

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Finance and Administration Portfolio**

**Department of Human Services and agencies**

Additional Estimates 2005-2006, 14 February 2006

**Question: HS15**

**Outcome 1, Output 1**

**Topic: Centlink – ARO – Appeals and reviews**

**Hansard Page: F&PA, 130-31**

**SENATOR MOORE** asked on 14/2/2006:

There were particular questions here on Indigenous issues, so if we could find out whether there is the possibility of looking at how AROs were involved with Indigenous clients and whether in fact they did access that service well –

Basically, I think the thrust of the question is to work out the availability of the appeal system to Indigenous clients and their knowledge of it, based on the premise that perhaps they were not using it as much as other clients. Could you have a look to see whether any of the AROs at the area level have that knowledge, and if we can get it?

**Answer:**

Indigenous customers have the same review and appeal rights as all other customers. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that there are Indigenous customers who are not testing their review and appeal rights as much as other customers. Authorised Review Officers (AROs) have said that possible reasons may include:

- Indigenous cultures are generally more accepting of authority figures, and therefore may be less likely to challenge Centrelink decisions than other customers.
- There are Indigenous customers who lack the specific knowledge, skills and/or confidence to pursue their rights of review.
- There are Indigenous customers who are able to access family support when experiencing difficulties with Centrelink, which reduces the incentive to question decisions.
- The transient lifestyle of some Indigenous customers may make it difficult for them to receive communications from Centrelink and to respond within legislative timeframes.
- Communications in person with Centrelink may be difficult for some Indigenous customers residing in rural and remote areas due to the distance required to attend an office.

Access to services in general is supported by Indigenous Customer Service Officers, Indigenous Community Agents and the Indigenous Call Centres who play a critical role in informing Indigenous customers of the review and appeal processes and rights.

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Centrelink has incorporated information about review and appeals rights in most Indigenous publications. Recent changes to Centrelink's internal review process have made it more accessible for Indigenous customers. One change was to broaden the definition of what constitutes a request for review so that customers are more readily recognised as seeking a review. Another change was to streamline the process so ABSTUDY customers need ask for review only once for a matter to go to an Authorised Review Officer, rather than twice under previous arrangements.

Centrelink is also working in collaboration with the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Indigenous Working Group to ensure that all aspects of Centrelink services including review and appeals are promulgated.

This answer required 10 hours and 50 minutes at a cost of \$470.00 to prepare.