

Antipoverty Centre submission to the ANAO investigation into Services Australia's management of automated decision-making

1 September 2026

The Antipoverty Centre is a collective of activists, advocates and researchers with direct, contemporary experience of poverty and unemployment. We assist people with problems caused by semi-automated¹ and fully automated decisions in relation to their social security payments that have arisen from penalties that are partially administered by Services Australia in coordination with DEWR. We had input from dozens of people affected by such decisions for our submission to the employment services consultation that is currently underway. For more information about the human cost of maladministration and a lack of oversight and accountability, you can access this submission here: bit.ly/ReformSubDEWR

The Antipoverty Centre is also a member of the DEWR Targeted Compliance Framework Stakeholder Reference Group and has provided information about issues covered in this submission to government through this and other avenues. To our knowledge, no actions have been taken to address issues we have raised through our participation in this reference group.

Implications of compliance penalties in welfare administration

Services Australia does not exercise meaningful oversight of processes and decisions – neither those partially nor fully automated – that delay, reduce or cancel a person's welfare payment as a result of penalties issued under the Targeted Compliance Framework. This is due to the large amount of administration that Services Australia is required to undertake where responsibilities are shared between different agencies. This submission will only focus on processes and decisions that are shared between Services Australia and the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR).

The TCF, which has recently come under scrutiny by the Commonwealth Ombudsman, is the engine of the penalty system for Services Australia and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, who are inextricably linked by the compliance framework. Currently a number of provisions

¹ We use the term 'semi-automated' to differentiate between decisions that are fully automated and those initiated by a human decision maker to trigger a series of automated administrative processes. It is important to make the distinction when referring to the TCF given how employment service providers use the TCF, and their ability to stop someone's payment without oversight, as a conditioning tool to manipulate people's behaviour.



in the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999* are supposed to be paused due to the discovery of processes and systems that were resulting in unlawful payment cancellations.

Under the TCF, a person can have their Centrelink payment placed on hold for a variety of reasons. Most commonly, this is caused by an outsourced employment services provider marking a person as not attending an appointment or activity, or because the person did not log the minimum number of points or activities (such as applying for jobs, doing paid work or attending training) in a reporting period. After an employment services provider marks someone as not attending – often erroneously, unfairly or unlawfully – there is a frictionless process that automatically stops a person's Centrelink payment with no involvement or oversight from Services Australia, DEWR or any other government agency. Failing to log points in DEWR's IT system triggers a fully automated hold on the person's payment. Remedying a payment hold in either situation can be a burdensome process, particularly when a person is in crisis, and there can be significant barriers to people who are entitled to an income support payment being able to restore their payment. Welfare recipients with participation requirements are required to submit evidence to demonstrate their compliance monthly.

When a person's payment is placed on hold it means they're unable to report their income to Centrelink (which they are required to do every fortnight whether they're in paid employment or not). This is not because a person is prevented from reporting income under the law, but because the IT systems have been designed to block someone from fulfilling this requirement if an unrelated participation requirement is unmet. If they are unable to reverse the payment hold that is administered by DEWR and are therefore blocked from submitting an income report, their Centrelink payment will be cancelled, which is actioned Services Australia. Despite their payment being placed on hold by DEWR preventing an income report being lodged, their payment can be cancelled by Services Australia with no human oversight or discretion, even if they remain in need of income support.

Analysis conducted by the Antipoverty Centre from publicly available data estimates that a payment suspension notice is issued five times a minute,² with more than 2.68 million payment suspension notices issued between June 2024 to July 2025 across all compulsory employment services programs. The majority of these penalties affected people in Workforce Australia. There were more

² See: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/nov/02/centrelink-payment-2025-payments-suspended-cancellations-mutual-obligation>



than 720,000 people in Workforce Australia as of June 2026 (latest data), with around 300,000 people in other compulsory programs.³

Semi-automated and automated compliance decisions are effectively made outside of Services Australia, but utilise their infrastructure. As an individual accumulates penalties, Services Australia may take a more direct role in applying more severe punishments, such as a payment cancellation. We believe that Services Australia may be unaware of the full extent to which these decisions and how they are made effect their processes and the possibility that Services Australia is implementing unlawful decisions itself, as well as payment cancellations that are supposed to be paused, which are triggered by a combination of automated processes in both DEWR and Services Australia's IT systems.

In a Question on Notice published in August 2026, it was revealed that between Q4 2024 and Q1 2026, more than 235,000 people had their payment cancelled⁴ automatically by Services Australia for not reporting income. No information is available about whether these people were otherwise eligible for or in need of income support to survive.

26,500 of these people had their payment on hold as a result of compliance penalties, which would have automatically blocked them from reporting income to Services Australia. Throughout this entire period payment cancellations related to the vast majority of "mutual" obligations failures were supposed to be paused.⁵ While some of these people would have been in paid employment that may have made them ineligible to receive a Centrelink payment, even DEWR admits that a significant proportion of people are not in secure or adequate paid work at the time their payment is cancelled as a result of a compliance penalty. At a recent senate estimates hearing, First Assistant Secretary Bronwyn Field of the Employment Services Reform Taskforce described automatic payment cancellations is a "passive exit point", even though some cancellations are applied to people who remain eligible for social security. She stated that 70 per cent of people reported that they were in employment after their payment was cancelled.⁶ The source of the figure is unclear, however in 2023 DEWR told the Workforce Australia Inquiry that 66.9 per cent of people in Workforce Australia Online

³ See: <https://www.dewr.gov.au/employment-services-data/resources/tcf-public-data-1-april-30-june-2026>

⁴ See attachment 'Question 606' enclosed at the end of this document.

⁵ See DEWR Secretary's statement of 21 March 2025, in particular, that 42AM decisions had been paused since 24 September 2024.

⁶ Senate Estimates, Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 3 June 2026.



exited for employment related reasons, however this was lower for people in Workforce Australia Services.⁷

Services Australia does not have any process to check whether a decision to put a person's payment on hold, whether semi-automated or fully automated, may have been lawfully applied after the initial penalty is triggered before its systems automatically cancel their payment. There no process that prevents a penalty or cancellation being applied if a person failed to comply due to a personal crisis that is not taken into account, as is required under the law according to the Commonwealth Ombudsman. As we and others have evidenced over many years and as the Ombudsman identified, an alarming number of these penalties are potentially unfair and unlawful.

We explore the barriers for people getting their payments reinstated in the sections below. If for whatever reason a person is unable to do take the required action to have their payment suspension reinstated, the system of automated processes can then lead to an extended period of deprivation and psychological harm because they do not have access to their survival payment, and ultimately a payment cancellation, which may or may not be unlawful. While we have only focused on the two largest services below, these issues also affect people in Inclusive Employment Australia (formerly Disability Employment Services), Transition to Work and Remote Area Employment Service (formerly Community Development Program).

Workforce Australia Online

A person in online services must contact DEWR's National Customer Service line in order to have their payment reinstated after a payment suspension notice is issued. From October 2024 to July 2026 when most compliance-related payment cancellations were paused, 12,800 people in Workforce Australia Online⁸ had their payments cancelled by Services Australia for not reporting income after a penalty was applied that led to their Centrelink payment being put on hold.

Workforce Australia Services

Portrayals of the TCF in the media and by some advocates as being an entirely automated system are false and deflect culpability for abuse of the penalty system. In many instances a penalty is

⁷ Pages 303-304, "'Rebuilding Employment Services': Final report on Workforce Australia Employment Services." See:

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/Workforce_Australia_Employment_Services/WorkforceAustralia/Report

⁸ See Table (b)(i) in attachment 'Question 606'.



triggered by a human decision maker in the outsourced employment services sector, which is notorious for its well-documented mistreatment of welfare recipients. Outsourced employment services providers are empowered to make these penalty decisions on behalf of the DEWR secretary through delegated legislation and legislative instruments.

After a payment suspension notice is issued, a person is required to complete a 'reengagement activity' within 5 business days. Depending on the reason for the suspension notice the activity can vary from an appointment with their provider, calling their provider, or reapplying for a certain number of jobs.

Misuse of semi-automated penalties

In our experience, and as reported to us by the thousands of welfare recipients we have directly assisted or who have contributed to our work, these penalties are often applied as a result of incompetence or as a tool of abuse and control, not because the person has failed to comply with a lawful requirement. For example, if a person is marked as not attending an appointment (or even if they do), or for failing to complete adequate job searches (even if they did complete the required number), the onus is then on the individual to either comply with a demand from the outsourced provider (whether lawful or unlawful) or successfully have the payment hold lifted via the NCSL.

The most common penalty is someone failing to attend a compulsory appointment. Many of these people are have caring responsibilities, work commitments and other reasonable reasons why attending an appointment is difficult, burdensome or not required under the law. For example, some people must pay for taxis or incur other transport costs to attend appointments or Work for the Dole (an unpaid labour program) when they're already living in poverty, often leading people to skip additional meals.

The overuse of payment suspension notices was highlighted by the Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services. The committee's 2023 report noted that 70 per cent of the entire caseload had received a payment suspension notice from the beginning of Workforce Australia Services in July 2022 to September 2023, while 40 per cent received one suspension in Workforce Australia Online during the same period.⁹

⁹ Page 439, "'Rebuilding Employment Services': Final report on Workforce Australia Employment Services." See: https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Former_Committees/Workforce_Australia_Employment_Services/WorkforceAustralia/Report



Barriers to lifting a payment hold

People are unable to reengage for a variety of reasons, which can be personal and circumstantial. One public example is when Kelly's payment was put on hold when she was hospitalised for psychosis. During this period her payment was put on hold, with the provider refusing to reinstate it even after both she and a social worker at the hospital contacted them repeatedly.¹⁰ While this may seem like a more extreme example, this level of unfair and unlawful decision-making is not uncommon.

Currently the National Customer Service Line (NCSL), which is the only way for a person in online services, and the main avenue for a welfare recipient to have an unfair or unlawful penalty reversed or an automatic payment hold lifted, is experiencing high levels of demand and extended waiting times. Many people have their calls ended after a brief hold period, and the Antipoverty Centre is aware that some people have waited as long as 7 hours to get through to someone who can help them, with 2–3 hours on hold being more common. Some people have barriers to lodging a written complaint, however even those who do are waiting up to a month to receive a response. We have also supported people who were able to get through to someone who ultimately gave them incorrect information about what they could lawfully be required to do, leaving the person's payment on hold when it should have been reinstated.

This is incredibly alarming, as people who are unable to contact the NCSL may have their payment automatically cancelled by Services Australia for being unable to report their income to Centrelink.

Data shows that there has been a drastic increase in the number of people contacting the NCSL in recent years, which has led to a significant increase in 'abandoned' calls. More than 223,000 calls were abandoned between July 2024 and October 2025. The number of people waiting over an hour to speak to staff increased from 0 in December 2024 to more than 14,000 in October 2025.¹¹

Conclusion

Despite payment cancellation decisions under the TCF being paused by DEWR, 12,800 people in Workforce Australia Online and more than 12,300 people in Workforce Australia Services¹² had their Centrelink payments cancelled for not submitting an income report after their payment was put on

¹⁰ See: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2025/jun/16/kellys-jobseeker-payments-were-cut-off-during-a-hospital-stay-for-psychosis-its-far-from-an-isolated-case>

¹¹ See table in attachment 'SQ25-002729'.

¹² See Table (b) in attachment 'Question 606'



hold. It is unknown how many people subjected to the TCF in the disability employment service have had their payment cancelled in the same circumstance.

The Antipoverty Centre is in direct contact with a person who was subject to a payment hold and blocked from submitting an income report who believed that their payment would not be cancelled as a result of the pauses in place. The person anticipated that when the payment hold was automatically lifted they would be able to submit an income report and receive backpay, as DEWR had advised would be the case. Instead, their payment was cancelled over the holiday period and they were left without any income support.

It appears that there has been no work done by outsourced providers, DEWR or Centrelink to determine whether these people were or are still otherwise eligible for a social security payment at the time their payment was cancelled as a result of “mutual” obligations penalties. We have seen no evidence of action being taken as a result of us raising these issues for Services Australia or DEWR to understand how the interaction between their systems and automated processes may be leading to payment cancellations that should not be happening. This represents an egregious breach of people's rights under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

There is an obvious and urgent need for all relevant government bodies to fully understand how decisions made in programs administered by DEWR, DSS or any other department are linked to decisions made by Services Australia. Welfare recipients should be able to rely on Services Australia to fully implement the pauses announced by DEWR and to prevent any payment cancellation being made as a result of a potentially unlawful penalty, regardless of whether a full pause on cancellations is in place.

Based on the actions of these agencies and responses to our concerns we do not believe that these outcomes are a result of flawed IT design or “glitches”. This belief is informed by records obtained via FOI and other mechanisms that the TCF was intentionally designed to allow people to be removed from the social security system regardless of their qualification for social security, with the department and government's view that fewer people accessing a payment is a positive outcome, regardless of how many people are denied their rights or thrown into personal crisis as a result.

Relying on a person's payment being cancelled through automated processes for not reporting income achieves the same function and outcome as the application of penalties under TCF, regardless of whether the person had their payment on hold at the time. However, cancellation decisions under section 42AM of the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999* were specifically



paused due to concerns over the lawfulness of its operation.¹³ 42AM allows for payment cancellations where a person does not reengage after 28 days of their payment being placed on hold. Cancellations effectively resulting from this provision have continued throughout the entire period it is supposed to have been paused.

While Services Australia is not responsible for the design of the TCF, the agency is directly administering decisions to cancel social security payments arising from semi-automated decisions made by outsourced employment services and automated processes within and outside of Services Australia. Given that DEWR paused all payment cancellation points connected to the TCF without ensuring that Services Australia did not action cancellations arising from “mutual” obligations compliance, Services Australia has risked and likely been responsible for applying unlawful payment cancellations.

We urge the ANAO to interrogate whether Services Australia knew that compliance-related automated payment cancellations were understood to be occurring despite parts of the TCF being paused due to legal issues with its administration.

We would welcome any enquiries from the ANAO or the opportunity to provide more information related to this submission.

¹³ Analysis by Economic Justice Australia from September 2025 reveals that approximately 310,000 people may have had an unlawful payment cancellation under 42AM, and DEWR officials said that the number was “in the vicinity of that” in a June 2026 estimates hearing. See: <https://www.ejaustralia.org.au/eja-briefing-analysis-of-payment-cancellations-under-42am-of-the-social-security-administration-act-1999/>



Australian Government

Department of Social Services

ANSWER TO SENATE QUESTION ON NOTICE

QUESTION NO: 606

DATE ASKED: 29 July 2026

Senator Penny Allman-Payne asked the Minister representing the Minister for Social Services. in writing on 29 July 2026:

a. how many Services Australia payment cancellations were applied due to the affected recipient not reporting their income, broken down by payment type and reported quarterly from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2026, please provide this data for the following programs:

- i. Workforce Australia Online,
- ii. Workforce Australia Service,
- iii. Transition to Work,

- iv. Community Development Program until its replacement on 01 November 2025,
- v. Remote Area Employment Service, starting from its commencement on 01 November 2025,
- vi. Disability Employment Services until its replacement on 01 November 2025, and
- vii. Inclusive Employment Australia, starting from its commencement on 01 November 2025;

b. of these cancellations, how many recipients were also subject to a Mutual Obligations payment suspension under section 42AM of the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999* during the same period that they did not report their income; and

c. referring to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations' most recent report on 'Job seeker compliance data' for the period 1 January to 31 March 2026, Table 12a, under which provisions were these five cancellations applied.

Minister Gallagher – The answer to the honourable Senator's question is as follows:

- a. The tables below show the number of sustained payment cancellations applied due to the recipient not reporting their income, which is a requirement outside of the Targeted Compliance Framework, broken down by payment type and employment service program, as at 10 July 2026.

- i. Workforce Australia Online

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	15,360	280	5	1,720	17,360
Quarter 1, 2025	12,380	195	5	980	13,555
Quarter 2, 2025	19,730	290	5	1,910	21,935
Quarter 3, 2025	21,520	295	10	2,230	24,055
Quarter 4, 2025	22,010	300	5	2,475	24,790
Quarter 1, 2026	16,365	205	5	1,270	17,845
Total	107,365	1,560	35	10,580	119,540

ii. Workforce Australia Services

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	12,785	325	5	1,605	14,725
Quarter 1, 2025	8,515	255	10	835	9,610
Quarter 2, 2025	14,175	390	20	1,540	16,120
Quarter 3, 2025	15,120	465	20	1,575	17,180
Quarter 4, 2025	16,230	465	15	1,910	18,620
Quarter 1, 2026	11,520	325	20	1,140	13,010
Total	78,345	2,230	85	8,605	89,265

iii. Transition to Work

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	160	0	0	1,130	1,290
Quarter 1, 2025	115	0	0	715	830
Quarter 2, 2025	185	5	0	975	1,155
Quarter 3, 2025	210	5	0	1,035	1,245
Quarter 4, 2025	220	0	0	1,245	1,465
Quarter 1, 2026	145	5	5	880	1,030
Total	1,035	5	5	5,975	7,015

iv. Community Development Program (until 31 October 2025)

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	520	15	0	155	695
Quarter 1, 2025	435	20	0	100	555
Quarter 2, 2025	570	20	0	125	715
Quarter 3, 2025	645	30	0	155	825
Quarter 4, 2025	260	10	0	70	340
Total	2,430	90	0	605	3,125

v. Remote Australia Employment Service (from 1 November 2025)

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2025	355	15	0	95	465
Quarter 1, 2026	430	25	0	110	565
Total	785	40	0	205	1,030

vi. Disability Employment Services (until 31 October 2025)

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	2,320	30	5	185	2,540
Quarter 1, 2025	1,795	25	5	105	1,930
Quarter 2, 2025	2,440	35	5	145	2,620
Quarter 3, 2025	2,635	40	5	155	2,835
Quarter 4, 2025	980	15	5	80	1,075
Total	10,175	150	10	670	11,000

vii. Inclusive Employment Australia (from 1 November 2025)

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2025	1,575	10	0	100	1,685
Quarter 1, 2026	2,295	35	5	125	2,455
Total	3,870	45	5	225	4,145

- b. The tables below show the number of sustained payment cancellations in part (a) which replaced a suspension as a result of non-compliance with mutual obligations requirements, broken down by payment type and employment service program, as at 10 July 2026.

i. Workforce Australia Online

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	3,805	55	0	335	4,195
Quarter 1, 2025	815	10	0	65	895
Quarter 2, 2025	1,555	15	0	190	1,760
Quarter 3, 2025	2,085	20	0	225	2,330
Quarter 4, 2025	2,200	25	0	240	2,460
Quarter 1, 2026	1,060	15	0	95	1,170
Total	11,520	140	0	1,150	12,805

ii. Workforce Australia Services

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	3,380	85	0	425	3,890
Quarter 1, 2025	610	10	0	50	670
Quarter 2, 2025	1,380	25	5	190	1,595
Quarter 3, 2025	2,140	70	0	245	2,455
Quarter 4, 2025	1,940	60	0	230	2,230
Quarter 1, 2026	1,355	35	5	150	1,540
Total	10,805	285	5	1,290	12,385

iii. Transition to Work

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	0	0	0	15	15
Quarter 1, 2025	5	0	0	0	5
Quarter 2, 2025	5	0	0	10	10
Quarter 3, 2025	5	0	0	5	5
Quarter 4, 2025	5	0	0	10	15
Quarter 1, 2026	5	0	0	5	10
Total	10	0	0	45	55

iv. Community Development Program (until 31 October 2025)

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	65	0	0	20	85
Quarter 1, 2025	65	5	0	10	75
Quarter 2, 2025	70	0	0	20	90
Quarter 3, 2025	110	5	0	30	145
Quarter 4, 2025	5	0	0	0	5
Total	315	5	0	85	400

v. Remote Australia Employment Service (from 1 November 2025)

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2025	0	0	0	0	0
Quarter 1, 2026	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0

vi. Disability Employment Services (until 31 October 2025)

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2024	285	5	0	15	300
Quarter 1, 2025	70	0	0	5	70
Quarter 2, 2025	160	5	0	5	165
Quarter 3, 2025	190	5	0	10	200
Quarter 4, 2025	25	5	0	5	25
Total	730	5	0	30	765

vii. Inclusive Employment Australia (from 1 November 2025)

	JobSeeker Payment	Parenting Payment Single	Special Benefit	Youth Allowance (other)	Total
Quarter 4, 2025	0	0	0	0	0
Quarter 1, 2026	80	5	5	5	85
Total	80	5	5	5	85

- c. The data in Table 12a of the 1 January to 31 March 2026 Job seeker compliance data report refers to participants in Workforce Australia Online whose income support payment was cancelled after 28 calendar days of payment suspension. A correction to Table 12a of the 1 January to 31 March 2026 report was applied on 12 August 2026 due to a coding error. This correction has reduced the number of cancellations to zero.

Notes

Data counts each sustained cancellation from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2026 where activity tested recipients were determined to be cancelled due to failure to report. It includes cancellations where the date of effect may fall outside the reported period.

Cancellations are allocated to the employment service program to which the recipient was last referred or participating in at the time of a cancellation. For recipients with a compliance suspension in part (b), this may not reflect their employment service placement at the time the suspension was applied.

Suspension reasons in part (b) include non-attendance report received; non-attendance at participation appointment or activity; did not meet provider requirement; or provider work refusal failure.

Inclusive Employment Australia replaced the Disability Employment Services program on 1 November 2025. Remote Australia Employment Service replaced the Community Development Program on 1 November 2025.

To protect individuals' privacy, all cells including any totals and subtotals have been rounded to the nearest 5. Values 1 to 7 are round to 5, zero cells are actual zeros.

Source: Services Australia and Department of Employment and Workplace Relations administrative data.

Education and Employment - Legislation

QUESTION ON NOTICE Supplementary Budget Estimates 2025 - 2026

Outcome: Employment and Workforce

Department of Employment and Workplace Relations Question No. SQ25-002729

Senator Penny Allman-Payne provided in writing.

National Customer Service Line

Question

For inbound calls to the National Customer Service Line, provide the following information broken down by month for each month between 1 July 2024 and 31 October 2025:

- the average wait time callers spent on hold;
- the number of callers who spent 1 hour or more on hold;
- the total number of inbound calls, including the number of calls that were terminated by the caller while on hold, and the number of calls disconnected or not answered; and
- the number of inbound calls that were answered, broken down by program (Workforce Australia Services, Workforce Australia Online, Disability Employment Services, other).

Answer

Inbound calls to the National Customer Service Line (NCSL)					
Month	Average wait time	Number of callers who spent 1 hour or more on hold	Inbound calls	Answered calls	Abandoned calls
Jul-24	0:16:14	-	32,353	19,120	13,233
Aug-24	0:06:35	-	24,526	19,287	5,239
Sep-24	0:06:09	-	24,457	19,382	5,075
Oct-24	0:20:54	-	34,448	15,769	18,679
Nov-24	0:14:04	-	25,481	16,259	9,222
Dec-24	0:06:46	-	14,790	11,965	2,825
Jan-25	0:08:20	43	21,002	15,648	5,354
Feb-25	0:18:56	358	27,158	14,752	12,406
Mar-25	0:26:05	1,688	25,546	11,444	14,102
Apr-25	0:25:00	1,958	21,951	10,799	11,153
May-25	0:29:03	4,433	27,387	11,736	15,652
Jun-25	0:34:36	5,758	26,055	9,410	16,645
Jul-25	0:33:47	7,360	30,583	9,791	20,792
Aug-25	0:31:09	6,226	27,324	9,425	17,899
Sep-25	0:24:09	4,606	28,496	12,841	15,655
Oct-25	0:30:02	14,330	67,109	27,371	39,738

Please note:

- The department defines 'average wait time' as the average time a call spends in the queue before being answered or abandoned.

- Data for the number of callers who spent 1 hour or more on hold is only available from 1 January 2025.
- The department defines 'inbound calls' as the count of calls to the NCSL. This count excludes internal call transfers.
- The department defines 'answered calls' as the count of calls answered by a Service Officer.
- The department defines 'abandoned calls' as the count of calls that disconnected, either by the caller or the system (unanswered), before a Service Officer answers the call.
- The department does not currently capture the number of inbound calls answered by the NCSL, broken down by program (Workforce Australia Services, Workforce Australia Online, Disability Employment Services, other). The NCSL supports participants, employers, and the public, some of whom wish to remain anonymous. As such not all users are supported or can be identified as being supported by an employment services program.
- An increase in call demand in October 2025 is associated with NCSL support of the Disability Employment Services (DES) Transition Line (1800 227 337).

Question

How many overtime hours have been worked by staff in the National Customer Service Line each month between 1 July 2025 and 31 October 2025?

Answer

Between 1 July 2025 and 31 October 2025 overtime hours worked by NCSL staff were:

NCSL overtime hours worked	
Month	Total
Jul-25	9.6
Aug-25	9.28
Sep-25	12.68
Oct-25	62.52

Please note:

- The increase in overtime during October 2025 was primarily due to the 6 October state based public holiday, observed in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, South Australia, and Queensland

Question

What steps has the department taken to address wait times for the NCSL including the amount of additional resourcing that has been provided since July 2025?

Answer

The department uses a mix of staffing, technology and process strategies aimed at enhancing the participant experience and reducing wait times for the NCSL.

Staffing

- Since July 2025, the department's Contact Centre has recruited 30 labour hire contractors.
- Ongoing capability uplift and cross skilling of existing staff ensures agents can resolve enquiries at first contact, reducing repeat calls.

Technology

- Enhancements to self-service tools, including a new 'Top Call Topics' webpage and improved Interactive Voice Response (IVR) messaging, enable participants to resolve issues independently where appropriate and reduce reliance on staff.

Process

- Progressive uplift of staff resources

Question

Provide the materials used for training workers in the NCSL call centre.

Answer

The NCSL delivers a broad scope of services to Australians across all Commonwealth employment and pre-employment service programs, and training materials to support staff are reflective of that broad scope.

Currently more than 324 training materials are used for training NCSL staff. Given this, it is not practical to provide all materials used for training staff in the NCSL and would represent an unnecessary diversion of departmental resources in responding to this request.

Question

Provide operational guidelines and related material including phone scripts, decision making tree, or workflows used by the NCSL.

Answer

The NCSL delivers a broad scope of services to Australians across all Commonwealth employment and pre-employment service programs, and operational guidelines and reference materials to support staff are reflective of that broad scope.

Currently more than 298 operational guidelines and related materials including phone scripts, decision making tree, and workflows are used by staff in the NCSL. Given this, it is not practical to provide all operational guidelines and related materials used by staff in the NCSL and would represent an unnecessary diversion of departmental resources in responding to this request.

Under the department's [Information Publication Scheme \(IPS\) plan](#), operational information relating to departmental plans, policies, and guidelines is available on the department's website. This includes the guidelines for Workforce Australia which outline some of the functions delivered by the NCSL.

Question

Provide the criteria used by the NCSL to determine whether a contact is classified as a complaint and whether or not it should be escalated beyond the call centre.

Answer

The NCSL supports the management of complaints across all Commonwealth employment and pre-employment service programs. This includes complaints management for:

- Employment services programs managed by the department
- Inclusive Employment Australia program administered by the Department of Social Services, and the
- Remote Australia Employment Service program administered by the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

The department's definition of a complaint and key steps in the complaints service are in the first Complaints Service Report available at <https://www.dewr.gov.au/employment-services-complaints/resources/complaints-service-report-31-oct-24-30-apr-25>.

Question

Provide the operational guidelines and related material including phone scripts, decision making tree, or workflows for investigations of job providers.

Answer

There are a range of operational guidelines and materials that relate to investigating complaints about an employment services provider. The first Complaints Service report available at <https://www.dewr.gov.au/employment-services-complaints/resources/complaints-service-report-31-oct-24-30-apr-25> outlines the complaints process, including when complaints are investigated.

When considering potential non-compliance by a Provider that may warrant further investigation, the Department considers all relevant information available to it, including administrative data, documentary evidence, correspondence and case files. Where insufficient information is available to the Department, it will seek additional information from the Provider and, where applicable, the complainant.

Investigations into potential non-compliance are conducted in accordance with the principles of procedural fairness. Affected Provider(s) are offered an opportunity to show cause as to whether a complaint is substantiated, whether a breach should be imposed on one or more licenses, and the significance of that breach. The Department assesses any information supplied in response to a Show Cause Notice before making a decision on the action the Department will take. Findings may result in the investigation being closed with no further action or may result in Breach action being taken against the Provider. The response is proportionate to the impact and consequences of the non-compliance and may include rectification action and/or recovery of funds. All confirmed Breaches will have implications on a Provider's performance ratings. Instances of suspected fraud are referred to the Department's fraud and integrity team for further investigation.