

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Department of Human Services

Additional Estimates February 2005

Question: HS53

Outcome 1, Output 1.1 - Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers

Topic: Violence against Centrelink Staff

Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: Written

Senator Evans asked on 15 February 2005:

- (1) Does Centrelink keep a record of violence against Centrelink staff by clients?
- (2) What about for harassment of staff by clients generally?
- (3) Can a summary of these records for the last five financial years be provided? Please indicate date of incident, nature of incident, what was done in response etc.
- (4) What is Centrelink doing to reduce the incidence of violence/harassment of staff by clients?
- (5) What sorts of training programs are used to address this issue?
- (6) How many staff have actually participated in training programs dealing with violence/harassment against staff in each of the last five financial years?

Answers:

(1) and (2) Yes.

(3) The numbers of customer aggression reports (which includes incidents of swearing, threats to damage Commonwealth Property etc) including assaults, submitted by staff for the last five years is set out below.

Year	Total Reports	Assaults
2000-01	2758	Not available
2001-02	4909	304
2002-03	5137	325
2003-04	5228	316
2004-05	3605	231 (to 25 February 2005).

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(4) Centrelink has well-established policies and procedures for the prevention and management of customer aggression. All Centrelink offices have security procedures (Local Response Guidelines) based on the national policies and procedures, including the use of duress alarms and relationships with local police.

Most customer aggression incidents result in the customer being warned about their behaviour, although alternative servicing arrangements can be used where the customer aggression incident is serious. In the more serious incidents, police are contacted and this can result in charges being laid, particularly when the incident involved assaults, serious threats or property damage.

(5) Centrelink ensures that staff delivering customer service undertake the appropriate training to implement the Local Response Guidelines. Customer aggression training is undertaken to ensure that employees have appropriate skills to handle customer aggression. Additional training in dealing with customers who have mental disabilities or substance abuse problems may be undertaken, depending on the customer profile and customer aggression risk at a particular location. Customer Service Centres and Area Support Offices manage this training and retain manual paper records. Information is readily available to staff undertaking face-to-face customer service at Customer Service Centres.

(6) Of the staff delivering face-to-face customer service at Customer Service Centres who report an incident, 88.5% have undertaken customer aggression training, and 97% have undertaken training in either the Local Response Guidelines, customer aggression or both.