

Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

BUDGET ESTIMATES – 1 JUNE 2017 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Human Services

Topic: Parenting Payment Single

Question reference number: HS 61 (SQ17-000143)

Senator: Pratt

Type of question: Hansard pages 123

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 21 July 2017

Number of pages: 2

Question:

Senator PRATT: As you have indicated, people's relationships are sometimes secure and sometimes they can be a little bit unstable. How do you assess the stability of a relationship and the real interdependence of it when assessing someone for a single payment? Clearly, people who are single may nevertheless have romantic relationships, but they are not financially interdependent necessarily and not necessarily under the same roof.

Ms Campbell: There is criteria about being eligible for parenting payment single. I do not know whether we have it here. It is a very complex area. But it does include things such as financial and emotional dependence. Generally, under the same roof is one of the criteria which lends itself to suggest that people might be in a marriage-like relationship but not always necessarily. We do have the booklet.

Mr Creech: I think we do.

Ms Campbell: Do we have the reasons in there?

Mr Creech: No. It does not go to the level of detail you are after.

Ms Campbell: This is part of the assessment process. We could take it on notice and provide you those key elements of our process.

Answer:

The Department does not assess the stability of a relationship.

To complete a claim for Parenting Payment, a person must indicate their current relationship status. As part of the process to assess a Parenting Payment claim, the Department will:

- review the submitted claim to ascertain if the claimant qualifies for Parenting Payment. In order to do so, a person must:
 - be the principal carer of a Parenting Payment child aged under 8 (single parents) or under 6 (partnered parents);
 - have income and assets below certain amounts; and
 - meet residence requirements.

- undertake a Member of a Couple assessment, which may be required for one of the following reasons:
 - to determine whether or not a claimant or recipient is considered single or partnered for the purposes of determining the rate of income support payment;
 - if a recipient advises a change of circumstances;
 - a Service Officer identifies a potential undisclosed relationship during recipient contact;
 - information received from a third party, for example, a tip-off.

A Member of a Couple assessment involves a claimant or recipient completing a form which contains a number of questions that are aligned with the following five factors required to be assessed under social security law:

- the financial aspects of the relationship;
- the nature of the household;
- the social aspects of the relationship;
- any sexual relationship between the people; and
- the nature of the people's commitment to each other.

To make a determination on a claimant's relationship status, the Department will take into consideration:

- the information provided on the form;
- relevant information held by the Department; and
- information obtained during interviews or from third parties (if required).

No single factor should be seen as conclusive and not all factors need to be present for a decision to be made that a person is a member of a couple.