

**Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee**

**ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**Finance and Administration Portfolio**

**Department of Human Services and agencies**

Budget Estimates 2005-2006, 26 May 2005

**Question: HS91**

**Outcome 1, Output Group 1.1**

**Topic: Centrelink – Withdrawal of concession cards while customers are overseas**

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

**SENATOR EVANS** asked on 26 May 2005:

- (1) What are the arrangements for withdrawing pensioner concession cards from customers while they are overseas?
- (2) What is the purpose of withdrawing concession cards from eligible customers while they are overseas?
- (3) Have pensioner concession card holders always been required to surrender their card when they go overseas? On what date did this arrangement start?
- (4) What arrangements are in place to ensure that customers who surrender their concession card while overseas can still access concessions on electricity, gas, water, motor vehicle registration and other charges that continue to accrue while customers are overseas?
- (5) If there are no arrangements in place for this purpose, why is this the case? What does Centrelink do (if anything) to ensure that customers can access relevant concessions for the period of overseas travel on their return from overseas?

**Answer:**

- (1) To be eligible under social security law for a concession card, including a Pensioner Concession Card, a person must be in Australia. Customers are required to notify Centrelink when they are going overseas. Centrelink also matches overseas departures with the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs. When a person leaves Australia, the concession card is cancelled. When the customer advises Centrelink of their return to Australia, the customer's Pensioner Concession Card is automatically reissued, subject to their continued eligibility. The Commonwealth Seniors Health Card is reissued to customers on their return after an abridged claim process, where entitlement is once again established.
- (2) The reason for withdrawing concession cards from customers travelling overseas is to protect the integrity of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. The main purpose in issuing concession cards is to provide cardholders with access to this scheme and certain Medicare services, at cheaper rates. The requirement to cancel cards immediately upon departure overseas reflects the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Medicare provisions. As both the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Medicare operate exclusively within Australia, concession cards are only useful to holders while they are in the country, and are cancelled when the holder leaves Australia.

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(3) It has been a standard administrative practice, since the early 1950s, to cancel concession cards when a cardholder departs Australia. From 1 July 2001 concession card legislation formalised that practice into social security law.

(4) Most concession providers (other than providers of Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and Medicare concessions) will continue to provide concessions to income support recipients during the period they are overseas, if their continuous receipt of income support can be established. It should be noted, however, that the decision to provide concessions is at the discretion of the concession provider.

Centrelink provides letters of confirmation of receipt of income support to customers on their request.

(5) Apart from providing letters confirming receipt of income support, Centrelink will issue interim concession cards to customers who have an urgent need for a card while awaiting delivery of their new concession card.