

## ADDITIONAL BUDGET ESTIMATES 2009-10

## Questions on Notice (QoN) index -

## Department of Human Services

Answers to QON are due on Friday, 26 March 2010.

QON No.	Department/ Agency	Senator	09/02/2010 Hansard ref / Written	Question
HS 1a	DHS	Kroger	85	<p><b>Senator KROGER</b>—I want to turn straightaway to an update on the audit report on the Child Support Agency. I will quote one part of that report because it leads into my questions: In 2007, CSA identified 21 000 customers with invalid addresses. These customers had a total outstanding debt of \$93.5 million, and 75 per cent of those customers did not lodge tax returns. In the same year, CSA identified an additional 28 000 customers with invalid addresses; increasing to 49 000 the number of customers for whom CSA did not have valid addresses. Can I ask how many customers you have identified who do not have valid addresses now?</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—The CSP team will no doubt be able to enlighten us around that issue.</p> <p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—I do not have those updated figures with me. I would have to take that on notice.</p>
HS 1b	DHS	Kroger	85	<p><b>Senator KROGER</b>—That would be great. Could you also take on notice what the total value of outstanding debt would be for those that have invalid addresses and so have not fulfilled their obligations.</p>
HS 2a	DHS	Kroger, Collins	86	<p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—To give you a snapshot, in the period July 2006 to December 2009 we finalised 15,375 income minimiser investigations, and that resulted in the collection of almost \$45 million.</p> <p><b>Senator JACINTA COLLINS</b>—What work do you do?</p> <p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—I am sorry. That is what the brief gives me. We could break that down for you but that was just to give you a bit of a flavour of the size.</p>
HS 2b	DHS	Kroger	86	<p><b>Senator KROGER</b>—What would be an average time frame, if there is such a thing, for an investigation? How long would it take an investigation?</p> <p><b>Ms Cooke</b>—It would really vary according to the particular circumstances of the case. Sometimes some of these investigations require quite complex investigation and forensic accounting. Sometimes it is reasonably straightforward in terms of being able to access material that is freely available. We could take it on notice to look at the overall amount of time and break it down, but it really is quite variable depending on the circumstances of the case, which go from quite straightforward to sometimes quite complex.</p>
HS 3	DHS	Kroger	87	<p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—Clearly one of the things we need to do in any compliance environment is to try to</p>

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				<p>identify what our risk factors are and how we might then address those. It is an area that we are putting a fair bit more work into to work out what sort of risk factors we should be trying to address, because as you point out we have a big case load and it is not possible to pursue every single individual with the same intensity. So making some sort of careful decisions about which cases are most likely to be the ones that we need to pursue rigorously is obviously something we need to do in our risk profiling and case selection work. I think the audit pointed to the fact that that was an area where we need to do more and we have accepted that recommendation and are putting in place arrangements to pick up our risk identification, risk profiling case selection processes.</p> <p><b>Senator KROGER</b>—So how many people do you have working in this area? I guess it is determining what the classifications are. I am not sure how you classify them in terms of investigative area or what.</p> <p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—If you wanted it broken down into investigators and so forth, I would need to take that on notice...</p>
HS 4	DHS	Kroger	87	<p><b>Senator KROGER</b>—How many people would there be who have a partner who is defaulting on child support obligations and are unemployed?</p> <p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—I do not know the answer to that.</p> <p><b>Senator KROGER</b>—Full-time carers of children who have no personal income other than their—</p> <p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—Are you talking about receiving or paying parents?</p> <p><b>Senator KROGER</b>—Receiving.</p> <p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—I think we would have that information, but I do not have it with me. The one thing I would say is that I am not sure whether we could break it right down to their being unemployed, because it would be linked to whether they are the recipients of Centrelink payments, and we do have information on that.</p> <p><b>Senator KROGER</b>—If you could take it on notice, that would be good.</p>
HS 5	DHS	Fifield	88	<p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—...Even if they do register with the Child Support Agency, we still have that objective of encouraging cooperative arrangements. The rate of what we call private collect cases—that is, people who have private arrangements in place where we are not engaged in the collection activity—is going up, so that is a good indicator as well. As to the number of families that could otherwise register but have not, I would have to take that on notice to see if there is any research that might indicate that.</p>
HS 6	DHS	Collins	89	<p><b>Senator JACINTA COLLINS</b>—Just before you go on with these statistics, is there a way that you can relate them per child or to the number of children with respect to whom we are actually considering the debt?</p> <p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—I imagine there is, except that, as I say, given that some of the debt goes back 21</p>

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				<p>years and some of those children are now themselves adults—  <b>Senator JACINTA COLLINS</b>—I am just wondering in terms of the ongoing statistics—  <b>Ms Godwin</b>—In terms of ongoing liabilities, we certainly have a bit of a sense of that. I would need to take it on notice because that is a high level of detail.  <b>Senator JACINTA COLLINS</b>—I understand. If you would not mind taking it on notice, that would be good. Thank you.</p>
HS 7	DHS	Fifield	89, 90	<p><b>Ms Godwin</b>—At the moment, there are 648,667 paying parents, there are 648,200 receiving parents and there are 11,705 parents who are both paying and receiving.  <b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—I will not ask you to reconcile those three figures. Is there any statistical data you can point me to that shows the trends in payers and payees? Is there something in the annual report or website?  <b>Ms Godwin</b>—I have to confess that I have not actually looked at the website. I am not sure if it is there but we regularly report on it, including in the annual report.  <b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—That is okay, perhaps you could take it on notice.</p>
HS 8	DHS	Fifield	90	<p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—While someone is pulling out the exact figures I will give you some approximations. Of significant offices—leaving aside rural service delivery locations and the like—Centrelink has around 330 customer service centres; Medicare, from memory, has around 200 to 220 offices; CRS has probably 170 to 180; the Child Support Program operates from 27 locations, from memory. Someone will correct me if I have got those figures wildly out, but it is of that order. Some of those locations are already co-located offices, where the Child Support Program and Centrelink operate together or Centrelink and Medicare et cetera.  <b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—What about Australian Hearing?  <b>Mr Pratt</b>—No, I have not covered Australian Hearing offices. I do not have that figure to hand so we will take it on notice.  <b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Maybe it can be taken on notice for all of those and also for those which are already co-located.  <b>Mr Pratt</b>—Just to clarify, Senator: you would like a list of where we have co-located offices. Is that correct?  <b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Correct, and also if those numbers are different for any of the stand-alone sites.  <b>Mr Pratt</b>—We will give you the exact figures.</p>
HS 9	DHS	Fifield	91	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Do you have a handle on the costs of co-locating at the moment—things like moving, fit outs and things of that nature?  <b>Mr Pratt</b>—It varies considerably. We could give you, I guess, the cost of the co-location of one of</p>

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				the trial sites or something of that sort. We would do that on notice.
HS 10	DHS	Fifield	91	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—...Are you anticipating having to pay out any leases in order to facilitate the collocation?</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—I would not rule it out but typically we look to do co-locations where the contractual arrangements are convenient to do so.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Could you take on notice whether there is a requirement to pay out any leases to facilitate co-location and what the cost of that might be.</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—Yes.</p>
HS 11	DHS	Fifield	92	<p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—There was a set of criteria in operation last calendar year, pre the minister's announcement. Those criteria are being examined in the light of the service delivery reform announcement made by the minister late last year. There are currently no criteria applying, because they are being reworked.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—So the existing criteria will not apply; there will be new criteria?</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—That is correct. We will base the future criteria on the pre-existing ones, but they are being revised to take into account the extent of the reforms.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Could you provide the committee with a copy of the current criteria?</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—Yes, Senator.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—And of the new criteria when that is—</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—We will provide those criteria once they are signed off.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Thank you. It might not be within the time frame of this estimate period—</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—I can guarantee that.</p>
HS 12a	DHS	Fifield	92, 93	<p><b>Mr Popple</b>—Over the past couple of years there have been a number of co-locations, mainly between Centrelink and the Child Support Program as the Child Support Agency moved some of its regional offices into Centrelink offices. I do not have the numbers with me on how many occurred in the last two years, but in total there were 27. There has also been some movement in co-locating Medicare and Centrelink and, most notably, recently, at Narooma on the South Coast which is a fully-operating co-located office. Others have been of varying degrees, but I have to get numbers as to what happened in the last two years.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Could you take those co-locations on notice—where they occurred and the agencies which have come together. I assume, Mr Pratt, from what you said before, those would also have been ministerial decisions as to where the co-locations—</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—Typically that would be the case—yes.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—According to the criteria which is currently in place.</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—The criteria that applied at the time. The criteria that I discussed with you before were</p>

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				established in 2009.
HS 12b				<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—What were the criteria before that? Could we have a copy of that as well, if there were any?</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—I would have to take that on notice. That is before my time.</p>
HS 13a	DHS	Fifield	93	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Please take on notice the details for the physical locations of each of the separately located entities—Centrelink, Medicare, CSA and CRS—in the first instance and also some of the lease details.</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—I am sorry, that was not clear to me.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Sorry, could you provide the physical locations—the addresses of—</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—Existing offices?</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—of existing offices and also some of the lease details—so what the term of the lease is at each of those sites and when they might expire.</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—I am sure we can provide the details of locations of the offices without too much trouble. In fact, we will probably be able to direct you to a website or websites which provide that information. In terms of actual lease details, I will have to take that on notice. That could be quite a large body of work to look at.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Perhaps just provide the dates that the leases expire.</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—I will take that on notice.</p>
HS 13b	DHS	Fifield	93	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Thank you. This may be commercial-in-confidence, but, if it is not, could the annual cost of the leases for each of those sites be provided as well?</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—We will examine whether or not we can do that.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—As I say, it may be commercial-in-confidence, but, if it is not, please provide it. You have already undertaken to provide on notice information about those sites where there may need to be a lease paid out as a result of co-location. That would be useful, too.</p> <p><b>Mr Pratt</b>—Yes.</p>
HS 14	Centrelink	Abetz	95	<p><b>Senator ABETZ</b>—Can you confirm that in October 2009 there was a substantial backlog in processing claims?</p> <p>...</p> <p><b>Senator ABETZ</b>—That still does not tell me how long it is taking you to get them in and out of—I was going to say the sausage machine, but that is not necessarily appropriate—to get them paid.</p> <p>...</p> <p><b>Ms Hogg</b>—The decision has not been made.</p> <p><b>Senator JACINTA COLLINS</b>—For whatever the period is.</p>

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				<p><b>Ms Hogg</b>—Yes, since we received the claim. I can give you some figures. In December, 51 per cent of claims were processed within 15 days and 67 per cent were processed within 30 days.</p> <p><b>Senator ABETZ</b>—And the other 33 per cent—can we split that up further?</p> <p><b>Ms Hogg</b>—I think we will have to take that on notice, in order to tell you the oldest.</p>
HS 15	Centrelink	Abetz	95	<p><b>Senator ABETZ</b>—...I refer you to the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government questions from October 2009. Question No. 1 was taken on notice. I asked: ‘Can you take on notice how many invoices are currently awaiting assessment, how many of those have been awaiting assessment for seven days, 14 days’—and I went right through to 63 days, on a weekly basis. In fact, I went up to in excess of 70 days. Ms Riggs told me she would seek to discover whether those numbers were easy to extract from the system that Centrelink runs on our behalf. Having made that promise to seek to discover, the written answer I got was that the question is best referred to Centrelink. They are a very help department, that other one! That is why I am here seeking whether it is able to be discovered.</p> <p><b>Mr Tidswell</b>—I have a rundown of those 601 outstanding claims, if you want those figures now. I am happy to give them to you.</p> <p><b>Senator ABETZ</b>—Yes. Do you have them as well for October 2009?</p> <p><b>Mr Tidswell</b>—No, I do not have those with me, but we can take that on notice.</p> <p><b>Senator ABETZ</b>—Could you take that on notice, please—just in December 2009. I am very interested.</p>
HS 16	Centrelink	Abetz	96	<p><b>Senator ABETZ</b>—...I understand you have increased your staff level and I understand that the current figure of 601, which you have given the split on, may well be a lot better than it would have been in September, October and November last year. If you would take that on notice as well and give me a similar split-up, the figures will speak for themselves.</p>
HS 17	Centrelink	Boyce	96	<p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—From some figures I have pulled out I see that the difference in the maximum level available to two singles and a couple could in fact be over \$300 a fortnight. Is that right?</p> <p><b>Ms Beath</b>—I would have to take the exact amount on notice, but there is a significant difference between the rates—</p>
HS 18	Centrelink	Boyce	97	<p><b>Ms Beath</b>—There were 3,979 couples, which is 7,958 individuals, in a same-sex, de facto or registered relationship who have had their records linked. This includes customers who may have a partner who is not a Centrelink customer but they have to declare their relationship.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—Do you have that broken up by couples who have dependent children in the relationship?</p> <p><b>Ms Beath</b>—No, I do not have that.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—Would you be able to take it on notice?</p>

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				<b>Ms Beath</b> —I will take it on notice and investigate if we can do that.
HS 19	Centrelink	Boyce	98	<p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—We were talking earlier about child support agencies and about visual inspections of houses, workplaces and that sort of thing to verify people’s income information and the like. Are you conducting any checks of any sort on people that you suspect are same-sex couples but are not saying so?</p> <p><b>Ms Beath</b>—That is part of our general compliance activities, so I might ask one of my colleagues to discuss it with you.</p> <p><b>Mr Withnell</b>—We have a standard procedure for members-of-a-couple assessments. It is largely a desk based activity where we look at a range of issues around whether there is interdependence or co-dependency, either financially or in terms of residence.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—So you have broadened this oversight now to include single individuals of the same gender who may be a same-sex couple?</p> <p><b>Mr Withnell</b>—That is correct.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—Could you tell me a little more about what you have done there. Have you found people who are not complying? What has been the next action?</p> <p><b>Mr Withnell</b>—I do not have the exact figures on that breakdown with me.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—Would you be able to provide those on notice, perhaps just from July to 31 December or 31 January, depending on what is convenient.</p> <p><b>Mr Withnell</b>—Yes, we can do that.</p>
HS 20	Centrelink	Boyce	99	<p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—You mentioned the tip-off line. Can you tell us how many tip-offs Centrelink has received about singles living together who claim to be same-sex couples?</p> <p><b>Mr Withnell</b>—I will just check, but I do not think I have information on the tip-off line down to that level of detail. The only detail I have is a very much aggregated level in terms of totals. We could probably provide the information you have asked for on notice.</p>
HS 21	Centrelink	Fifield	101	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—...I specifically want to focus on the first area where the switchover is going to take place, which I think is Mildura—the Sunraysia district. At the last estimates we were advised, I think, that letters were not sent out to, say, people on the DSP until six months before the switchover to advise them of the assistance that was available. The Mildura switchover is now within six months. Have letters been sent to DSP recipients, for instance, in the Mildura/Sunraysia area?</p> <p>....</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Would you be able to provide the committee with a copy of that letter?</p> <p><b>Mr Cowan</b>—Sure.</p>
HS 22	Centrelink	Boyce	103	<b>Senator BOYCE</b> —...There are two other issues that I want to raise; one is the disability support

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				<p>pension. In the last estimates hearings we talked about the fact that disability support pensioners between 16 and 21 received a generic letter telling them they were going to get an increase, along with other pensioners, but in fact they did not. I then had a fascinating conversation with FaHCSIA around when is a pensioner not a pensioner. One thing that we did not appear to clear up at the last estimates hearing was how many people between 16 and 21 receive the disability support pension.</p> <p><b>Mr Cowan</b>—In that particular group—under 21 with no dependants—which is the group at issue, there were 19,000 or 20,000—it was that sort of magnitude.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—Would you take it on notice and give me an exact figure on it?</p> <p><b>Mr Cowan</b>—Yes, we would be happy to give you a precise answer.</p>
HS 23	Centrelink	Boyce	104	<p><b>Ms Beath</b>—I am talking about the family’s income support payments. The parent may be on a parenting payment or a Newstart payment. If they persist in not engaging, have no reasonable excuse and we have made all the offers that are possible, there would be a point at which we would write to them and advise them we will suspend that payment until they re-engage in addressing their child’s attendance problems.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—Would it be 100 per cent of the payment that would be suspended?</p> <p>...</p> <p><b>Ms Beath</b>—It would be 100 per cent of the income support payment though if they are on a family tax benefit payment, they would still receive that payment.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—If that were to happen and then the family behaved in such a way that it was repaid, would they receive benefits they had missed?</p> <p><b>Ms Beath</b>—Yes.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—Is it possible to get the number of families overall involved in these programs split into Logan, Mornington, Doomadgee?</p> <p><b>Ms Beath</b>—We can certainly do the split but, usually, when the numbers are less than 20, we do not identify that because it can lead to an ability to identify people at a local level.</p> <p><b>Senator BOYCE</b>—Okay. If it is possible to provide that, it would be good.</p>
HS 24	Centrelink	Fifield	108	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—I will talk to FaHCSIA about their report. Given the overwhelming balance of information on the characteristics of disability support pension recipients which FaHCSIA would receive would come from Centrelink, could the committee please be provided with the information that Centrelink has on the characteristics of recipients of the disability support pension—by medical category, by gender and whatever other information you have on the characteristics of recipients of the disability support pension.</p> <p><b>Ms Hogg</b>—Yes, we will give you whatever we can on the characteristics of disability support pension recipients. It might be lines and lines and lines of data. If I cannot narrow it down, it will be</p>



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				<p>a lot of data. ... <b>Ms Beath</b>—If we could come back to you and identify which of those elements arise from Centrelink data, and if there is anything else—</p>
HS 25a HS 25b	Centrelink	Fifield	109	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—I hope this is not further testing or trying. This is a question I asked at the last estimates of FaHCSIA and they very kindly offered to seek information from Centrelink and respond in a question on notice, which I appreciated. My question to them was: are there any figures which indicate how many DSP recipients have a legal guardian and how many of those DSP recipients who have a legal guardian and who move overseas would lose their pension as a result of staying overseas for more than 13 weeks? FaHCSIA replied, having obtained the information from Centrelink, that, no, Centrelink does not collect information regarding a customer’s legal guardian and that no such data is available. Now that I am here with Centrelink, can I confirm that no such data is available and that there would be no way of ascertaining the number of DSP recipients who have a legal guardian? <b>Ms Hogg</b>—We do not believe that we hold data on legal guardians, but we keep data on nominees. If somebody is a nominee for a customer, we could give you that if that is of interest. <b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—That would be helpful.  <b>Senator BOYCE</b>—Also, could that be split up into age recipients somehow? <b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Would you have figures as to the number of DSP recipients who lose their pension as a result of staying overseas for more than 13 weeks regardless of whether they have a guardian? <b>Ms Hogg</b>—Yes, I am sure we would.</p>
HS 66	Centrelink	Fifield	110	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Maybe you could take it on notice and give us those numbers for 31 January this year and 2007. You seem to be quoting 31 January as a marker point. Also for those two times, how many of those were executive or senior executive level. Of the staff you employ, how many would you categorise as being front-line, front of office? I think you do have a policy of rotating senior executives through the counter from time to time to make sure they have some face time. <b>Ms Hogg</b>—Just a rough break up: as at 31 January for our areas, which would include our officers and area management officers, we had approximately 17,827; there were 4,997 call centre staff; and there were 4,368 national support staff.</p>
HS 26	Centrelink	Fifield	110	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Do you keep figures on how many people with a disability would have either voluntarily or involuntarily left Centrelink over the last financial year or calendar year? <b>Ms Cornish</b>—I am not sure that we have that, but we can look into it to see if we do.</p>

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				<b>Senator FIFIELD</b> —If you are aware of that, if you are also able to categorise the reasons for departure, that would be helpful.
HS 27	Centrelink	Fifield	110	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—You might be aware of an article from late last year in the <i>Canberra Times</i> headed ‘Number of disabled workers in public service falling’. This is the wording of the article: The largest job cuts took place at Defence Centrelink, and the Australian Taxation Office. That refers to the previous year. I think it cites the <i>State of the service</i> report from the Public Service Commission. Are you able to put that in context for the committee? I appreciate that the word ‘cuts’ that the article uses is probably not the right word, but what is the trend in Centrelink in relation to employment of people with disabilities?</p> <p><b>Ms Cornish</b>—I do not recall the actual article, but certainly in relation to the <i>State of the service</i> report for 2008-09, yes, as you said, the proportion of people with a disability employed in the APS fell to three per cent. The number of Centrelink employees identifying with a disability fell to five per cent.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—From?</p> <p><b>Ms Cornish</b>—I am sorry, I do not have that figure, but we will provide it to you. We certainly do try to have above-average representation for that group amongst our people employed.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Let us take the last four years. Would you be able to take on notice what the trend has been over the last four years?</p> <p><b>Ms Cornish</b>—Yes.</p>
HS 28a	Centrelink	Fifield	111	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—If you could take on notice to provide those activities which Centrelink does contract out to ADE, that would be helpful. I did ask the department of finance, in light of their procurement guideline exemption to tendering, where departments and agencies obtain services from ADE, if they maintained any record for the whole of government. They said they do not, which necessitates us asking agency by agency and department by department. So that information would be helpful. Does Centrelink have a budget, or can you identify specifically the amount of money that is spent on fraud protection and fraud detection each year? Or is that something that is just part of the general responsibility of Centrelink? Is there a particular allocation for that activity?</p> <p><b>Ms Hogg</b>—We can certainly give you some indication of the amount of staffing et cetera in those activities which would lead to a dollar figure. But, by and large, we are funded by initiative. If we are able to group that together for you, we will.</p>
HS 29a	Centrelink	Fifield	111	<p><b>Mr Withnell</b>—That can often be made up of a number of initiatives. I do not have the total number of staff, say, who are involved in fraud investigation at this point in time.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Would you be able to take that on notice?</p>
HS 29b	Centrelink	Fifield	112	<b>Mr Withnell</b> —Certainly. I can give you figures for 2007-08. We did 35,885. There was a drop

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				obviously and that drop is related to the way in which we dealt with identity fraud and some business processes that led to greater assessment rather than things going straight through to investigation. I do not have the figures for 2006-07, but we could get those for you.
HS 29c	Centrelink	Fifield	112	<b>Senator FIFIELD</b> —Could you provide the number of tip-offs for the previous two years as well? <b>Mr Withnell</b> —I can provide that for 2007-08 for you now. There were 101,595, and we will have to take on notice the 2006-07 figure.
HS 30	Centrelink	Fifield	112, 113	<b>Senator FIFIELD</b> —Do you also have dollar figures as to what the total payment reductions amount to? <b>Mr Withnell</b> —Yes, I have it in two categories: debts that were raised and savings against future outlays. For 2008-09 savings against future outlays amounted to \$2.8 million—that is fortnightly—and for 2007-08 fortnightly savings against future outlays were \$3.6 million. Debts raised as a result of tip-offs: in 2008-09 it was \$46.6 million and in 2007-08 it was \$54.5 million. <b>Senator FIFIELD</b> —A big year. <b>Mr Withnell</b> —There were a number referred to the CDPP as well. <b>Senator FIFIELD</b> —Could we have that for the previous year as well. <b>Mr Withnell</b> —Yes.
HS 31	Centrelink	Fifield	113	<b>Senator FIFIELD</b> —Some questions on parenting payments will probably need to be taken on notice. How many people who are currently receiving parenting payments have a youngest child aged six years or older? <b>Ms Hogg</b> —We will take that on notice. <b>Senator FIFIELD</b> —That is: how many separate mail-outs and what occasion that was, but also the number of individuals to whom letters went to in each of those mail-outs, over the last two years. <b>Ms Hogg</b> —Our general manager of communications has a fairly long memory <b>Senator MOORE</b> —If we could get that over, say, five years it might be useful. <b>Ms Hogg</b> —We will try.
HS 32 a	Medicare	Ryan	114	<b>Senator RYAN</b> —There was also a 30 per cent increase in the number of approaches to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. I know they are small numbers, and if this is in the range bouncing around from year to year I would be happy for you to tell me, but there was an increase from 125 in 2007-08 to 161 in 2008-09. Is that within a normal range of movement for the number of approaches to the Commonwealth Ombudsman or is there a reason for that? <b>Ms O'Brien</b> —I would have to take that on notice.
HS 32 b	Medicare	Ryan	114	<b>Senator RYAN</b> —...Just going to the research you undertook on satisfaction, dealing with your clients— as I assume you call them—in this case, page 79 of your annual report records a quite

QON No.	Department/ Agency	Senator	09/02/2010 Hansard ref / Written	Question
				<p>dramatic decrease in the level of satisfaction from practitioners, who I assume are medical practitioners of various varieties who are eligible to access the Medicare schedule. In the last year of the Howard government it was just under 90 per cent—it was 89 per cent. It stayed at 86 per cent in 2007-08 and it has dropped quite dramatically to 74 per cent in 2008-09. Is there an explanation for what I would imagine would be quite a worrying trend downwards?</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—Those numbers have been generally pretty high and we have just got the results of the most recent survey. I have not been able to go through that in much detail—within only a week or so—and the data does look like some of that has recovered, but I cannot be precise on particular measures in that.</p> <p><b>Senator RYAN</b>—Can you take on notice, then, what the results of the most recent survey would be?</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—Most definitely.</p>
HS 33	Medicare	Ryan	115	<p><b>Senator RYAN</b>—Do you have a summary or a table or any form of tabulation of what may have driven that decline in the satisfaction rate with Medicare Australia?</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—Not here with us but we certainly can provide some of that on notice.</p>
HS 34	Medicare	Ryan	115	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Ms Briggs, I was asking Centrelink before and I will ask Medicare as well: does Medicare have a particular allocation for fraud prevention and fraud detection?</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—Yes, we do. We have a fairly extensive compliance program that looks quite broadly at general compliance, including criminal fraud issues.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Is there a dollar figure that covers that?</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—I do not have the exact figure but I can tell you that it is in the order of about 450 staff across the board looking at both our audit programs, our investigation, and our health and education services around this territory. That is in the order of about \$50 million annually, but I do not have the precise figure.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Could you provide that figure and the number of staff for 2009, 2008 and 2007?</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—Yes, certainly.</p>
HS 35	Medicare	Fifield	116	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—How much money do you recover?</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—In the order of \$6 million to \$7 million a year, although in the year to date we are in that order already. The cash recoveries in our compliance programs have always been relatively small amounts, in comparison to things like the impact we have on planning behaviour across the medical profession. Traditionally, our compliance programs have been able to generate in the order of \$250 million a year of reductions in the system, but cash recoveries is a very small portion of that.</p>

QON No.	Department/ Agency	Senator	09/02/2010 Hansard ref / Written	Question
				<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Would you mind providing the figures for the cash recoveries and the reductions for the last three years?</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—Yes, I will do that.</p>
HS 36a	Medicare	Fifield	116, 117	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—I wonder if you could advise, and you will probably need to take this on notice, the number of practices which were subject to a search warrant and its supported raids.</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—I do not have the current figures, but we do report that every year in our annual report. That is one of our statutory obligations. However, the numbers are not huge.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Could you provide those for 2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09 and year to date for 2009-10?</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—I can do that...</p>
HS 36b	Medicare	Fifield	117	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Thank you. In addition to the number of raids, could you also advise the number of practitioners involved. There may have been multiple raids.</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—Yes, often there are.</p>
HS 36c	Medicare	Fifield	117	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—That would be helpful. And also, for the years I have mentioned, the number of practitioners arrested by police in or as a consequence of a raid. There might be none.</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—Off the top of my head, I am pretty sure there were no arrests, but I will confirm that. Certainly, there have been none in my time.</p>
HS 36d	Medicare	Fifield	117	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—That would be interesting. Also, the number of practitioners subject to further penalty actions as a consequence of those raids.</p> <p><b>Mr Bridge</b>—The only option is formal criminal prosecution. There are no other penalty propositions. I can give you all the prosecution data.</p> <p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—Yes—the number of criminal prosecutions.</p>
HS 36e	Medicare	Fifield	117	<p>Also, for the same years, the number of practitioners who have successfully appealed against any conviction, and also the total cost to taxpayers of the activities for those years. Obviously, that is just the costs that relate to Medicare Australia, including legal and other costs. I appreciate there is a whole range of other costs—police or whatever—which would not be from your budget.</p>
HS 37	Medicare	Fifield	117	<p><b>Senator FIFIELD</b>—...in relation to electronic Medicare claiming, what work has Medicare done to cost the administrative and financial impact on medical practices for processing Medicare claims on behalf of the patients? Is that doable?</p> <p><b>Ms O'Brien</b>—When the Easyclaim system was first implemented or first planned to be implemented two to three years ago, we commissioned some research into the impact on practices. The results indicated that there were efficiencies to practices in bulk-billing, using the electronic channels. There were quite significant efficiency gains there. There was not significant additional time and effort associated with patient claiming channels. I do not have the exact details with me,</p>

<b>QON No.</b>	<b>Department/ Agency</b>	<b>Senator</b>	<b>09/02/2010 Hansard ref / Written</b>	<b>Question</b>
				but I can go back and look at that research again and bring that forward.
HS 38 – HS 65	DHS, Centrelink, Medicare		Written	<b>See below</b>

**Written Questions on Notice: (HS 38 – HS 64)**

**Department of Human Services**

**Staffing levels**

**HS 38 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

- a) What is the total expenditure on staffing for the Department and for all portfolio agencies? What is the SES and non-SES breakdown?
- b) What are the current staffing levels for SES and non-SES officers?
- c) What have been the changes in staffing levels since November 2007?
- d) Why have these changes occurred?
- e) What have been the budgetary implications?
- f) What, if any, functions have been sacrificed?
- g) Has there been a target for staff reductions to achieve savings? What is that target and what strategy is being implemented to achieve this?
- h) Have any voluntary or involuntary redundancies been offered to staff? If so, how have staff been identified for such offers? Are there such plans for the future?

**HS 39 – DHS – Senator Barnett**

- a) How many permanent staff recruited since the supplementary budget estimates?
- b) What level are these staff?
- c) How many temporary positions exist or have been created since budget estimates?
- d) Since supplementary budget estimates, how many employees have been employed on contract and what is the average length of their employment period?

#### **Staffing – efficiency dividend/budget cuts**

##### **HS 40 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

- a) Have staffing numbers been reduced as a result of the efficiency dividend and/or other budget cuts?
- b) If so, where and at what level?
- c) Are there any plans for staff reduction? If so, please advise details ie. reduction target, how this will be achieved, services/programs to be cut etc.
- d) What changes are underway or planned for graduate recruitment, cadetships or similar programs? If reductions are envisaged please explain including reasons, target numbers etc.

#### **Consultancies**

##### **HS 41 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

- a) How much, and for what, has the Department spent on external consultancies since November 2007?
- b) For external consultancies currently being undertaken, what is the cost and project description of each?

##### **HS 42 – DHS – Senator Barnett**

- a) How many consultancies have been undertaken or are underway since November 2007? Please identify the name of the consultant, the subject matter of the consultancy, the duration and cost of the arrangement, and the method of procurement (ie. open tender, direct source, etc). Please also include total value for all consultancies.
- b) How many consultancies are planned for this calendar year?
- c) Have these been published in your Annual Procurement Plan (APP) on the AusTender website and if not why not? In each case please identify the subject matter, duration, cost and method of procurement as above, and the name of the consultant if known.

#### **Electorate data**

##### **HS 43 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

- a) Has the Department undertaken any research or created any reports that break down funding by electorate?
- b) For whom, and when, have these reports been created?
- c) How often are these reports updated?
- d) Can the Department provide these reports?
- e) Have these reports or other electorate-specific data been used in the allocation of grants since December 2007?

#### **Discretionary Grants**

**HS 44 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

Could the Department provide a list of all discretionary grants, including ad hoc and one-off grants since November 2007? Please provide details of the recipients, the intended use of the grants and what locations have benefited from the grants.

**HS 45 – DHS – Senator Barnett**

These are subject to a continuing order of the Senate: Examine what has been provided and ask about non-answers, or potentially controversial grants. Has the Department complied with interim requirements relating to the publication of discretionary grants?

**Reports****HS 46 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

- a) How many Reports have been commissioned by the Government in the Human Services portfolio since November 2007?
- b) Please provide details of each report including date commissioned, date report handed to Government, date of public release, Terms of Reference and Committee members.
- c) members.
- d) How much did each report cost? How many departmental staff were involved in each report and at what level?
- e) What is the current status of each report? When is the Government intending to respond to these reports?

**Election commitments****HS 47 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

- a) Has the Department identified the status of election commitments within its purview?
- b) Which of these commitments have yet to be completed? Why? What are revised expected completion dates for delayed commitments?

**Advertising and marketing****HS 48 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

For all expenditure on advertising and marketing since December 2007:

- a) What is the cost, broken down by campaign/project?
- b) To whom was the contract awarded?
- c) What is the justification for the expenditure for each?

**Ministerial pressure on APS staff****HS 49 – DHS – Senator Ryan**



*The Canberra Times* reported on 4/12/09 that ("ministers or their advisers pressured one in four executive-level bureaucrats to breach their duty to be apolitical, impartial or accountable in 2008-09."

- a) Did any Department of Human Services staff report that they felt that ministers or their advisers pressured them to breach their duty to be apolitical, impartial or accountable in 2008-09?
- b) Did any staff report that they felt that the Minister for Human Services or his advisers pressured them to breach their duty to be apolitical, impartial or accountable in 2008-09?

### **Breaches of APS code of conduct**

#### **HS 50 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

The State of the Service report for 2008-09 reported that there were in total 521 employees who were investigated and found to have breached the APS Code of Conduct:

- a) How many employees in Department of Human Services were investigated for breaches of the APS Code of Conduct?
- b) How many employees in Department of Human Services were investigated and found to have breached the APS Code of Conduct? If so, what breaches and how many of each were recorded?
- c) In relation to Department of Human Services staff, how many employees were reprimanded for a breach of the APS Code of Conduct?
- d) In relation to Department of Human Services staff, how many employees were counselled for a breach of the APS Code of Conduct?
- e) In relation to Department of Human Services staff, how many employees had their employment terminated for a breach of the APS Code of Conduct?
- f) In relation to Department of Human Services staff, how many employees were reassigned for a breach of the APS Code of Conduct?

### **Breaches of code of conduct for ministerial staff**

#### **HS 51 – DHS – Senator Ryan**

- a) In relation to the Code of Conduct for Ministerial Staff, were any of the Minister for Human Services' staff investigated for breaching the Code of Conduct for Ministerial Staff?
- b) If so, were any breaches recorded and what was the breach?

### **Government Advertising**

#### **HS 52 – DHS – Senator Barnett**

- a) What communications programs has the Department/Agency undertaken, or are planning to undertake?
- b) For each program, what is the total spend?

### **Hospitality**

#### **HS 53 – DHS – Senator Barnett**

- a) What is the Department's hospitality spend FYTD? Please detail date, location, purpose and cost of all events.
- b) For each Minister/Par Sec's office, please detail total hospitality spend FYTD. Please detail date, location, purpose and cost of each event.

### **Freedom of Information**

#### **HS 54 – DHS – Senator Barnett**

- a) Has the Department/agency received any advice on how to respond to FOI requests?
- b) How many FOI requests has the Department received?
- c) How many have been granted or denied?
- d) How many conclusive certificates have been issued in relation to FOI requests?

### **Community Cabinets**

#### **HS 55 – DHS – Senator Barnett**

- a) What was the cost of Ministers travel and expenses for the Community Cabinet meetings held since Budget Estimates?
- b) How many Ministerial Staff and Departmental officers travelled with the Minister for the Cabinet meeting?
- c) What was the total cost of this travel?
- d) What was the total cost to the Department and the Ministers office?

### **Reviews**

#### **HS 56 – DHS – Senator Barnett**

- a) How many Reviews are currently being undertaken in the portfolio/agency or affecting the portfolio agency?
- b) When will each of these reviews be concluded?
- c) Which Reviews have been completed since Budget Estimates?
- d) When will the Government be responding to the respective reviews that have been completed?
- e) What is the total number of Reviews *both completed and ongoing* in the portfolio/agency or affecting the portfolio agency since November 2007?
- f) What is the estimated cost of these Reviews?
- g) What further reviews are planned for 2009 - 10 FY?

### **Customer fraud**

#### **HS 57 – DHS/CSA – Senator Kroger**

The audit report of the 2006 child support reforms<sup>1</sup> mentions that: *'[I]n 2006-07, of CSA's 1.4 million customers, it investigated 0.01 in every 1000 customers. By comparison, in 2006-07, Centrelink had 6.5 million customers and conducted 42,000 fraud investigations (seven in every 1000 customers).'*

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<sup>1</sup> Australian National Audit Office, *Child Support Reforms: Stage One of the Child Support Scheme Reforms and Improving Compliance*, February 2010

- a) Could the Department confirm that this figure is correct?
- b) If so, how does that figure compare with the number of investigations this financial year?
- c) What is the total number of fraud investigations that have taken place this financial year?
- d) What percentage of investigations resulted in findings that fraud had been committed?
- e) How long, on average, do fraud investigations take?
- f) Approximately what percentage of suspected cases of fraud is not investigated?

### **Improving Compliance program**

#### **HS 58 – DHS/CSA – Senator Kroger**

- a) What was the total cost of implementing the Improving Compliance program?
- b) Has the Child Support Agency received any feedback from customers about the Improving Compliance program? If so has the feedback been favourable or unfavourable?
- c) How is compliance measured by the Child Support Agency?
- d) What has been the improvement in compliance since the introduction of the Improving Compliance program, if any?

### **Litigation action to recover payments**

#### **HS 59 – DHS/CSA – Senator Kroger**

- a) How many legal proceedings were initiated by the Child Support Agency this financial year?
- b) How many legal proceedings were initiated by the Child Support Agency during the financial year before the Improving Compliance program was introduced?
- c) What has been the rate of success in litigation this financial year?
- d) What proportion of cases were settled out of court – that is, before the commencement of a trial?
- e) How much did the Child Support Agency pay in legal fees this financial year?
- f) How much did the Child Support Agency pay in legal fees during the financial year before the Improving Compliance program was introduced?
- g) What is the total value of payments which have been enforced by this litigation?

### **International debt**

#### **HS 60 – DHS/CSA – Senator Kroger**

During estimates, Deputy Secretary Philippa Godwin indicated that *‘a significant proportion of [debt] is international debt—that is, debt transferred in when a payer from another country comes to Australia. That is one of our ongoing challenges... International debt is in a sense a disproportionate contributor to that overall debt picture, so one of the other things that we are focusing on is how to better manage international debt.’*<sup>2</sup>

- a) How much of the total outstanding child support debt is international debt?

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<sup>2</sup> Committee Hansard, 9 February, p 89

- b) How much has been spent on collecting international debt this financial year?

### **Child support review**

#### **HS 61 – DHS/CSA – Senator Siewert**

- a) At what stage is the review of the changes to the Child Support arrangements?
- b) When is the report of the review likely to be completed?
- c) What aspects of child support is the review focussing on?

#### **HS 62 – Centrelink – Senator Siewert**

In light of the fact more than 1 in 2 Centrelink decisions were changed because the agency got its facts wrong or did not understand the legislation underpinning entitlements worth \$66.5 billion (Data from the 2008-09 Social Security Appeals Tribunal annual Report) what is being done to provide better resourcing for appeals, improve training for Centrelink staff, and ensuring more care is taken when making decisions?

### **Disability Support Pension**

#### **HS 63 – Centrelink – Senator Fifield**

- a) How many people have received (granted) Disability Support Pension each month since October 2009?
- b) How many people applied (claimed) for Disability Support Pension each month since October 2009?
- c) How many were transferred to the Disability Support Pension from other income support payments since October 2009?
- d) How many people were suspended from Disability Support Pension each month since the start of the new financial year?
- e) How many people left the Disability Support Pension each month since October 2009?
- f) How many of those who left the Disability Support Pension went on to other payments since October 2009 and which payments were they transferred to?

### **Rebates – Cataract surgery**

#### **HS 64 – Medicare – Senator Kroger**

The following questions relate to the new Medicare rebate for cataract surgery (Medicare item 42702) announced by the Minister for Health on 29 January 2010<sup>3</sup>:

- a) When did the old rebate of \$623.70 cease to operate?
- b) When did the new rebate of \$548.85 come into effect?
- c) How many patients claimed a rebate between the dates referred to in questions (a) and (b) above?
- d) Will those patients be reimbursed for extra expense incurred under the lower rebate that applied during that time?

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<sup>3</sup> See Hon Nicola Roxon, 'Media Release: Government and Ophthalmologists Agree to Compromise on Cataract Fees' 29 January 2010

**Property Value Checks for Disability Support Pensioners**

*(Parts 2 and 3 of 5 Qs) transferred from FaHCSIA*

**HS 65 – Centrelink – Senator Boyce**

- a) Please advise if qualified valuers will undertake this work and how, and on what basis, these valuers will be retained and how long the process of valuations of affected disability pensioners will extend?
- b) What is the cost of this process?