

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2012-2013, 17 & 19 October 2012

Question: E12-101

OUTCOME 0: Whole of Portfolio

Topic: FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Number of pages: 2

Senator: Senator Boyce

Question:

- a) Has the department/agency received any updated advice on how to respond to FOI requests?
- b) What is the total cost to the department/agency to process FOI requests for 2011-12? How many FOI requests did the department/agency receive in 2011-12? How many requests were denied and how many were granted? Did the department fail to meet the processing times outlined in the FOI Act for any requests? If so, how many? Do any of these requests remain outstanding?
- c) What is the total cost to the department to process FOI requests for this financial year to date? How many FOI requests has the Department received for this financial year to date? How many requests have been denied and how many have been granted? Has the department failed to meet the processing times outlined in the FOI Act for any requests? If so, how many and why? Do any of these requests remain outstanding? If so, how many and why?

Answer:

- a) The Office of the Australian Information Commission (OAIC) has issued guidelines for the purposes of the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (FOI Act). The Department of Health and Ageing has regard to the OAIC Guidelines in the performance of its functions and exercise of powers under the FOI Act. The Department has not received any advice from the OAIC on how to respond to FOI requests for this financial year to date.
- b) The non-staff costs directly attributable to processing FOI requests for the financial year 2011-2012 was \$595,321. The Department does not keep records of all staff time spent on FOI, so cannot provide a total figure for staff costs.

The Department received 363 FOI requests in the 2011-2012 financial year. In the 2011-2012 financial year, 89 requests were denied, 110 requests were granted in part and 42 were granted in full. The Department failed to meet processing times on 20 occasions. Of the 20 where there was a delay in processing, no requests remain outstanding.

- c) The non-staff costs directly attributable to processing FOI requests for this financial year to date are \$50,899. The Department does not keep records of all staff time spent on FOI, so cannot provide a total figure for staff costs.

The Department has received 108 FOI requests in this financial year to 31 October 2012. 26 requests were denied, 28 requests were granted in part and 11 requests were granted in full. The Department failed to meet processing times on three occasions. Failures to meet statutory timelines were generally attributable to factors such as failure of third parties to respond on time to consultations about privacy or commercial business interests or insufficient resources in program areas to both perform their usual duties and complete the labour-intensive tasks involved in large requests. It is the Department's standard practice in such instances to contact FOI applicants in advance of the expiry of the statutory period to inform them when the decision may be late and to seek their agreement to an extension of time. Of the three where there was a delay in processing, no requests remain outstanding.