

Senate Standing Committee on Education Employment and Workplace Relations

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Supplementary Budget Estimates 2011-2012**

Outcome 4 - Employment

DEEWR Question No. EW0716_12

Senator Wright provided in writing.

Question

Engaging with Customers with a Mental Illness

"I refer to the recommendations of the Commonwealth Ombudsman report 'Falling Through the Cracks. Centrelink, DEEWR and FAHCSIA: Engaging with Customers with a Mental Illness in the Social Security System' and note in particular, Part 5.3 that the Ombudsman asks each agency provide a status report on the implementation of relevant recommendations six months after publication of the report. 1. Given the report was published in September 2010, please advise which recommendations have been implemented, or will be implemented and whether DEEWR have provided status reports. 2. If status reports have yet to be provided, please advise when we would likely expect these status reports."

Answer

DEEWR has either implemented the relevant recommendations made by the Commonwealth Ombudsman's report 'Falling through the Cracks,' or processes are well developed to implement the recommendations.

DEEWR provided the Commonwealth Ombudsman with a status report on 1 July 2011.

A summary of DEEWR's progress towards implementing the recommendations is at [Attachment A](#).

#	Recommendation	DEEWR response
1	<p>Centrelink and DEEWR (for ESPs) should expand their existing service delivery procedures to require staff to consider whether a customer's mental illness necessitates a particular outgoing communication strategy.</p>	<p>Employment service providers use a range of communication mechanisms with job seekers and are contractually required to deliver tailored, individualised services to all participants.</p> <p>DEEWR secured funding in the 2011–12 Budget to develop training materials which will build the capacity of employment service providers and DHS front line staff to identify and assist people with mental illness to gain employment. Staff will be provided with training and resources to increase their knowledge, skills and expertise in mental health awareness and effective employment strategies for the recruitment of job seeker with mental illness. Staff will also be trained in how to collaborate and build partnerships to better connect job seekers with appropriate mental health services. Appropriate communication strategies will also be included as part of this training which is expected to be available by the end of June 2012.</p> <p>In addition, DEEWR has recently undertaken a process to update existing service delivery guidelines and training material to remind staff that they should consider whether a customer's mental illness necessitates a particular outgoing communication strategy. For example, the Direct Registration Guidelines, Vulnerable Youth Direct Registration Guidelines and the current Mental Health Awareness training have been amended to include additional information about alternative servicing and support strategies, including tailored communication arrangements, to assist job seekers with mental health issues.</p>
2	<p>Service delivery procedures should be updated to reflect that, where a special contact arrangement is implemented for a customer with a mental illness, the customer must be made aware that the arrangement is for their benefit and can be revisited if they find it is unnecessarily restrictive or unhelpful.</p>	<p>An Employment Pathway Plan is developed at the initial interview with each job seeker which sets out the agreed contact arrangements as well as the timing and details of vocational and non-vocational activities.</p> <p>DEEWR will ensure that, as part of the training material being developed for DHS front line staff and employment service providers, staff understand the importance of explaining to a job seeker with mental illness when and why a special contact arrangement is being implemented.</p> <p>DEEWR has undertaken to update existing service delivery guidelines and training material in line with this recommendation. For example, the Direct Registration Guidelines, Vulnerable Youth Direct Registration Guidelines and the Mental Health Awareness online training modules have been amended to advise employment service providers that where an alternative contact arrangement is implemented, the job seeker should be made aware that the arrangement is for their benefit and that it can be revisited if it becomes unnecessarily restrictive or unhelpful.</p>

3	<p>Centrelink and DEEWR should expand existing service delivery procedures to require that, where staff identify a customer's mental illness may prevent them from adequately pursuing a beneficial course of action, the customer is provided with additional services by way of advice, support or referrals.</p>	<p>Employment service providers must provide a suitable and flexible mix of services and support to meet the needs and personal circumstances of participants, which may include in-house or external assistance or services.</p> <p>DEEWR will ensure that, as part of the training material being developed for DHS front line staff and employment service providers, staff consider alternate servicing and support strategies where they identify that a customer's mental illness may prevent them from adequately pursuing a beneficial course of action.</p> <p>The JobAccess service has recently been expanded to include professionals in the mental health area who will provide information and support relating to the employment of people with mental illness. This measure, which is part of the 2011–12 Budget, also includes funding to encourage employment service providers to access the expertise of the JobAccess staff.</p> <p>DEEWR has recently undertaken a process to update existing service delivery guidelines and training materials in line with this recommendation. For example, the guidelines for conducting the Job Seeker Classification Instrument and the Mental Health Awareness online training modules have been amended to remind providers that they should consider additional support and referrals for participants who disclose diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issues. Providers were also reminded of the support that is available to them through the JobAccess service.</p>
4	<p>Centrelink and DEEWR should coordinate the updating of the Guide to Social Security Law to ensure that it appropriately supports the special procedure for assessing customers who are unwilling or unable to provide medical evidence.</p>	<p>Complete. FaHCSIA agreed to provide a response to the Ombudsman on this recommendation.</p>
5	<p>Centrelink and DEEWR should amend the procedural instructions and policy guidance for assessing Participation Reports (PRs) to require staff to consider whether direct contact with a customer</p>	<p>As previously advised, DEEWR disagrees with this recommendation. Recommendation 5 relates to contacts Centrelink has with job seekers with a Participation Report. Prior to a Participation Report being investigated by Centrelink, employment service providers record a Participation Report. As the report highlights, employment service providers have flexibility in raising participation reports and must consider if the job seeker's disability, including mental illness, contributed to the participation failure.</p>

	with mental illness is appropriate in the circumstances (this could be incorporated in the broader policy and procedures around communication with customers with mental illness).	The new training material being developed will assist staff in communicating with job seekers with mental illness.
6	Centrelink should expand the current debt recovery procedures to require staff to consider any evidence of a customer's mental illness and associated communication or servicing arrangements before proceeding to negotiate repayment.	Not applicable to DEEWR
7	Centrelink and DEEWR should consider how to improve their information products and staff scripts to ensure customers are aware of the benefits of disclosing a mental illness, and feel comfortable doing so.	<p>DEEWR will ensure that the online mental health training package incorporates guidance for staff on how to ensure customers are aware of the benefits of disclosing a mental illness, and feel comfortable doing so. This will include information on how to foster an environment where disclosure can take place.</p> <p>The JobAccess website also contains a substantial amount of advice on the benefits of disclosure including advice to providers and job seekers on their rights and responsibilities around disclosure and advice to job seekers on how to disclose. Employment Service Providers have been reminded of the information on disclosure that is available on the JobAccess website.</p> <p>DEEWR has recently undertaken a process to update existing service delivery guidelines and training material in line with this recommendation. For example, the guidelines for conducting the Job Seeker Classification Instrument and the Mental Health Awareness online training modules have been amended to remind providers that they should consider additional support and referrals for participants who disclose diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health issues. DEEWR will continue to consider this recommendation with the development or enhancement of communication materials and staff scripts.</p>
8	Centrelink and DEEWR enhance the existing training and procedural instructions to provide greater guidance to staff about what is expected of them when	As noted for previous recommendations, DEEWR has secured funding to develop training material which will build the capacity of employment service providers and DHS front line staff to identify and assist people with mental illness to gain employment. Appropriate communication strategies will be included as part of this training.

	<p>they identify that a customer may have a mental illness. The procedural instructions should provide direct links to complementary procedures, such as referrals to social workers and Job Capacity Assessors (JCAs).</p>	<p>The expansion of the JobAccess information and advice service to include professionals in the mental health area to provide information and support relating to the employment of people with mental illness, as well as encouraging employment service providers to access the expertise of the JobAccess staff, will also improve the service provided to job seekers.</p> <p>As noted for previous recommendations, DEEWR has recently undertaken a process to update existing service delivery guidelines and training materials in line with the recommendations. For example, the Direct Registration Guidelines have been updated to include advice on what providers should consider if they identify that a job seeker may have mental health issues.</p> <p>Some suggestions include, seeking the assistance of a more experienced case manager or a JobAccess Adviser, organising alternative contact arrangements, consulting with the job seeker's nominee to determine the most suitable communication and contact arrangement, recommending that the job seeker discuss their circumstances with a mental health services provider or referring the job seeker to other relevant support services.</p>
<p>9</p>	<p>Centrelink implement processes to collect information from customers who identify as having a disability (mental or physical) about the impact that disability has on their capacity to engage effectively with the social security system.</p>	<p>Not Applicable to DEEWR</p>
<p>10</p>	<p>Centrelink should consider implementing a standard process for recording any special needs or limitations associated with mental illness on a customer's electronic file, as well as any instructions/strategies for accommodating those needs. It may be appropriate to consider adopting standard words for reflecting a customer's condition</p>	<p>Not applicable to DEEWR</p>

	<p>and needs in order to avoid the risk of causing offence to the customer in the event of an FOI application.</p>	
<p>11</p>	<p>Centrelink and DEEWR expand current training packages to address the options available for more effectively engaging and servicing customers with a mental illness, including (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication methods and special arrangements (recommendation 1) • Offering tailored support or advice (recommendation 2) • Identifying and implementing appropriate referrals (recommendation 7) • Collecting information about mental illness and barriers (recommendation 8) • Appropriate recordkeeping (recommendation 10) 	<p>As noted in previous responses.</p>