment is determined solely by seasonal factors;
2. Once Centrelink receives the retrenchment notification, it will forward this to the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB); and
  3. Where an employer fails to comply with section 170CL, an employee [s170CP(1)], an inspector, trade union, trade union officer or trade union employee [s.170CP(4)] may apply to the Federal Court of Australia for a penalty of not more than \$1000 and/or an order not to terminate the employment of employees concerned except as provided for in the order (eg: after consultation has taken place).

Before bring an application in the Federal Court the employee or person acting on the employee's behalf must make an application under section 170CE of the Act in respect of unlawful termination of employment (on the ground of a breach of section 170CL, or for grounds including this) to the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (the Commission). In the first instance, the Commission will attempt to conciliate the claim. If conciliation is unsuccessful, the Commission will issue a certificate to that effect. Once the certificate is issued, section 170CFA requires the applicant to elect whether to bring proceedings in the Federal Court for an order under section 170CR in respect of the alleged contravention of section 170CL.