

Estimates 2004-05 — Additional Estimates, February 2005

Questions on Notice Index—Department of Human Services and agencies

QON No.	Department / agency	Senator	Hansard reference	Question	Comments
HS1	DHS	Moore	F&PA 108, 15/2/05	<p>Senator MOORE—Ms Scott, what you have given me on the organisational structure is lovely, and I saw the coloured one. But it only goes to the management structure—I am interested in seeing where the 54 in your anticipated full structure fit in. At the moment, we have only got their programs and I would like to get some idea about your proposed levels and where they fit.</p> <p>Ms Scott—We drew it like this because in most departments, when you see their organisational structure, quite frankly, it does not usually go beyond this level. You normally stop at this point. We would be happy to go further, but we would almost get to the stage where we would have individual people mentioned.</p> <p>Senator MOORE—Numbers would be good.</p> <p>Ms Scott—I could provide that.</p> <p>Senator MOORE—Just to get an idea about how it fits, because it is such a new structure.</p> <p>Senator Abetz—Can we take that on notice?</p> <p>Senator MOORE—Absolutely. It is just that when I got the draft I could not make it come up to 54.</p>	Answer received 8/4/05
HS2	Centrelink	Wong	F&PA 117, 15/2/05	<p>Senator WONG—Since the rearrangement, have there been discussions between Centrelink and DEWR about the provision of this data for reporting purposes?</p> <p>Mr Whalan—I do not know. I will just check if one my staff knows.</p> <p>Senator WONG—Perhaps you could take it on notice if you are not able to.</p> <p>Mr Whalan—If I may.</p>	Answer received 8/4/05
HS3	HIC	McLucas	F&PA 121, 15/2/05	<p>Senator McLUCAS—Given the time, I wonder if you could provide on notice for the committee the list of the extra fields that are generated under the consumer directory.</p> <p>Mr Andreatta—Sure.</p> <p>Senator McLUCAS—Also provide the cost of the project, the expected completion date and how much has been spent to this point in time. I understand, and you may be able to correct me, that there is an issue about data cleansing. Can you explain that to the</p>	Answer received 31/3/05

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QON No.	Department / agency	Senator	Hansard reference	Question	Comments
				<p>committee?</p> <p>Ms Argall—Generally, data cleansing is something that occurs whenever a new technology project is being implemented. If you are transferring information from one system to a new system then it is appropriate to ensure that the data is as clean and as correct as possible before you migrate data from one system to the other.</p> <p>Senator McLUCAS—I understand there was a process or review of the movement of the data from one system to the other, and the HIC has a series of recommendations to deal with that issue of data cleansing.</p> <p>Mr Andreatta—That is correct. Six recommendations came out of last year's ANAO audit. Those six recommendations have been accepted by the HIC, and in fact we have moved a long way to implementing most of those recommendations.</p> <p>Senator McLUCAS—So all have been accepted and you are moving to complete all of them?</p> <p>Mr Andreatta—We are in the process of completing all six.</p> <p>Senator McLUCAS—If you take those questions on notice, that will complete that issue for me.</p> <p>Mr Andreatta—Sure.</p>	
HS4	Centrelink	McLucas	F&PA 121, 15/2/05	<p>Senator McLUCAS—On the issue of health care concession cards, it has been suggested that a crackdown on the misuse of Commonwealth health care concession cards could net the federal government up to \$400 million in savings. I must say I do not have the reference to that comment, and I apologise for that. Is that anywhere near the ballpark of what compliance with health care cards could deliver?</p> <p>Ms Argall—This is probably a Centrelink issue, if we are talking about concession cards.</p> <p>Senator McLUCAS—Sure. I will put it on notice to Centrelink.</p>	Answer received 31/3/05
HS5	HIC	Allison	F&PA 123, 15/2/05	<p>Senator ALLISON—Is it possible to break down the number that you have suggested has been the subject of recovery into those which have been about child abuse?</p> <p>Ms Argall—I doubt it, but I am happy to look at that on notice if you would like.</p>	Answer received 31/3/05
HS6	HIC	Allison	F&PA 125, 15/2/05	<p>Senator ALLISON—Is there any data available on how often that item has been used so far?</p> <p>Mr Andreatta—I do not have any data with me, but I certainly could</p>	Answer received 31/3/05

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QON No.	Department / agency	Senator	Hansard reference	Question	Comments
				get that for you. Senator ALLISON—Could you put a dollar figure on all those as well? Mr Andreatta—Yes.	
HS7	Centrelink	Wong	Written	Attached	Transferred to EWRE Committee 6/4/05
HS8	DHS	Carr	Written	Attached	Answer received 22/4/05
HS9	Centrelink	Carr	Written	Attached	Answer received 5/4/05
HS10	HIC	Carr	Written	Attached	Answer received 8/4/05
HS11	Aust Hearing	Carr	Written	Attached	Answer received 25/5/05
HS12	DHS	Carr	Written	Attached	Answer received 2/5/05
HS13	HIC	Harradine	Written	Attached	Answer received 8/4/05
HS14	Centrelink	Lundy	Written	Attached	Answer received 8/4/05
HS15	DHS	Troeth	Written	Attached	Transferred to the dept. of Health and Ageing
HS16	DHS	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 8/4/05
HS17	DHS	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS18	DHS	Evans	Written	Attached	Parts (1) & (2) transferred to CA Committee—for FaCS—on 2/3/05 Parts (3) to (8) transferred to CA 11/3/05
HS19	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS20	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received

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QON No.	Department / agency	Senator	Hansard reference	Question	Comments
					22/4/05
HS21	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS22	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS23	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS24	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS25	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS26	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 8/4/05
HS27	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS28	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS29	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS30	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS31	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS32	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 8/4/05
HS33	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS34	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS35	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 8/4/05
HS36	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 15/4/05
HS37	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 22/4/05
HS38	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05

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QON No.	Department / agency	Senator	Hansard reference	Question	Comments
HS39	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS40	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Transferred to CA Committee 9/3/05
HS41	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 22/4/05
HS42	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS43	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 22/4/05
HS44	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS45	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS46	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS47	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 2/5/05
HS48	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 8/4/05
HS49	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS50	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS51	Centrelink	Wong	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS52	Aust. Hearing	McLucas	F&PA 127, 15/2/05	<p>Senator McLUCAS—Hearing impaired people are not invariably but almost invariably older and are less likely to make a direct complaint and would more likely go through an advocacy group. We have had some concerns expressed. I wonder whether for the record you could provide us with a copy of the offer that you would make.</p> <p>Ms Green—Of course, yes.</p> <p>Senator McLUCAS—So that we can see how patients are advised about—</p> <p>Ms Green—The quote with the disclaimer on it, yes.</p> <p>Senator McLUCAS—With the advice that the clinician is going to</p>	Answer received 31/3/05

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QON No.	Department / agency	Senator	Hansard reference	Question	Comments
				get the top-up.	
HS53	Centrelink	Evans	Written	Attached	Answer received 31/3/05
HS54	HIC	Forshaw	Written	Attached	Transferred from Community Affairs Committee 1/3/05 Answer received 8/4/05
HS55	Aust. Hearing	Crossin	Written	Attached	Transferred from Community Affairs Committee 3/3/05 Answer received 31/3/05
HS56	Centrelink	Wong	Written	Attached	Transferred from EWR&E Committee 3/3/05 Answer received 31/3/05
HS57	Aust. Hearing	McLucas	Written	Attached	Transferred from Community Affairs Committee 7/3/05 Answer received 31/3/05
HS58	HIC	McLucas	Written	Attached	Transferred from Community Affairs Committee 8/3/05 Answer received 31/3/05
HS59	HIC	McLucas	Written	Attached	Transferred from Community Affairs Committee 9/3/05 Answer received 31/3/05
HS60	HIC	McLucas	Written	Attached	Transferred from Community Affairs Committee 9/3/05 Answer received 31/3/05

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QON No.	Department / agency	Senator	Hansard reference	Question	Comments
HS61	HIC	McLucas	Written	Attached	Transferred from Community Affairs Committee 9/3/05 Answer received 8/4/05

Please note that answers are due on 1 April 2005

HS7

Centrelink

- (1) (a) Can trend data be provided showing, from 1999, the number of persons claiming Newstart and Youth Allowance (other) for more than one year; and (b) can this data also be broken down by: (i) state, and (ii) DEWR labour market region?
- (2) (a) Can trend data be provided showing , from 1999, the number of persons claiming Newstart and Youth Allowance (other) for more than two years; and (b) can this data also be broken down by: (i) state, and (ii) DEWR labour market region?
- (3) (a) Can trend data be provided showing , from 1999, the number of persons claiming Newstart and Youth Allowance (other) for more than five years; and (b) can this data also be broken down by: (i) state, and (ii) DEWR labour market region?

HS8 to HS12

Please provide a table listing details of all consultancies for the 2003/04 financial year, for the department and all associated agencies within the portfolio. Please include the following:

- The costs for all completed consultancies, both budgeted and actual;
- The costs for ongoing consultancies, both budgeted and for the current financial year;
- The total costs for all consultancies, both the amount expended in the current financial year, and the total budgeted value of all consultancies running in the current financial year;
- The nature and purpose of the consultancy;
- The method by which the contract was let;
- The name and details of the company and/or individual who is carrying out, or carried out, the contract.

HS13

HIC

Topic: ABORTIONS FUNDED BY MEDICARE - FRAUD

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- (1) I note the report in the Canberra Times on 17 February that there are 2,000 complaints about abortion clinics billing practices a year. What is the total number of abortion-related complaints for each of the last five years? Please provide a breakdown by State and Territory and by abortion provider. How have these complaints been acted on?
 - (2) What systematic action is the HIC taking to address billing fraud in the abortion industry? What is the total cost of this fraud to the Commonwealth? What steps are taken to recoup this lost money? What are the penalties for such fraud?
-

HS14

Centrelink

I refer to the Auditor-General's audit report number 4 for 2004-05, entitled Management of Customer Debt and note Centrelink's agreement with the majority of the report recommendations:

- (1) Can Centrelink advise what progress has been made on implementation of the report's recommendations?
- (2) To what extent has this implementation flowed down to the local Centrelink customer service centres, which are the places where most Australians deal with the agency?
- (3) What exactly are the customer service officers now doing differently in response to the recommendations of the audit report?
- (4) Is this change just occurring at the planning level, or are customers actually seeing a difference in the service?
- (5) In respect of Centrelink customers who incur debts due to illiteracy:
- (6) How does Centrelink deal with customers who have incurred debts due to not being able to read or understand the complicated material which relates to notification of a change in circumstances?
- (7) Has Centrelink specifically identified people with literacy problems as a group at risk of overpayment? If so, what are you doing about it?
- (8) What measures does Centrelink take to identify customers with literacy problems and how does the agency help them manage their responsibilities with regard to income support? For example, is there a note included on their file that they have literacy difficulties?
- (9) Does Centrelink ensure that there is a family member or other authorised person to act on a customer's behalf when their literacy skills are poor?
- (10) I am aware of one case of a particularly disadvantaged person who entered Australia as a recognised refugee with no English language skills and who is illiterate in both her own language and English. Staff at Centrelink knew she was illiterate, as they completed forms on her behalf, and yet they continued to send complicated documents about her obligations that neither she nor her family could understand. Consequently, she was overpaid over \$4,000 and is now being pursued by Dun & Bradstreet, the Centrelink debt collectors. Surely a debt such as this should be categorised as a debt arising from Centrelink error?
- (11) Given the unsympathetic handling that this young person has received from Centrelink thus far, would you be willing to look into this person's case?
- (12) In relation to the use of Dun & Bradstreet to collect Centrelink debts:
- (13) Can Centrelink provide statistics on how many cases have been referred to Dun & Bradstreet for debt collection in each of the last three financial years? How many of these relate specifically to the ACT and Queanbeyan region.
- (14) How many of the cases referred to Dun & Bradstreet have subsequently been overturned? Please provide this information for each of the last three financial years. How many of these relate specifically to the ACT and Queanbeyan region. Please also indicate the basis on which these debts were overturned.
- (15) In the overturned cases, do you have any statistics on what stage Dun & Bradstreet had reached in their recovery activities? For example, how many customers were still receiving letters from Dun & Bradstreet or visits to their home etc at the time the debt was overturned?
- (16) Does Centrelink have discretionary power to ensure that Dun & Bradstreet temporarily cease collection activities under any circumstances? If so, under what circumstances?

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- (17) If this discretion exists, how often has it been used since Centrelink started using Dun & Bradstreet for debt collection?
In regard to cases of customer debt that have been referred to Dun & Bradstreet for collection, only to subsequently be overturned because they were due to Centrelink error:
- (18) Given that it was an error for Centrelink to pursue these debts in the first place, hasn't the customer's privacy has been violated by passing their details on to Dun & Bradstreet?
- (19) Has Centrelink consulted with the Privacy Commissioner on this issue? If so, what advice have you received? If not, isn't this an issue where the Commissioner's advice should be sought?
- (20) Does Centrelink apologise to the customers whose debts are subsequently found to be due to Centrelink error?
- (21) In these cases, does Dun & Bradstreet destroy the information it holds regarding these customers? Does Centrelink check that Dun & Bradstreet actually do destroy the documentation?
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HS15

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Outcome 1: Effective and efficient delivery of social and health related services, including financial assistance to the Australian community

Output 1 – Core Department – Effective and efficient delivery of social and health related services, including financial assistance to the Australian community.

- (1) (a) For pregnancies between 12 and 20 weeks a two-stage abortion procedure can be provided. The first stage of the procedure involves the administering of a short-acting anaesthetic where laminaria tents (thin seaweed "needles") are inserted into the cervix. The laminaria tents slowly dilate and soften the cervix over the next 24 hours by absorbing the natural moisture. The next day the woman returns for the abortion procedure under general anaesthetic or intravenous sedation.
- (b) There is not, and never has been, a Medicare item number for insertion of laminaria tents for the first stage of a two-stage abortion procedure. However, some clinics have used Medicare Item No 35500 which is for examination under anaesthetic.
- (c) Medicare queried the appropriateness of this item many years ago but, in response to provider arguments, they agreed it was appropriate. Approximately 12 months ago, Medicare decided that Item No 35500 was no longer appropriate. Providers were left with no Medicare item to subsidise the cost of laminaria tents, and women are now required to pay more for this type of abortion.
- (d) Will the Minister for Health advise why the Medicare item 35500, which for years has been deemed appropriate to cover this first stage of a two-stage abortion procedure, has now been deemed inappropriate and removed from the schedule?
- (2) Termination with laminaria tents is a longstanding method that is both safe and effective. Will the Minister for Health advise why there isn't a Medicare item specifically for the insertion of laminaria tents?
- (3) (a) In April 2004, Australian Birth Control Services (Sydney) was informed by the Health Insurance Commission that its Medicare rebate would no longer be paid because the \$180 out-of-pocket theatre fee charged to patients contravened the Health Insurance Act. Australian Birth Control Services was forced to restructure its fees to keep services at the same price for patients.
- (b) The Abortion Providers Federation of Australia has confirmed that charging an additional patient fee has been an almost universal practice among abortion providers, and changing that will increase the cost of terminations, making them less affordable and less accessible.
- (c) An increase in fees will put affordability of terminations out of reach of women in lower socio-economic status could see a return to days prior to 1970, when poorer women had to access less safe services as they could not afford specialist costs. This has serious implications for the status of Australian women's reproductive health. In addition, if women are forced to save money to have a termination, this may result in women presenting at

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later stages in their pregnancy – therefore increasing the number of terminations performed in Australia at a later gestation and the accompanying risks to the woman's welfare.

(d) With the change to billing arrangements stemming from the HIC audit of some abortion providers, will the Minister for Health advise how the Federal Government will ensure that a woman with an unplanned pregnancy who makes the difficult decision to terminate the pregnancy will be able to access affordable and confidential abortion services?

- (4) Will the Minister for Health advise if he has instructed the Health Insurance commission to investigate abortion clinics on this basis?
 - (5) Will the Minister guarantee that women's access to safe and affordable termination services will not be undermined by the conduct or outcome of this investigation?
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HS16

Department of Human Services

Outcome 1 – Effective and efficient delivery of social and health related services, including financial assistance to the Australian community

Output 2 – Child Support Agency – Staffing issues

- (1) Please provide a full breakdown of CSA staff by level, location, gender, part-time/full-time status etc.
 - (2) Please provide a table showing the salary bands for each CSA staff classification.
 - (3) How is the appointment of a new agency head being managed?
 - (4) Has a recruitment consultant been engaged? If so, who?
 - (5) What are the details of the contract (term, cost etc)?
 - (6) Please list all locations of CSA offices, indicating whether the property is owned or leased by the Commonwealth, and if leased, the terms of the lease (annual rent, expiry date of lease etc).
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HS17

Department of Human Services

Outcome 1 – Effective and efficient delivery of social and health related services, including financial assistance to the Australian community

Output 2 – Child Support Agency – Child support payments

For the last five financial years, please indicate:

- the number of child support payers;
- the average amount paid by payers;
- the total amount paid to payers;
- the number of child support recipients;
- the average amount received by recipients;
- the total amount paid to payers.

(Please break this information down by state and territory.)

HS18

Department of Human Services

Outcome 1 – Effective and efficient delivery of social and health related services, including financial assistance to the Australian community

Output 2 – Child Support Agency – Use of different methodology to assess income

- (1) Is it the case that for non-custodial parents who are paying child support, the payments they make are not taken out of their taxable income when calculating their entitlement to family tax benefit? [\[THIS PART WAS TRANSFERRED TO FaCS ON 2/3/05\]](#)
 - (2) Is it the case that for custodial parents in receipt of child support, the payments they receive are not factored into their taxable income when calculating their entitlement to family tax benefit? [\[THIS PART WAS TRANSFERRED TO FaCS ON 2/3/05\]](#)
 - (3) Does the CSA agree that this means that non-custodial parents with a child support liability are relatively disadvantaged for other purposes (such as family tax benefit)? [\[THIS PART WAS TRANSFERRED TO FaCS ON 11/3/05\]](#)
 - (4) Has this issue been raised with the CSA before? Who has raised this issue? On how many occasions? [\[THIS PART WAS TRANSFERRED TO FaCS ON 11/3/05\]](#)
 - (5) What steps has the CSA taken to investigate this issue? [\[THIS PART WAS TRANSFERRED TO FaCS ON 11/3/05\]](#)
 - (6) What other agencies have been consulted about this? [\[THIS PART WAS TRANSFERRED TO FaCS ON 11/3/05\]](#)
 - (7) Is any work underway to rectify these apparent anomalies? [\[THIS PART WAS TRANSFERRED TO FaCS ON 11/3/05\]](#)
 - (8) Please outline the nature of the work that is underway. [\[THIS PART WAS TRANSFERRED TO FaCS ON 11/3/05\]](#)
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HS19

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Office locations

- (1) (a) Please list all locations of Centrelink offices, indicating whether the property is owned or leased by the Commonwealth, and if leased, the terms of the lease (annual rent, expiry date of lease etc). (b) Please also indicate the electorate in which the office is located.
 - (2) Please provide a list of all Centrelink offices that have closed over the last five financial years, the date of the closure, the reason for the closure, and the savings to Centrelink as a result of the closure.
-

HS20

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Queues in Centrelink offices

- (1) Is Centrelink aware of concerns about lengthy queues at any of its office locations?
 - (2) Which offices have a problem with queuing?
 - (3) Is Centrelink aware of concerns about queuing at its offices in Dandenong and Cranbourne?
 - (4) What is being done to address these concerns?
 - (5) Please indicate the total number of office staff at both the Cranbourne and Dandenong Centrelink offices in each of the last five financial years.
-

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HS21

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Staffing

- (1) Please provide a full breakdown of Centrelink staff by level, location, gender, part-time/full-time status etc.
 - (2) Please provide a table showing the salary bands for each staff classification in Centrelink.
 - (3) Please provide a table showing numbers of SES staff over the last five financial years.
 - (4) Please provide a table indicating staffing projections for the next four financial years.
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HS22

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Performance bonuses

- (1) Please provide a table indicating the total amount paid in performance bonuses to SES staff over the last five financial years. Please also indicate the number of SES staff who received a performance bonus.
 - (2) Please provide a table indicating the amount paid in performance bonuses to non-SES staff over the last five financial years. Please also indicate the number of non-SES staff who received a performance bonus.
-

HS23

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Overseas travel

- (1) How many overseas trips were taken by Centrelink employees in each of the last five financial years?
 - (2) Please indicate the destinations of each of these overseas trips.
 - (3) Please provide a table showing the cost of all overseas travel undertaken by Centrelink officials over the last five financial years. Please provide a breakdown of the cost of accommodation allowances, food allowances and airflights.
-

HS24

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Mobile phones

- (1) Please provide a table showing the number of Centrelink staff with Government-funded mobile phones in each of the last five financial years.
 - (2) Please also provide a breakdown of the classifications of Centrelink staff who had Government-funded mobile phones in the last five financial years?
 - (3) What was the total mobile phone bill for phones issued to Centrelink officials in each of the last five financial years?
-

HS25

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Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Motor vehicles

- (1) How many Centrelink staff were issued with Commonwealth-funded vehicles in each of the last five financial years?
 - (2) Please indicate how much was spent by Centrelink on these vehicles in each of the last five financial years.
-

HS26

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Management retreats/conferences

Could you please list all 'management retreats/conferences' attended by Centrelink managerial staff during the last five financial years. For such meetings held off-site (ie not at Centrelink offices) could you please indicate:

- where (location and hotel) and when they were held;
 - how much was spent in total;
 - how much was spent on accommodation;
 - how much was spent on food;
 - how much was spent alcohol/drinks; and
 - how much was spent on transport.
-

HS27

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Domestic travel

- (1) What was the total cost of all domestic travel by Centrelink staff in each of the last five financial years?
 - (2) Please provide a breakdown on the cost of accommodation allowances, food allowances and airflights.
-

HS28

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Advertising, market research and consultants

- (1) How much was spent on advertising by Centrelink in each of the last five financial years?
 - (2) How much was spent on market research by Centrelink in each of the last five financial years?
 - (3) How much was spent on external consultants by Centrelink in each of the last five financial years?
 - (4) How much was spent on professional service providers by Centrelink in each of the last five financial years?
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HS29

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Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Legal expenses

- (1) Please indicate how much was spent on legal services by Centrelink in each of the last five financial years.
 - (2) Please summarise the nature of the legal services that were provided (eg advice on debt recovery, advice on policy proposals, etc).
 - (3) For each of the last five financial years, please provide a list of all legal firms that were paid by Centrelink for legal services. Please indicate how much was paid to each of these firms (in each of the last five financial years).
-

HS30

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Centrelink's role in Australia's response to the tsunami crisis

- (1) Please provide an outline of Centrelink's involvement in the whole-of-Commonwealth Government response to the Indian Ocean tsunami.
 - (2) How much has it cost Centrelink to carry out these additional functions?
 - (3) Is there an ongoing role for Centrelink in the tsunami response?
 - (4) Is there any additional financial commitment for Centrelink in future years?
-

HS31

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Local liaison officers

- (1) How many staff will be needed to resource the LLO program?
 - (2) Where will these staff come from?
 - (3) How many new staff will need to be recruited to fully resource the program?
 - (4) Will they be diverted away from other areas of Centrelink business?
 - (5) What will be the impact on staff workload in other areas of Centrelink?
 - (6) Will the new program have any cost implications for Centrelink?
 - (7) Please indicate the projected additional cost of the program for the next financial year.
 - (8) Who will pay the extra costs? Will Centrelink receive additional funding from the Government to resource the new program?
 - (9) What additional training will the new local liaison officers undertake?
 - (10) Who will pay for the training?
 - (11) Will the costs of the training be absorbed by Centrelink, or will the Government provide additional funding to cover the cost?
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HS32

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – 'Efficiency' dividend

- (1) What is the current efficiency dividend required by the Government from Centrelink?

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- (2) What does this equate to in dollar terms for each of the next four financial years?
 - (3) How is the dividend being funded?
 - (4) What are the projections of staff reductions over the next four financial years that are being undertaken to contribute to funding the efficiency dividend?
-

HS33

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Debt recovery strategies

- (1) Is Centrelink concerned that its debt recovery practices account for nearly half (46%) of all complaints to the Commonwealth Ombudsman?
 - (2) What strategies have Centrelink established to try and reduce the level of complaints about its debt recovery practices?
 - (3) What resources have Centrelink devoted to improving its record in this area?
 - (4) What proportion of Centrelink's budget would be used to resource its debt recovery methods (ie how many staff are involved, how much do these staff cost)?
 - (5) What is the pattern of Centrelink expenditure on debt recovery over the last five financial years?
 - (6) Has Centrelink expenditure on debt recovery been increasing? Have numbers of staff working on debt recovery increased? Please indicate how many staff have worked on debt recovery in each of the last five financial years.
 - (7) Where have the additional staff working on debt recovery come from? Are they being transferred from other areas of Centrelink?
 - (8) What sort of training is provided to staff working on debt recovery?
 - (9) What accountability mechanisms are in place to ensure that people with Centrelink debts are treated appropriately by Centrelink staff?
-

HS34

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Compensating people for financial loss as a result of overestimating income for family tax benefit purposes

- (1) In relation to the case in which one family was paid compensation under the Compensation for Detriment Caused by Defective Administration Scheme as a result of that family overestimating their income to reduce the risk of incurring a family tax benefit debt (see page 40 of the Ombudsman's Annual Report 2003-04):
 - (a) Why was this compensation paid?
 - (b) How much compensation was this family paid?
 - (2) Are there any other families in the same situation? How many other families have lodged a claim for compensation under the CDDA scheme?
 - (3) How much will it cost to compensate those other families?
-

HS35

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Family tax benefit taskforce

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- (1) What is the purpose/role of the Family tax benefit taskforce, and how does it work (timing of meetings, number of staff involved, reporting arrangements etc)?
 - (2) Can a summary of the 750 suggestions received from staff be provided? How many of these suggestions have been taken up by Centrelink?
-

HS36

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Debt analysis

- (1) Will any research under the Debt Analysis program (referred to on page 50 of the Centrelink Annual Report 2003-04) be made publicly available?
 - (2) As a result of this analysis why was it decided to target recipients of age pension, disability support pension, sickness allowance and indigenous customers?
 - (3) Does Centrelink plan to undertake similar studies to determine common characteristics of people who are still attracting FTB debts? If not, why not?
 - (4) Has any internal analysis of the socio-economic status of families who are overpaid FTB been conducted?
 - (5) If so, is any of this analysis publicly available? If not, why not?
 - (6) Does Centrelink accept that such an analysis would be a useful starting point for developing strategies to help these people eliminate their debts/overpayments?
 - (7) Is it fair to say that those families in greatest need of FTB are the most likely to be overpaid (and therefore receive an FTB debt at the end of the year)?
-

HS37

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Debt management

- (1) Does Centrelink consider the recovery of over \$1.2 billion worth of debts in 2003-04 to be normal? Or is this figure very high?
 - (2) Why was there such a high amount of debt recovery in 2003-04? How does this compare with previous years? Please provide a table indicating the amount of debt recovered in the previous five financial years.
 - (3) Can Centrelink provide a full breakdown of the cause of the \$1.2 billion worth of debt (that is, what payments were involved)?
 - (4) Does Centrelink consider the \$939 million worth of raised debts to be normal? Or is this figure very high?
 - (5) Please provide a table indicating the amount of new debt raised in the previous five financial years.
 - (6) Can Centrelink provide a full breakdown of the cause of the \$939 million worth of new debt (that is, what payments were involved)?
-

HS38

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Decision to not recover \$600 overpayments in 2004

- (1) Can Centrelink confirm that 1,974 families were overpaid the June 2004 payment of the \$600 per child supplement.
- (2) What was the average overpayment to these families that were overpaid? What was the total amount of overpayments to families that were overpaid?

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- (3) How many families that were overpaid repaid the overpayments in full?
 - (4) How many families that were overpaid partially repaid the overpayments?
 - (5) What is the total amount that has been recovered by Centrelink through this process?
 - (6) Why did Centrelink not raise a debt against those families who were overpaid the \$600 supplement?
 - (7) Why did Centrelink adopt a different approach to the \$600 payment to that which it would normally adopt if a family is overpaid FTB?
 - (8) Who made the decision to not pursue those families who were overpaid the \$600 supplement? Why was this decision taken?
 - (9) How many families were overpaid the second instalment of the \$600 supplement when that was made later in 2004?
 - (10) What was the average overpayment to these families that were overpaid? What was the total amount of overpayments to families that were overpaid?
 - (11) Did Centrelink seek to recover these overpayments, or did it adopt the same approach as for the first \$600 payment in June 2004 (and not pursue the overpayment)?
-

HS39

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers - \$600 family tax benefit part A supplement

For each occasion on which the \$600 family tax benefit part A supplement has now been paid, please indicate:

- The total number of families that received the payment;
 - The total amount paid out to families under the supplement;
 - The average payment to families under the supplement;
 - The number of families paid the supplement in each federal electorate;
 - The total amount paid out to families under the supplement in each electorate; and
 - The average payment to families under the supplement in each electorate.
-

HS40 [Transferred to the Community Affairs Legislation Committee for FaCS 9/3/05](#)

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Family tax benefit part A overpayments

- (1) For the 2000-01, 2001-02, 2002-03 and 2003-04 financial years, please indicate in tabular form:
 - the number of families who were overpaid family tax benefit part A (and the total amount of that was overpaid);
 - the number of families that have totally repaid the debt raised for that year (and the total amount fully repaid);
 - the number of families that have partially repaid the debt raised for that year (and the total amount partially repaid); and
 - the number of families that have not repaid any of the debt raised for that year (and the total amount not repaid).
- (2) Can Centrelink provide updated FTB part A reconciliation figures for the 2003-04 financial year?
- (3) Can Centrelink provide FTB part A overpayment figures for the 2003-04 financial year before the effect of the \$600 supplement is taken into account? If not, why not?
- (4) For each year of the family tax benefit system's operation (please provide this information for each state and territory):
 - How many families and/or individuals (in total) have an outstanding debt to the Commonwealth due to the overpayment of family tax benefit?

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- What is the total amount of family tax benefit debt?
 - What is the average amount of debt per family?
 - What is the average income of the families and/or individuals that have incurred a debt?
 - How many families and/or individuals who have incurred a family tax benefit debt have had all or part of their tax return withheld to satisfy the debt?
-

HS41

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Review of payment recipients' property holdings

- (1) Can Centrelink provide details of any comprehensive reviews of payment recipients' real estate holdings that have been conducted over the last two financial years?
 - (2) How many payments have been reduced or cancelled as a result of these reviews? Please provide this information by payment type and by state.
 - (3) Are steps are being taken to ensure the real estate holdings of payment recipients are more regularly reviewed?
 - (4) How many people affected by these reviews have appealed the decision, and how many have been paid under the Assets Hardship provisions?
 - (5) Could we have a breakdown by capital cities of the number and type of payments cancelled and reduced, and the amount expected to be saved each financial year as a result?
 - (6) Is the AVO now being used to assess the value of property holdings?
 - (7) Is the AVO applying the same valuation methodology across Australia?
 - (8) Are pensioners given a transition period following the new assessment of the value of their properties, or does their pension cease immediately?
-

HS42

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – DSP customer referrals to Job Network

- (1) In what circumstances does Centrelink refer Disability Support Pension recipients to Job Network providers?
 - (2) Has there been any new advice (in the last six months) about the circumstances in which this should occur?
 - (3) Please provide a copy of that advice?
 - (4) Does Centrelink keep a record of occasions on which Disability Support Pension recipients are provided with incorrect advice?
 - (5) What steps in Centrelink undertaking to ensure that customers are provided with accurate information regarding their obligations?
-

HS43

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Newstart and youth allowance matters

- (1) Please provide figures on overall numbers of NSA and YA incapacitated paid in 2003-04, and 2004-05 to March 2005, plus an additional breakdown by age and gender for the periods listed?
- (2) Can we have the figures of recipients that were newly granted NSA and YA incapacitated in each of the last three financial years?

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- (3) Could we have data on type of 'flexible' or 'partial' Preparing for Work Agreements (PWAs) granted to clients on who have exited from NSA and YA incapacitated payments for each of the last two financial years, based upon the work capacity as assessed using the bands available to Centrelink?
- (4) Could we have data for people over the last two financial years about the length of time a person was on NSA and YA incapacitated before their were exited from the payment?
- (5) Can we have details of the numbers of medical certificates that were not accepted by Centrelink from customers seeking an activity test exemption, of currently on an activity test exemption?
- (6) Could we have information on the number of recipients in the last financial year who move from a full activity test exemption to the normal activity test requirements for NSA or YA?
- (7) Could we be provided with an outline of the range of support services available to those on NSA and YA incapacitated and after they are placed on full activity test for NSA and YA?
- (8) Could we have a breakdown of the types of incapacity or health problems experienced by recipients on NSA and YA incapacitated (eg mental health conditions) for the last two financial years?
- (9) Of those who have been exited from NSA and YA incapacitated over each of the last two financial years, could we be provided with data on length of time on NSA and YA incapacitated?
- (10) Could we have data on the number of recipients breached within the 12 month period they go off incapacitated payments, over the last two years?
- (11) What research has the Centrelink undertaken into incapacitated clients or the 'Better Assessment' policies since they were introduced in September 2002? Is there any research that you are planning to do? If there is any research, could the findings be provided?
- (12) What are the actual employment outcomes of the 'Better Assessment and Early Intervention' changes introduced in 2002, for each of the last two financial years and the use of work capacity assessors?
- (13) What issues arise for Centrelink, Job Network providers and recipients in circumstances where they have had a medical certificate for an exemption rejected by Centrelink, and they then proceed to hand this same certificate to the Job Network provider?

HS44

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Impact of 'marriage-like' relationships on payment recipients

- (1) Can Centrelink supply data over the last two financial years, about the number and type of payments that have been cancelled and suspended as a result of a decision to find a person living in a 'marriage-like' relationship.
- (2) Could we have data on the number of Original Decision Maker (ODM) reviews into 'marriage-like' relationships, and the number of ODMs where the original decision being changed?
- (3) Could we have data on for the last two financial years of the number of reviews lodged at each stage (Authorised Review Officer, Social Security Appeals Tribunal and Administrative Appeals Tribunal) and the outcome of the review? Could we have a further breakdown for each state?
- (4) Could we be provided with some categorisation of 'marriage-like' relationship debts raised by dollar amount ie how many debts are under \$15,000, or \$15,000 to \$30,000 or are over \$30,000?
- (5) Are decisions finding a 'marriage-like' relationship made at the same rates in each state?
- (6) How many Centrelink referrals are made to its in-house prosecutions team for 'marriage-like' relationship consideration and then, separately, how many consequential further referral to the DPP and what are the prosecution outcomes?
- (7) Is it the case that some clients have a permanent warning on their Centrelink screen that if they move in with 'X', an investigation is triggered? If this is so, how is this warning used so as to not bias the investigation and rights of the client involved?

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- (8) How much is spent on domestic violence training by Centrelink of its staff who deal with marriage-like relationship matters?
 - (9) And what about debt recovery compliance and prosecutions staff?
 - (10) Could the Committee be provided with copies of any electronic reference of other training material on this subject matter?
-

HS45

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Decisions to grant 'unreasonable to live at home' youth allowance payments

- (1) What is the purpose of the 'unreasonable to live at home' youth allowance rate.
 - (2) Can the officials provide data on the number of decisions made by Centrelink to grant 'unreasonable to live at home' youth allowance rate over the last two financial years?
 - (3) Could we get a breakdown of the time taken to process these claims?
 - (4) Can you inform us of any timeliness standards and other measures that are used within Centrelink to assess its performance in the processing of 'unreasonable to live at home' claims?
 - (5) Can an estimate be made of the number of social work days devoted to investigating and process such claims, and the percentage of social work time devoted to this activity, as a percentage to their overall workload?
-

HS46

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Crisis payment

- (1) Has the Crisis Payment been reviewed?
 - (2) Please provide an update of what is happening with this review.
 - (3) Why was the review undertaken? What were its main findings?
 - (4) When will the Government respond to this review?
-

HS47

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Income support customers

For the following payment types:

- (a) Family Tax Benefit Part A
- (b) Family Tax Benefit Part B
- (c) Maternity Payment
- (d) Maternity Immunisation Allowance

- (e) Parenting Payment
- (f) Double Orphan Pension
- (g) Carer Allowance
- (h) Age Pension
- (i) Disability Support Pension
- (j) Wide Pension
- (k) Bereavement Allowance
- (l) Widow B Pension
- (m) Carer Payment
- (n) Newstart Allowance
- (o) Youth Allowance
- (p) Austudy Payment
- (q) Partner Allowance
- (r) Sickness Allowance
- (s) Widow Allowance
- (t) Mature Age Allowance
- (u) Special Benefit
- (v) Mobility Allowance
- (w) Remote Area Allowance
- (x) Crisis Payment

Please provide the following information: (Please provide these figures for the 2002 and 2003 calendar years.)

- (1) The number of people receiving the payment;
- (2) The age breakdown of people receiving the payment;
- (3) The gender of people receiving the payment; and
- (4) The number of people receiving the payment in each state and territory.

HS48

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Pension bonus scheme

For each financial year since the pension bonus scheme commenced, please indicate: (Please break this information down by state/territory.)

- How many applications have been made for the bonus;
- The number of people that have been paid the bonus;
- The total amount paid under the scheme; and
- The average bonus paid under the scheme.

HS49

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Seniors' concession allowance

- (1) What was the date of the first payment of the seniors' concession allowance?
 - (2) How many payments have now been made?
 - (3) What has been the total amount paid?
 - (4) What was the average payment made?
 - (5) Were eligible recipients of the payment given the option of declining payment? Why?
-

HS50

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Utilities allowance

- (1) What was the date of the first payment of the utilities allowance?
 - (2) How many payments have now been made?
 - (3) What has been the total amount paid?
 - (4) What was the average payment made?
-

HS51 Senator Wong

Centrelink

Is Centrelink aware of cases of people assessed as severely disabled, who had told Centrelink about their intention to travel overseas prior to the rule changes, but were then caught out by the 1 July 2004 cut off?

HS53

Centrelink

Outcome 1 – Effective delivery of Australian Government services to eligible customers – Violence against Centrelink staff

- (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?
-

HS54

Health Insurance Commission

(A commitment was given by Minister Patterson at the Health and Ageing estimates hearing (Hansard p. CA32) that she would pass the questions on to Mr Hockey and the relevant committee.)

- (1) How many new Medicare offices did the Government commit to during the election campaign
- (2) Where are those offices to be located.
- (3) What is the proposed start-up date for the offices.
- (4) What is the cost of the offices.
- (5) Where will the funds come from for this commitment.

HS55

Australian Hearing Services

- (1) Staff incentive scheme:
 - (a) I understand Australian Hearing has introduced incentive schemes to help retain staff. Could you explain how the "voluntary clinical bonus" on the sale of particular hearing devices works?
 - (b) Wouldn't the scheme be less effective where audiologists are serving a more disadvantaged clientele say in remote areas?
 - (c) Do you have a mechanism to overcome this so remote staff don't miss out?
- (2) Newborns:
 - (a) The states are essentially responsible for testing hearing of newborn babies and those with problems might be referred to Australian Hearing. Can you provide figures on the growth of referrals of newborn children to Australian Hearing?
 - (b) Can you briefly explain why there is such an increase?
 - (c) Are the referrals of newborns spread evenly across Australia in each jurisdiction?
- (3) Regional hearing centres:

I understand each hearing centre is set up on a business basis and is paid a flat rate by Australian Hearing for each child it services. Is there a method of giving a weighting to these payments or reimbursing remote area hearing centres for their extra overheads such as extra staff leave, the cost of recruiting and relocating staff to remote areas?

HS56

Centrelink

I would like to ask about the changes introduced on 1 July 2004 to overseas portability for DSP recipients assessed as severely disabled, where a 13 week time limit was introduced. When the changes were legislated for in December 2003, what steps did Centrelink take to notify people who had flagged an intention with Centrelink to travel overseas, who has an assessment to be treated as severely disabled, or an assessment pending to be classified as severely disabled, so as to obtain unlimited DSP portability under the old provisions?

HS57

HEARING TESTS FOR CHILDREN

- (1) Is it correct that the Australian Hearing Services facilities in Sydney (at 175 Castlereagh Street) have lost their lease and that there is now no ability to offer services in the Sydney CBD?
 - (2) Is it correct that Australian Hearing has now closed facilities that provide hearing tests for children under the age of 3 years in the Sydney CBD, at Bankstown, Chatswood and Hurstville?
 - (3) Please provide a list of AHS offices around Australia, noting those that provide services to children under 3.
 - (4) Please provide a list of AHS offices around Australia which have closed in the last 3 years.
 - (5) Please provide a list of AHS facilities for testing children under 3 which have closed in the last 3 years.
-

HS58

HIC – crackdown on bulk billing

- (1) Why did the HIC last year write to doctors saying that from November 15 all claims would be checked prior to payment and ineligible services rejected?
 - (2) Who authorised this letter?
 - (3) Has the HIC recorded the impact of this letter and is it aware of the impact on GPs and their bulk billing practices?
 - (4) Is it correct that between 15 November and 4 December 2005 110,000 claims were knocked back?
 - (5) What proportion of all bulk billing claims from GPs does this represent?
 - (6) How many of these claims were found to be ineligible for the bulk billing incentive?
 - (7) What happened to those claims where payment was refused? Were doctors eventually paid?
-

HS59

HIC—IT SECURITY NEEDS FOR E-HEALTH

- (1) How many GPs are currently using HIC Online?
 - (2) How many GPs are currently involved in the roll-out of HealthConnect?
-

HS60

HIC—HEALTH CONNECT

What staff recruitment changes have occurred since HIC was placed under the control of DOFA? Are any redundancies planned in any area of HIC as a result of these changes?

HS61

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HIC—SCRAPPING OF MEDICONNECT

- (1) Is it correct that \$4.9 million has been written off the value of software developed for MediConnect? If not, what is this value?
- (2) What percentage of the total cost of MediConnect software does this represent?
- (3) What will happen to the remaining software?