

## Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

### BUDGET ESTIMATES - 2 JUNE 2011 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Human Services Portfolio

**Topic:** Access to Personal Information

**Question reference number:** HS 11

**Senator:** Fifield

**Type of question:** Hansard page 73

**Date set by the committee for the return of answer:** 22 July 2011

**Number of pages:** 2

**Question:**

- a) **Senator FIFIELD:** Do you have any flags against the records of some people who you keep information on; because of their profile they may be more of a temptation for people to access their details?

**Mr Wadson:** There are various reasons we flag records and limit access. Some of them are because we protect records. There may be a particular reason. So, there are various reasons we do that. I do not think it is so much because they are a celebrity as such in one way or another.

**Mr Box:** We might take it on notice to give you a complete answer, but the short answer is Medicare Australia does monitor celebrities. As to access to well-known celebrities, politicians, people of note, even people in the media—there are flags on them and if their records are accessed inappropriately that is detected and action is appropriately taken.

- b) **Senator FIFIELD:** Have there been any instances where flags have gone up or you might consider that there had been privacy breaches in the year to date?

**Mr Box:** The year to date I would have to take it on notice for you. There are briefs around I think that might answer the question. Historically there have been; in the year to date I will have to take on notice.

**Ms Campbell:** There have been some instances which are referred for investigation and those officers who have breached privacy are considered under the code of conduct, and determinations under the code of conduct on how those officers are dealt with.

**Senator FIFIELD:** Have there been any this financial year?

**Ms Campbell:** There have been this financial year, yes. I do not have the details with me and there may be things about the privacy of individuals we would have to consider. We do monitor this very closely and constantly remind staff of the privacy of those individuals and the records they deal with.

**Senator FIFIELD:** Obviously we would not want to compromise the privacy of individuals, but if you could take on notice the number of instances and the nature of those instances for the year to date that would be good.

**Ms Campbell:** We can do that, yes.

- c) **Senator FIFIELD:** And also for the previous financial year.

**Answer:**

- a) The Department of Human Services (DHS) recognises that some customers who are in the public eye (including ‘celebrities’) are more at risk of unwarranted attention and has a monitoring regime to mitigate those risks.

While each Program within DHS uses system tools to actively monitor employee access to all customer information, monitoring access to the records of high profile individuals in both the Child Support Program and Medicare Australia is done through a manual sampling process. Inappropriate access to high profile individuals is detected through this process.

DHS also undertakes work on behalf of other Government departments and in some cases, to perform this work, DHS employees have access to customer information on the IT systems belonging to those departments. These Departments monitor access to their systems by DHS employees in various ways and refer suspected unauthorised access to DHS for investigation.

- b) Active monitoring of the Child Support Program and Medicare Australia systems since 1 July 2010 has not detected any unauthorised access in regard to the records of high profile individuals.

Since 1 July 2010, DHS has received three referrals, all from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, in relation to Centrelink employees accessing the records of high profile individuals on the Australian Passports System. These matters were investigated under the portfolio’s code of conduct processes.

- c) In the 2009-10 financial year, there was no evidence identified of unauthorised access to the records of high profile individuals in either the Child Support Program or Medicare Australia systems.

In the 2009-10 financial year, there was no evidence identified of unauthorised access by DHS staff to the records of high profile individuals on IT systems belonging to other Government departments.