

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Human Services Portfolio

Additional Estimates 2006-07, 13th and 16th February, 2007

Question: HS84

Department/Agency: DHS/Centrelink

Outcome 1, Output 1

Topic: Browsing

Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: Written Question on Notice

SENATOR MOORE asked on 16/02/2007:

1. What measures are in place to discipline Centrelink staff who access customer records without cause or authorisation?
2. Have there been any changes since 2006? If not why not?
3. How has the Department improved its services to cut down on customer privacy breaches, especially in relation to the initiation of the Access Card?

ANSWER:

1. Where it is suspected that an employee has accessed customer records without authority, an investigation is undertaken in accordance with procedures established under sub-section 15(3) of the *Public Service Act 1999* for determining breaches of the Code of Conduct. Where it is determined that an employee has breached the code of conduct a sanction may be applied. Sanctions include termination of employment, reduction in salary, re-assignment of duties, deductions from salary by way of a fine, and a reprimand.
2. Centrelink's procedures for determining breaches of the code of conduct, established under sub-section 15(3) of the *Public Service Act 1999* have not changed. These procedures comply with legislative requirements and are considered sufficient to adequately address misconduct in Centrelink.
3. Since 2006, Centrelink has increased its focus on ethics, including privacy, through the Enhancing Ethical Culture project. As part of this project Centrelink launched the 'Ethics Resource Kit' in March 2007. The Ethics Resource Kit comprises:
 - Centrelink's Ethics Handbook (all employees);
 - Centrelink's Ethics Framework (all supervisors);
 - Declaration of Confidentiality (to be re-signed by all employees);
 - Managing Conflict of Interest fact sheet (focusing on employee/customer relationships);
 - Starting with Privacy brochure;
 - Australian Public Services Values and Code of Conduct bookmark; and
 - Centrelink Values third edition (newsletter).

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Centrelink's Ethics Resource Kit is being distributed to all staff via a compulsory training session. In addition, every employee is required to re-sign the Declaration of Confidentiality confirming that they agree to abide by the rules contained therein. The implementation of the Access Card will not change Centrelink's accountabilities in relation to accessing customer records. Additional privacy training will be undertaken prior to the introduction of the Access Card.

Only authorised staff will be permitted to access the information held on the Access Card and they will only have access to those fields of information that they need to deliver health and social services. Transactions involving the card will be securely logged and audited, including access, authentication and the specific details of the transaction. All logs will be analysed constantly for anomalous behaviour.

To prepare this answer it has taken approximately 5 hours and 1 minute at an estimated cost of \$273.