

## Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee

### BUDGET ESTIMATES – 1 JUNE 2017 ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

#### Department of Human Services

**Topic:** Appointments with Recipients

**Question reference number:** HS 8 (SQ17-000089)

**Senator:** Pratt

**Type of question:** Hansard page 98

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

**Number of pages:** 2

#### **Question:**

- a) Senator PRATT: How common is it when Centrelink sends a letter to someone that the reason specified in the letter as to why they need to come in for an appointment?

Ms Campbell: It is not always letters. We often use SMS.

Senator PRATT: Yes indeed. But would there normally be a reason specified as to why you are being asked to make contact with Centrelink?

Dr Charker: I might have to take that on notice. I say we have noted, it is not unusual for us to make contact with the recipient via one more means and ask them to come in. What I think we might have to take on notice is how much specificity we would normally provide, noting that there is going to be less in an SMS by design of an SMS than there would be in a letter. SMS is obviously much shorter. I will take notice that on notice and come back to you on the specificities.

- b) Senator PRATT: My reason for asking is that normally if someone is asked to come in, they have got a certain window in which they are required to come to the office. What is that window?

Ms Campbell: Sometimes there is an appointment and they are given a time to come in depending on the nature of the appointment. As Dr Charker said, we can take that on notice and give you some more details.

#### **Answer:**

- a) Under social security law, the Department has the legal authority to notify job seekers of certain Mutual Obligation Requirements. This includes requesting recipients attend an appointment.

There are currently 16 basic types of appointment notification. The contents of these notifications are customised depending on the reason for the appointment. Regardless of the notification channel, appointment notification advices include:

- the broad reason for the appointment;
- the appointment method (attend an office or another location in person, or be available by phone); and

- the date and time of the appointment.

Notification to attend the appointment may be delivered:

- verbally, either face-to-face or by phone;
- by electronic messaging (SMS or email), if the recipient is subscribed to the Centrelink Electronic Messaging service but has not subscribed to letters online;
- by email, if the recipient has chosen to receive their letters online; or
- by mail, to the recipient's postal address if they are not subscribed to electronic messaging or letters online.

The timeframes for delivery of an appointment notification vary depending on the method of delivery:

- where an appointment has been made in direct consultation with the recipient (i.e. verbally) and the recipient has agreed to attend, reasonable notice is considered to have been given even if the appointment is on the same day as the verbal notification;
  - where the recipient is subscribed to the Centrelink Electronic Messaging service, they will be reminded about the appointment within two working days of the appointment;
  - notifications sent by mail should be received within seven working days of the date the appointment is made;
  - notifications sent online will be received within two working days of the date the appointment is made.
- b) If a recipient is verbally notified of an appointment, they must be given sufficient time to comply with the requirement to attend that appointment. If, during the conversation, the recipient agrees to attend the appointment, this may be considered to be reasonable notice. This is the case even when the appointment is on the same day.