

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

ADDITIONAL ESTIMATES – 11 FEBRUARY 2016 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Child Support

Question reference number: HS 140

Senator: Cameron

Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 4 April 2016

Number of pages: 3

Question:

- a) How many child support cases are currently in the child support scheme (registered/enforced maintenance liabilities)?
- b) Can you provide a breakdown of child support payers by gender?
- c) How many child support assessments were undertaken in the financial years 2013-14, 2014-2015, and so far in 2015-16?
- d) How many child support agreements were finalised in the financial years 2013-14, 2014-2015, and so far in 2015-16?
- e) How many court orders/agreements were breached in the financial years 2013-14, 2014-2015, and so far in 2015-16?
- f) What is the average period of time taken to finalise a child support agreement?
- g) What is the average period of time taken to undertake an assessment?
- h) What is the longest period of time taken to finalise a child support agreement?
- i) How many payments were suspended to payees in the financial years 2013-14, 2014-2015, and so far in 2015-16?
- j) How many payments that had been previously suspended were resumed by the Registrar in the financial years 2013-14, 2014-2015, and so far in 2015-16?
- k) For those owing child support payments/who have breached agreements and court orders:
 - 1) Please provide a breakdown by location.
 - 2) Please provide a breakdown by income level.
- l) For those payers not complying with their agreements, what are the main reasons for non-compliance?
- m) How many 'top up' payments were requested by the Registrar in the financial years 2013-14, 2014-2015, and so far in 2015-16?
- n) How many claims of overpayment against the payee to recover overpaid child support were made in the financial years 2013-14, 2014-2015, and so far in 2015-16, including:
 - 1) where there was a registered maintenance liability; and
 - 2) where there was no-registered maintenance liability?

- o) How many cases where ongoing entitlement to child support has ended, did the Registrar will seek to recover the debt from the payee and refund any amounts to the payer?

Answer:

- a) As of 31 December 2015, the total current caseload is around 832,132. [Note: This number only includes cases that are active (current) and not ended.]
- b) Numbers current as at 31 December 2015:

Gender	Customer Count
Female	104,877
Male	636,397
Unknown	18,109
Total	759,383

Notes: 1) There are a greater number of cases (caseload) compared to customer count because some paying parents have more than one case.
2) The 'unknown' category represents cases where gender has not been recorded.

- c) The department interprets this to mean applications taken and processed.
During the period 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014, approximately 61,500 applications were taken and processed.
During the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, approximately 62,000 applications were taken and processed.
During the period 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2015, approximately 29,005 applications were taken and processed.
- d) During the period 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014, 2,050 child support agreements were finalised (processed as accepted).
During the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, 1,987 child support agreements were finalised (processed as accepted).
During the period 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2015, 869 child support agreements were finalised (processed as accepted).
- e) The department does not collect this data. The department becomes aware of breaches in limited instances, such as when the customer self discloses. The contravention of a court order that specifies care arrangements is a family law matter.
- f) During the period 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2015, the average time taken to process an application to accept a child support agreement was approximately 3.5 days.
- g) During the period 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2015, the average time taken to process an application for an administrative assessment was 11.5 days.
- h) During the period 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2015, the longest time taken to process a child support agreement was 113 days.
- i) This information is not able to be readily extracted from the child support system and would require manual interrogation of individual cases and IT changes. Providing this information would be an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources.
- j) Data on payment/disbursement resumption is not readily available and would require the diversion of resources and an IT change.
- k) The department does not collect this data.
- l) The department does not collect this data.

m) During the period 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014, the department applied a top-up credit on 35,287 occasions.

During the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, the department applied a top-up credit on 33,102 occasions.

During the period 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2015, the department applied a top-up credit on 14,464 occasions.

A top up credit describes the process of using money from consolidated revenue to pay a child support liability after the employer advises that a deduction has been made from the paying parent's wages but was not forwarded to the department on time.

n) 1) During the period 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2014, 44,934 new overpayments were reported where there was a registered maintenance liability.

During the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, 43,936 new overpayments were reported where there was a registered maintenance liability.

During the period 1 July 2015 to 31 December 2015, 22,329 new overpayments were reported where there was a registered maintenance liability.

Notes: i) Some payees may have incurred more than one overpayment during this period.

ii) The data provided in QoN 52 in response to a question raised at the Senate Estimates hearings in June 2015 and provided in July 2015 was based on existing data sets available at that time. This date, like the data provided in QoN 57, is more accurate and based on improved methodology and data sets.

2) The department cannot recover overpayments that occur when there is no registered maintenance liability because they are not debts due to the Commonwealth under Section 79 of the *Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988*. A paying parent would need to seek an order from court and recover any monies privately if a child support case was registered and subsequently cancelled. The department has no visibility of when this occurs and therefore does not collect this data.

o) As at 31 December 2015, 51,671 debts remain on payees' accounts, requiring recovery, where the case has ended.