



**Australian Government**

# **Department of Human Services Submission to the Independent Review of the Australian Public Service (APS)**

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## INTRODUCTION

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We, the Department of Human Services ('the Department'), welcome the opportunity to inform the work of the Independent Review of the APS ('the Review'). The Department recognises that submissions to the Review are the beginning of a conversation with a range of stakeholders and in different formats – we are happy to participate further, including through providing additional information to support the panel's deliberations.

This submission outlines the role and value of the Department in today's APS and how we will support a dynamic and high-functioning APS into the future – an APS that is able to deliver high-quality services to government and citizens.

The Department is central to ensuring that effective outcomes are achieved for government and that these outcomes meet the needs of the Australian people, whether as individuals or as representatives of industry or other sectors. Bringing the citizen and service delivery more prominently into decision-making (including policy design and delivery) best serves the government of the day, as it means the APS can effectively design and deliver the policy that government intends. This also allows the APS to drive better outcomes and services for citizens, including through lessons learned from current service delivery to inform future policy.

## WHO WE ARE: THE SERVICE DELIVERY AGENCY OF CHOICE

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The Department aspires to be the service delivery solution of choice for government and citizens. Invaluable experience in massive scale service delivery and payments systems, together with substantial geographic presence across urban, regional and remote Australia, means we are uniquely placed to provide services to Australians on behalf of other government departments. The Department's physical presence supports strong connections to the communities we serve, enabling better understanding of their diverse needs, including the complex needs of the most vulnerable. Our combination of critical capabilities in social work, emergency management and providing services to remote Australia are not

found in other agencies or sectors. Further background about the Department is provided at [Attachment A](#).

Since being established in 2004, the Department has worked to improve service delivery outcomes for government and citizens. In July 2011, key service organisations, including Medicare and Centrelink, were brought together to create a single department of state to more effectively support delivery of government priorities. This means we are able to enhance outcomes through more efficient and effective use of technology, staff skills and collaborative values and behaviours. In addition, strong partnerships across the APS allow us to both augment and share our capacity, enabling better outcomes for government.

The Department's size, scale and ICT capability also positions it well as a provider of shared services within the APS. In support of the Department of Finance's Shared and Common Services Program, the Department is an identified shared services provider (or 'Hub') and has worked with Department of Veterans' Affairs, Department of Social Services, and the Department of Health to explore opportunities for more shared services.

The broad range of activities the Department undertakes each day involves engaging with a diverse customer base including working families, farmers, older Australians, students, sole parents, people facing unemployment or homelessness, people with disability, and people caring for someone. The services provided need to be designed for different delivery methods and specialised requirements to work for all customers and in different environments and circumstances – from establishing information phone lines to respond to enquiries on the Same Sex Marriage survey to providing critical support in natural disasters. Along with the Department of Defence, in major emergencies like Cyclone Debbie, the Department plays a critical role in the delivery of social work services and relief payments as well as being the 'community intelligence' on the ground. The Department also delivers the Australian Passport Information Service on behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and during international disasters, establishes a crisis hotline overflow capacity for consular crisis calls to provide critical support to affected Australians.

In addition to delivering payments and services on behalf of partner agencies, the Department's role includes providing advice to government to inform social welfare, health and child support service delivery policy. Our broad focus and centralised service delivery role give visibility across the end-to-end impact of policy and implementation – indeed, this role can be likened to a 'reverse central agency' in that we are uniquely placed to see how the different government policies and measures intersect and their combined impact on citizens. This holistic perspective allows the Department to bring valuable citizen insights and service design expertise into the broader APS and the government, in turn improving policy and the way government operates.

## SERVICE DELIVERY IS CENTRAL TO GOVERNMENT AND TO THE CITIZEN'S EXPERIENCE OF GOVERNMENT

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The Department is most Australians' primary interface with government, underscoring how central service delivery is to the work of government. This means we are pivotal to building trust in government as well as to understanding how citizens' views of government are changing. It also means that we are in a position to erode a citizen's trust in government – for example, if there is a failure in service delivery systems or in an individual customer's experience. The Department's frontline staff have a role to play through direct interactions, as each individual transaction can develop or diminish trust, as well as having exposure to customer views and confidence in government more broadly.

The Department can ensure citizens are 'listened to' in designing services and we can bring the voice of the citizen back to partner agencies. Our staff collectively see across the entire customer experience of services, supports and payments which informs our understanding of the citizen view of government. The Department also uses a number of analytics to measure and understand customer satisfaction with the quality of services received, including direct feedback and targeted research to drive service delivery improvements. This insight is unique and valuable in the context of effective policy development and delivery.

The creation of the Department has largely centralised government's welfare implementation resources, which has a number of benefits. Bringing together a critical mass

of skilled staff with a strong organisational focus on project governance allows us to implement large-scale projects, maximise resources (including providing flexibility across service delivery priorities), and drive transformational change. The Department successfully delivered \$174.3 billion in payments to recipients and providers in 2016–17, where a failure in processing would have significant impact on the Australian economy. For example, a one-day outage in Medicare could result in a substantial impact on the cash flow of health businesses, healthcare providers and individuals across Australia. In the longer term, providing support to people when they need help is aimed at enhancing self-sufficiency and independence, potentially reducing future government outlays and contributing to greater levels of participation.

The Department's entire focus is on delivering services and projects that make a noticeable difference to the Australian public, in contrast to other models where service delivery is decentralised across multiple agencies. An associated benefit is supporting more efficient use of leased premises and ICT capability than was possible with separate agencies, enabling whole of government responses, greater scaling and re-use of resources and products.

Policy cannot be effective without a service delivery focused design and explicit consideration of how it will be received by the customer. This reflects the impact service delivery has on customers. The way services are provided has a significant impact on public trust and acceptance and, consequently, on the quality of outcomes achieved for government. The centrality of the Department to the design and delivery of outcomes has seen its involvement in major transformation, working closely with other agencies to achieve outcomes for government and citizens.

## TRANSFORMATION AND MODERNISATION

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The focus and functions of the Department have continued to evolve since its inception, supported by significant transformation around service delivery, ICT and welfare systems. The goal to be the delivery agent of choice for government will require us to be at the forefront of development, design and delivery of outcomes, including through a strong investment in digitisation and leveraging data to improve service delivery.

The Department's Digital Transformation Strategy outlines a six-year roadmap to harness current and emerging technologies to deliver smarter and more efficient services. It seeks to:

- provide end-to-end, connected services with fast, easy, light-touch interactions where people only need to provide information once
- implement improvements across all service delivery channels
- deliver a comparable quality of service to recipients across digital and non-digital channels, including people-based support for those who need assistance, and
- strengthen the integrity of services through digital solutions that enforce mutual obligations and ensure people receive the right payment, at the right time.

Providing high quality digital services to Australians is critical to the current and future success of both the Department and government. A strong focus on engaging Australians across our various service delivery channels has enabled the Department to enhance customer experience, delivering faster, more seamless services.

The delivery and transformation of the Department's digital services is supported by strong, collaborative partnerships with a large number of government agencies and third parties. Just as we work with agencies on a range of activities, including data exchange, shared corporate services, co-location, ICT infrastructure support and utilising shared facilities or ICT platforms, the Department also partners with various agencies to design, build and deliver new digital services. This collaborative approach ensures appropriate consideration of the complexities of existing technology systems and design solutions, along with the associated costs and risks of policy implementation. It also enables the Department to build common digital capabilities and approaches into the delivery of government initiatives.

Working closely with the Department of Health, we have helped to drive an eight-year project to stabilise and consolidate the health and aged care systems. Over the last 10 to 15 years these services have been progressively digitised, allowing the majority of transactions to be completed simply and via electronic channels. In the 2018–19 Budget, government provided \$106.8 million over 18 months for the first stage of the project to

rejuvenate and transform the existing systems to ensure sustainability and improvements for customers. The commitment to the Modernising Health and Aged Care Payments Services (MHACPS) Program is a clear indication of how important Medicare and aged care services are to citizens.

Other examples of the Department's delivery of platforms and services to assist multiple agencies to meet the requirements of government include myGov, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and the Veteran Centric Reform program. In addition, the Department is driving the Welfare Payment Infrastructure Transformation Programme (WPIT), which aims to rebuild and improve the way government delivers welfare payments, enhance experience for customers and increase system stability and responsiveness.

WPIT commenced on 1 July 2015 and is expected to be completed by 2022, providing a flexible system that adapts to the needs of government and citizens. WPIT will improve and simplify the way we work across all channels (including face-to-face, phone and digital) and focus on people's circumstances and needs. Changes to welfare policy will be faster, cheaper and informed by improved business intelligence and data analytics. Most transactions will be accessed digitally end-to-end, noting that the Department will continue to provide alternative delivery for people who are unable to use digital services.

The Department's transformation and modernisation activities are aligned with its work with the Digital Transformation Agency (DTA) to support the implementation of government's Digital Transformation Agenda. We are working with the DTA and other government agencies on how we can contribute to the delivery of pilot programs, such as improvements to 'Tell Us Once', a digital identity solution, and publishing performance information around customer satisfaction and transaction costs on [dashboard.gov.au](https://dashboard.gov.au).

A commitment to increasing capacity and improving ease of use of government services requires us to embed innovation in our values, culture and work practices. The Department has a range of methodologies and mechanisms to identify and develop ideas including drawing from staff, citizens and industry. Within the Department, staff are actively encouraged to contribute new ideas through initiatives such as a new online collaboration

portal to foster online brainstorming and implementation of ideas endorsed by colleagues. July is also designated 'Innovation Month' in the Department, promoting another opportunity to support and assist staff wanting to flesh out ideas to transform and improve the way we work.

The Department's transformation and modernisation activities are underpinned by identifying and leveraging emerging technologies. Working with partner agencies, we are continually exploring opportunities for cutting edge technological solutions, interactions and service design to create an ever-better digital experience for our staff, customers and partners (such as expanded use of virtual assistants). Our Technology Innovation Centre in Tuggeranong is a facility created by us for the whole of government and our partners to discover emerging technology, challenge thinking and explore ways of improving government service delivery.

Our successful transformation and change, particularly technological, will be supported by appropriate customer design and assurance, drawing on the experience of consumers as well as input from peak bodies and community organisations with on-the-ground insights. These views, in near real-time design and prototyping, are fundamental for implementation success – moving through pre-discovery, discovery, alpha and beta phases before going live and, upon going live, sound change management and communication. Alongside this, good governance is needed, including clear accountabilities and simple performance metrics (for example a single key performance measure to clearly set the intent) to both empower people and break down silos. Infrastructure and people are the other two key enablers – including people who focus on solutions, work across disciplines and are willing to engage with the unknown. This combination allows the Department and the broader APS to drive genuine innovation and transformation, bringing the voice of the citizen to the forefront of service delivery, as well as informing government decision-making.

## BRINGING THE CITIZEN INTO THE CORE OF POLICY THINKING

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The Department is working with partner agencies to embed the citizen experience more centrally into policy design thinking with the aim of achieving more tailored and efficient delivery of services. This allows us to develop policies and services both with, and for, citizens – using ‘human-centred’ design that begins with a good understanding of key life events, needs and behaviours. By doing this, we can significantly re-shape the citizen’s experience of government – for example, better supporting citizens through key life events such as the birth of a baby or needing additional aged care support. By ‘thinking from the outside in’, we can start with the citizen and then the APS can work collaboratively and seamlessly across the ‘back-office’ (and thus avoid, or at least reduce, the need for citizens to fill in myriad forms or navigate across multiple departments/processes).

Services that work for people are best developed through design thinking across government and the communities it serves, with a strong focus on outcomes and evidence. The use of citizen-centric design approaches keeps the end user at the core of the design and delivery process, resulting in improved customer experience and supporting the achievement of government policy objectives. The Department’s role and responsibilities are supported by innovative, citizen-centric approaches to government services. By working to understand the people who use its services, their circumstances, needs and perspectives, the Department is better able to build and inform solutions that work for customers.

Highly experienced behavioural insights specialists lead our work in gathering and developing customer insights to contribute to evidence-based service design. Collaboration with partner agencies is critical to share these and other service delivery learnings and inform the development of effective policies and programs. The Department’s Design Hubs provide one mechanism to support this engagement. Activity undertaken in the Design Hubs focuses on delivering outcomes by enabling design thinking, collaborative ways of working, rapid decision-making, acceleration of work and innovation.

## Case study examples – bringing the citizen into policy design thinking

- The design and development of the **National Redress Scheme** for people who have experienced institutional child sexual abuse has been significantly informed by the voice of the citizen. We worked closely with the Department of Social Services to seek input from survivors as well as advocacy groups, non-government institutions and States and Territories, to help develop service delivery aspects of the National Redress Scheme. Different forums were used to interact with these stakeholders, resulting in a scheme that is trauma-informed and survivor-centric. Sessions included a strong focus on the design of the Redress Application form to ensure that it avoids, as far as possible, the risk of re-traumatising people applying to the Scheme.
- For **income support recipients**, reporting late can lead to delayed or cancelled payments and result in adverse outcomes for individuals. To help customers report on time, we worked collaboratively with the Behavioural Economics Team of Australia (within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet) to examine whether text message reminders would be effective. Behaviourally-informed text message reminders were found to increase the ability of people to report on time, from 53.1 to 66.6 per cent. People who received a text message reminder also reported sooner than those who did not. Certain reminders led to fewer payment cancellations, with a decrease from 3.9 to 2.2 per cent. These findings have been scaled up to help reduce payment cancellations.
- The Department worked with the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to refocus **Farm Household Allowance** policy from the farmer's perspective. Together we brought insights from key stakeholders, such as farmers, rural industry groups and rural financial counsellors into the design process, including involving some of these stakeholders directly to work through options in the Department's Design Hubs. As a result, the way the service is delivered has been refocused to put the needs of farmers and their partners at the centre of the process. Rather than completing complex procedures before their claim is considered, farmers and their partners can now start receiving financial support before completing a detailed Farm Financial Assessment. This eases the immediate financial concerns of farmers and their partners as they work through the full assessment process.

The Department's next challenge in placing the citizen at the core of policy is in predicting future needs through identifying trends and change. Responding well to the new and emerging needs of the citizen will again be a strong determinant of levels of trust in the APS and in government overall.

## HARNESSING THE POWER OF DATA

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The design of effective and innovative services for citizens must be informed by a strong evidence base supported by timely and accurate data and analysis. This includes data to identify failure points in design or implementation, as well as the recognition of relevant trends or risks that require change. Data is a valued departmental asset and our departmental Data Strategy provides structural responsibility for leading governance, control and policy development. The Strategy also has a forward-looking responsibility to lead the development and use of our substantial data assets, using data capability and insights to improve service delivery, citizen experience and outcomes for government. In these types of scenarios, the Department can continue to develop a leadership role by bringing together services and policies that may be delivered by a wide range of Commonwealth and State and Territory governments so that the citizen can meet their obligations and access their entitlements smoothly and quickly.

The Department is keenly aware of the responsibilities and risks associated with the management and protection of information relating to customers. Citizens have high expectations of trust in the Australian Government's ability to capture, manage and use personal data appropriately and with necessary safeguards and isolated failures or breaches have consequences for perception of the APS overall. The development of our Data Strategy and related work with external stakeholders is supporting consistent approaches to data management that will contribute to increased customer confidence. It will be increasingly important to engage citizens in discussions around data collection and use to build trust and agreement in the future.

Strong cyber security is a key component of citizen trust in government's ability to keep data safe and the Department takes this responsibility very seriously, constantly evolving

and continually reviewing security systems to ensure its digital services and information are protected, including the myGov digital service.

The Whole of Government Protective Security Policy Framework is used to ensure the security of information, information systems, physical assets and people. Systems and policies are developed in accordance with the Framework, which is also supported by the Australian Signals Directorate's Information Security Manual. The Department's Cyber Security Operations Centre works collaboratively with national and international agencies as well as multiple vendors to ensure our operations are in line with global best practice. In addition, the Department is focussed on increasing cyber security awareness within our workforce as an additional line of defence.

The Department has unmatched capability and expertise, including the value of our data holdings, which can be harnessed across many aspects of government. The Department is prioritising approaches to maximise the use of its data assets, including through efforts to increase participation and collaboration in cross-government data forums. A focus on building data analytical capability is expected to complement efforts to engage more broadly across the APS to support policy-making activities.

The Department administers and collects large amounts of data for the services it delivers on behalf of the policy agencies, which informs the design and transformation of services for citizens. The data collected by the Department is owned, ultimately, by policy agencies, and they are consulted in relation to any changes to the management and use of that information.

There are also a number of well-established processes and protocols in place in relation to the use and availability of this data, especially with respect to protecting an individual's privacy. The Department works within a framework of bilateral agreements, information and information release protocols in place with policy agencies as well as the requirements of the respective social security and health related legislation, the *Privacy Act 1988*, the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* and secrecy provisions.

The Department is supportive of broader reforms underway including the establishment of a National Data Commissioner as well as new legislation to improve the sharing, linkage, use and reuse of public sector data while ensuring data security and privacy. Work underway across the APS to establish a centralised governance framework for the use and management of its data holdings will support these reforms as well as ensure their security.

In order to best position the APS to succeed, it is essential that staff are equipped with the tools and capabilities to perform in a fast-paced, data-rich environment. Skills to support data analysis and research to better inform and provide evidence for policy development should be prioritised and grown, and this is a particular focus for the Department. Data is inherent to how the Department – and the APS – proceeds in almost every respect, and analysis needs to incorporate policy thinking to better measure key elements of citizen experience that can inform improvements and enhance performance. Timely data on customer dissatisfaction with services, for example, could facilitate swift responsive solutions, building greater trust in government. The Department is increasingly seeking to use data to understand and analyse customer needs and apply these insights to inform operational responses and policy considerations.

## A SUSTAINABLE AND HIGHLY CAPABLE WORKFORCE

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A highly skilled, efficient and responsive APS workforce is essential to providing quality support to government and citizens. The Department's workforce planning is a continuous process to identify the capabilities required for current and future priorities. Building the sustainable and capable workforce we need includes taking into account:

- **Increasingly multi-disciplinary contexts** – drawing expertise from across the breadth of the public sector, private and community sectors, as well as academia.
- **... where capability is vital** – we need people who care, are present, communicate well, and are able to work through systems and structures to deliver solutions. Bringing the voice of the citizen to government requires that we both understand what the citizen needs and are able to work within (and influence) the broader government decision-making process. Qualities such as compassion and concern for customers are valued and are a driving motivation for staff.

- **... alongside culture and mindset** – the Department is focused on maintaining a culture in which people are valued, encouraged to collaborate, and empowered (to be bold, speak up and put forward ideas).
- **... with leadership being critical** to the quality of outcomes achieved – both *what* is delivered but also *how* it is delivered. The right leaders are fundamental to organisational health and collaboration across boundaries (within organisations, across the APS and beyond). This year the Department has set clear expectations of all of our Senior Executive Service (SES) staff to exemplify desired behaviours, with assessment through 360 degree feedback and outstanding leadership credentials being fundamental to our SES recruitment decisions.

The Department's workforce needs to understand and reflect the diversity of the community that uses its services. Accordingly, people strategies are designed to reflect different backgrounds and experience. For example, in addition to the Department's expansive geographic employment profile extending across regional and remote Australia, around a quarter of the Department's employees identify as being from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, 4.9 per cent as having a disability and 5.2 per cent as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous and multicultural awareness and capability is promoted to all staff to support a workplace that better addresses the needs of our customers, employees and partner organisations.

To develop a sustainable workforce that is responsive and adaptable, the Department is enhancing its workforce model to allow some services to be delivered through selected external providers, including through blended ongoing/non-ongoing and public/private staffing arrangements. This workforce model enables appropriate targeting of staff expertise to more complex activities without affecting efficient processing of simple enquiries, and can provide the Department with additional flexibility and responsiveness, including with new or emerging technology. This blending of public and private sector expertise supports service delivery and transformation in the Department – and across the APS more broadly. In particular, as many of today's transformational projects carry large implementation risks, it is important to look across all sectors to identify best practice and draw on expertise and lessons learnt in areas such as ICT, transformational change and

delivery of shared services. Private sector experience at senior levels in the Department sits alongside those with substantial APS experience – with this mix of experience and expertise across the senior executive team driving progress across projects, policy and reform. At the same time, public sector experience, corporate memory and expertise in service delivery, program and policy areas, and the embedding of public sector values in government service delivery, must be valued and utilised.

## ROLE AND VALUE OF THE APS

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The APS is a highly skilled and values-driven institution that operates successfully in a challenging, complex, ambiguous and continually evolving environment. In this context, the APS manages particular priorities and issues, and operates under particular pressures and constraints. These are not experienced, or experienced to a lesser degree, in other sectors as the APS has a deeper and broader accountability to the Australian people as both taxpayers and customers. Resourcing for how we meet the spectrum of needs and expectations of citizens can drive levels of service which are different to those of other sectors (including the private sector) – which has consequential impacts on levels of customer satisfaction and, potentially, overall trust in government. The APS has proven it is able to adapt to serve successive governments, including shifting priorities and processes to deliver for respective Ministers and governments.

As with most very large organisations, the APS works best where there are clear and articulated accountabilities, overlaid with a clear and articulated expectation of collaboration and a focus on solutions. Indeed, collaboration across boundaries and finding solutions spanning traditional silos is increasingly necessary across the APS – but this shouldn't be confused with creating diffuse or unclear accountabilities. This is particularly important given the regulatory roles and responsibilities of the APS to government and the citizen.

Notwithstanding the need for clear accountabilities, flexibility and responsiveness are crucial to the ability of the APS to effectively manage drivers such as legislative activity, changes to policy priorities, shifts in government resourcing parameters, changing economic

or demographic influences, or national emergencies. The staff who support these responses have targeted skills and experience, including in areas that are not easily replaced by either the private sector or academia – where, respectively, expertise in ‘unprofitable’ areas may be scarce and experience in implementation may be less developed. The APS needs to be open to opportunities to learn from and leverage non-government sector experience, while being aware that we are affected by different factors and risks.

Building trust with the community is essential for the public service to successfully deliver the objectives of government in the future. The APS needs mechanisms to support staff engagement with citizens to ensure the voice of the citizen is present in policy settings and service design. This could entail drawing on or establishing frameworks and fora that enable co-design with diverse stakeholders, including citizens and across public and private sectors. Strong community relationships and understanding will better support engagement with the mutual obligation arrangements that are a cornerstone of the Australian welfare and participation system.

The role of the APS needs to be effective within the broader Australian system of government, maintaining linkages and working with States and Territories with the aim of serving the Australian people as a whole.

Leadership in the APS will be a strong determinant of future success, in establishing clear strategic direction as well as in embedding values that support and develop people. In addition to maintaining operational activity, the SES has a critical role in safeguarding and fostering organisational health. The responsibility of the SES to demonstrate and instil workplace behaviours and ethos that align with APS values must be measured and assessed as part of performance and recruitment processes.

Closely linked to leadership is the importance of a united workplace culture across the APS that supports collaborative innovation and improvement. Critically, this culture would endorse learning from both success and failure (such as both what works and what doesn’t), including explicitly sharing insights from failure. This culture would also facilitate transferability of resources, skills, intellectual property assets and technology – thereby

contributing to greater whole of government efficiencies. All of this should sit alongside continuing efforts to widen the capability of the APS with non-government learnings, expertise and recruitment.

## Attachment A: BACKGROUND/ADDITIONAL DETAIL

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- The Department of Human Services (the Department) is the Australian Government's largest service delivery organisation, responsible for approximately 35 per cent of government expenditure.
- The Department administers payments and associated services for multiple government agencies and provides advice to government on the delivery of welfare, health and child support services.
- The majority of services provided by the Department are delivered through:
  - The Centrelink program which delivers a range of government payments and services to Australians – including retirees, families, carers, parents, people with disability, Indigenous people, and people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The Centrelink programme also provides services at times of major change and emergency.
  - Aged care payments are made by the Department to services funded under the *Aged Care Act 1997* including residential care, home care and flexible care services.
  - The Medicare program which supports the health of Australians through efficient services and payments, such as Medicare benefits, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, digital health, the Private Health Insurance Rebate, the Australian Immunisation Register, the National Bowel Cancer Screening Register, the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register and the Australian Organ Donor Register and related services for eligible veterans, their spouses and dependants.
  - The Child Support program, which provides support to separated parents to provide the financial support necessary for their children's wellbeing.
- The Department also delivers other services including the Tasmanian Freight Equalisation Scheme; whole of government services such as myGov; and provides capability for partner agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with the Australian Passport Information Service and hotline capabilities for both national and international emergencies.

- In addition, the Minister for Human Services is responsible for Australian Hearing, a statutory authority that provides a full range of hearing services, including assessing hearing, fitting hearing devices and providing counselling and rehabilitative programs to enable eligible clients to manage their hearing impairment.
- The Department's scale, expertise, delivery network and digital services are unique. In 2016–17 the Department administered payments of over \$174 billion; processed over 399 million Medicare, 3.8 million welfare and over 60,000 aged care claims; facilitated the transfer of \$3.5 billion to support 1.2 million children; managed over 700 million digital and self-service transactions; and responded to 52 million phone calls and 19 million visits to its 349 service centres.
- Geographically, the Department offers almost 600 service points in regional, rural and remote Australia, providing a network for Australians to access services and self-help facilities.
- The Department's ICT systems, infrastructure and networks are critical to the digital delivery of government services. Over past years, the Department has improved the availability and security of its ICT through a rigorous programme to modernise its hardware and build a skilled and committed ICT workforce.
- The Department's data wealth, presence across Australia, and interaction with almost all Australians at some point in their lives create opportunities for economies of scale and allow the Department to develop and deliver effective services based on customer-centric design principles for all Australians.
- In June 2017, the Department created a new senior role—the Chief Citizen Experience Officer—as part of our increased focus on user-centred design. The Chief Citizen Experience Officer is responsible for ensuring the systems we use meet community needs and expectations.