

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs

BUDGET ESTIMATES - 2 JUNE 2011 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Topic: Participation Plans

Question reference number: HSW 17

Senator: Fifield

Type of question: Written

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Question:

- a) What constitutes a 'participation plan' to engage in community interaction and potentially employment?
- b) What measures are in place to ensure that Centrelink clients follow participation plans that are created for them?
- c) What sort of activities can be included in a participation plan?

Answer:

Part (i) of the following answers refers to participation plans for Disability Support Pension recipients aged under 35 who have a work capacity of eight hours or more per week, to be introduced from 1 July 2012. Part (ii) refers to the Helping Teen Parents and Jobless Families initiatives/changes.

- a) (i) An individualised participation plan will set out services and activities to help the Disability Support Pension recipient to build their capacity.

The Department of Human Services (Centrelink) will provide information on local services and support available to the Disability Support Pension recipient that can help them gain employment, skills, training, prepare for work and/or participate in the community. A Participation Plan will be prepared identifying activities that the customer wishes to undertake. When the participation plan is agreed, staff will provide referrals to the activities and services in the plan.

- (ii) People being assisted under the Helping Teen Parents initiative will develop a participation plan that will detail what educational opportunity they take up. It will also detail any early learning childhood activities they enrol their child in or parenting activities in which they may decide to participate.

People being assisted under the Jobless Families initiative will be provided with a plan which they can complete, during a workshop with departmental staff, for their own future reference and use.

- b) (i) While attendance at participation interviews and developing a participation plan will be compulsory, participation in activities and services identified in the plan will be voluntary.

Interviews every six months will ensure Disability Support Pension recipients are able to review their participation plans and the options available to assist them.

- (ii) Helping Teen Parents and Jobless Families participants will be required to attend compulsory participation interviews and must engage in activities identified through participation plans. If a participant fails to undertake their agreed activities, they will be required to attend a further interview with the department to discuss their participation barriers.

Helping Teen Parents participants must attend regular interviews with the department and must be able to demonstrate how they have been working towards their participation plans and participating in the identified activities. Any changes to the goals and activities outlined in the plan should be discussed with the department.

A failure by trial participants to attend compulsory appointments with Centrelink may result in the suspension of income support payments until participants re-book a subsequent appointment with the Department of Human Services. Where a participant fails to attend that appointment, they may have their income support payments suspended again. Under these trials, the existing mechanisms under the *Social Security Act 1991* will apply.

- c) (i) Activities in the participation plan may include:

- rehabilitation;
- volunteer work;
- employment services either through Job Services Australia or Disability Employment Services, which provide tailored assistance to help people with disability prepare for and get work;
- vocational education and training programs such as language, literacy and numeracy programs; or
- other support services to help address barriers to employment – for example homelessness or drug and alcohol related issues.

- (ii) People being assisted under the Helping Teen Parents initiative will develop a participation plan that will detail:

- their involvement in educational opportunities;
- early learning childhood activities; and/or
- parenting activities.

People being assisted under the Jobless Families initiative will develop a participation plan under guidance by departmental staff that will take account of their individual circumstances, barriers to employment and educational attainment.