

Senate Community Affairs Committee
ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
SOCIAL SERVICES PORTFOLIO
2017-18 Budget Estimates Hearings

Outcome Number: 1.10 Working Age Payments

Question No: SQ17-000521

Topic: Mental health, comorbidity and budget measures

Hansard page: Written

Senator Rachel Siewert asked:

Given that you know that many income support recipients have serious mental illness, coupled with dependency issues, what plans does the Department have in place, in terms of addressing the rehabilitative needs of these clients, e.g. set up an MOU with the NDIA for them to take up the clients and put in place a care plan?

Answer:

Under measures announced in the 2017-18 Budget, job seekers with drug or alcohol dependency, including those who may also have mental illness, and who require treatment will be able to participate in any available drug or alcohol treatment that is appropriate for their individual circumstances and have this contribute to meeting their requirements as part of their Job Plan. This may include, but is not limited to, further assessment services, support and case management, counselling, information and education programs, detoxification or withdrawal management, non-residential care or rehabilitation, residential care or rehabilitation, and pharmacotherapy.

In addition, there are existing mechanisms for identifying and supporting recipients who may be facing vulnerable circumstances such as mental health or drug dependence issues. The Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) is used to measure a job seeker's relative difficulty in gaining and maintaining employment and to identify those job seekers who have complex or multiple barriers to employment that need further assessment, for example mental illness and/or drug dependency issues. An Employment Services assessment (ESAt) may also be undertaken to determine a job seeker's barriers to employment, work capacity and interventions which may be of benefit to improve their current work capacity. These assessments help to identify the barriers and appropriate support for individual job seekers. These assessments may be undertaken when the job seeker first claims payment; however jobactive providers or the Department of Human Services (DHS) may also refer a job seeker to update their JSCI or to an ESAt at a later stage where appropriate, for example where new circumstances are identified or disclosed.

Job seekers with mental health and/or substance misuse issues may also be referred to a DHS social worker for assistance and/or referral to other community support services, depending on their circumstances.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides funding for long-term, individualised care and support that is reasonable and necessary to meet the needs of people with permanent disability, where a person's disability significantly affects their communication, mobility, self-care or self-management. The NDIS can provide supports for community reintegration and day to day living; however the Council of Australian Governments has agreed that the health system is responsible for the delivery of rehabilitative health services aimed at restoring a person's health and improving the person's functioning.

Existing clients of Commonwealth, State and Territory disability programs are being assisted to transition to the NDIS where applicable. People who are new to accessing disability supports can be referred to the NDIS through a variety of avenues, including health practitioners, social workers and disability support workers.

DHS staff are able to provide members of the Australian public who contact the department, including those with significant mental health concerns, with the following information/support in respect of the national disability insurance agency (NDIA):

- general information on the scheme regarding who is eligible to access assistance,
- assistance to access information via the NDIA website, and
- contact details for the NDIA national contact centre.

A person may also apply for access to the NDIS without referral. A person must meet the access requirements in order to become a participant in the scheme.

People with significant mental health issues who may meet the access requirements for the NDIS would generally be receiving Disability Support Pension, rather than a job seeker payment such as Newstart Allowance.