

The Auditor-General  
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Performance Audit

# **Management of the Multicultural Servicing Strategy for the Delivery of Centrelink Services**

**Department of Human Services**

Australian National Audit Office

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of Australia 2012

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Canberra ACT  
18 June 2012

Dear Mr President  
Dear Mr Speaker

The Australian National Audit Office has undertaken an independent performance audit in the Department of Human Services in accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. I present the report of this audit and the accompanying brochure to the Parliament. The report is titled *Management of the Multicultural Servicing Strategy for the Delivery of Centrelink Services*.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's Homepage—<http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely



Ian McPhee  
Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate  
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT

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# Contents

Abbreviations.....	7
Glossary .....	8
<b>Summary and Recommendations .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Summary .....	11
Introduction .....	11
Providing Centrelink services to DCALB customers.....	11
Audit objective, criteria and scope .....	15
Overall conclusion.....	16
Key findings.....	19
Summary of agency response .....	24
Recommendations .....	25
<b>Audit Findings .....</b>	<b>27</b>
1. Introduction .....	29
Background .....	29
Providing Centrelink services to DCALB customers.....	30
The Multicultural Servicing Strategy .....	34
Legislative and policy environment.....	38
Audit approach .....	39
2. Governance and Coordination .....	41
Introduction .....	41
Governance and coordination arrangements .....	41
Understanding of roles and responsibilities .....	42
Support and coordination from the Multicultural Services Branch.....	43
Flexibility for local priorities .....	46
Conclusion .....	47
3. Accessibility and Flexibility.....	49
Introduction .....	49
Accessibility.....	49
Flexibility .....	57
Customer satisfaction.....	60
International review of multicultural services .....	62
Conclusion .....	63
4. Engagement with External Stakeholders .....	64
Introduction .....	64
Stakeholder engagement at the national level.....	65
Stakeholder engagement at the Service Zone level .....	67
Conclusion .....	71

5. Performance Measurement and Reporting.....	72
Introduction .....	72
Outputs measurement and reporting .....	73
Outcomes measurement and reporting .....	77
Conclusion .....	84
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>87</b>
Appendix 1: Objectives of the Multicultural Servicing Strategy .....	89
Appendix 2: Access and Equity Framework.....	91
Index.....	92
Series Titles.....	93
Current Better Practice Guides .....	98

**Tables**

Table 1.1	Distribution of customers from a DCALB by Service Zone, January 2012.....	31
Table 1.2	Proportion of customers from a DCALB by major payment type, January 2012.....	33
Table 1.3	Multicultural Priorities for 2010–11 and 2011–12.....	35
Table 1.4	Estimate of Multicultural Servicing Strategy resources .....	37
Table 3.1	Multicultural training and support provided to employees .....	55
Table 3.2	Results from the national customer satisfaction survey .....	60
Table 3.3	Results from the CSC customer satisfaction survey .....	61
Table 3.4	Results from the call centre satisfaction survey .....	61
Table 4.1	Non-government service providers .....	68
Table 5.1	SMART characteristics of performance measures.....	73
Table 5.2	Language Services output indicators .....	74

**Figures**

Figure 2.1	Key roles and responsibilities for the Multicultural Servicing Strategy .....	42
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# Abbreviations

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ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
CSA	Customer Service Advisor
CSC	Customer Service Centre
DCALB	Diverse Cultural and Linguistic Background
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DHS	Australian Government Department of Human Services
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
ICFD	Integrated Customer Feedback Database
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
MART	MSO Activity Recording Tool
MSB	Multicultural Services Branch
MSO	Multicultural Services Officer
MSS	Multicultural Servicing Strategy

## Glossary

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Centrelink	<p>The Department of Human Services (DHS) delivers a range of payments and services for retirees, the unemployed, families, carers, parents, people with disabilities, Indigenous Australians, and people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and provides services at times of major change. Prior to July 2011, Centrelink delivered these payments and services as a separate agency. In July 2011, the <i>Human Services Legislation Amendment Act 2011</i> integrated the services of Medicare Australia and Centrelink into DHS.</p> <p>In this report, references to Centrelink or Centrelink services prior to July 2011 are references to Centrelink as an agency. References to Centrelink services after July 2011 are references to DHS' delivery of Centrelink services.</p>
MART	<p>Database that enables Multicultural Service Officers (MSOs) to enter information about the activities they undertake in the community. MART is the source of the reported performance data on activity-based MSO Program outputs. It is also used by MSO supervisors to monitor and manage MSOs' work.</p>
Refugee Customer	<p>A customer accessing Centrelink services is classified as a refugee if they have held a selected range of Refugee or Humanitarian visa sub-classes.</p>
Service Zone	<p>Service Zones refer to geographical areas of Australia. The DHS network is divided into 16 Service Zones.</p>



# Summary and Recommendations



# Summary

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## Introduction

1. Australia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. The 2006 Census of Population and Housing indicated that 22 per cent of people in Australia (4.4 million people) were born overseas<sup>1</sup>, and since that time this has continued to grow.<sup>2</sup> At the census date, 16 per cent of Australians spoke a language other than English, 17 per cent of whom did not speak English well or at all.<sup>3</sup> In total, almost 400 different languages were spoken in homes across Australia.<sup>4</sup>

2. People from a diverse cultural and linguistic background (DCALB) can face barriers to accessing government services. In addition to difficulties with English language and literacy, other barriers can include: the effects of torture and trauma; fear of government; cultural misunderstandings; and discrimination. To help people overcome these barriers, the Australian Government's 2011 multicultural policy, *The People of Australia—Australia's Multicultural Policy*, 'acknowledges that government services and programs must be responsive to the needs of our culturally diverse communities'. Further, the policy 'commits to an access and equity framework to ensure the onus is on government to provide equitable services to Australians from all backgrounds'.

## Providing Centrelink services to DCALB customers

3. As one of the Australian Government's primary service delivery agencies, the Department of Human Services (DHS) has a key role in helping to meet the commitments outlined in the multicultural policy. DHS administers more than \$130 billion in payments and delivers over 200 services

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2008, Census Tables - Cat. No.3105.0.65.001*, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *1301.0 – Year Book Australia, 2009-10*, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2008, Census Tables, Country of Birth of Person, Proficiency of Spoken English/Language by Sex Cat. No. 2068.0*, 2008.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Census of Population and Housing: Media Releases and Fact Sheets*, 2007.

to the community on an annual basis. A significant part of DHS' responsibilities is the delivery of Centrelink services.<sup>5</sup>

4. In 2010–11, Centrelink administered \$90.5 billion in payments and provided services to 7.1 million customers. Around 20 per cent of these customers are identified as being from a DCALB.<sup>6</sup> Within the DCALB customer group there are sub-groups, in particular migrants with limited English competency and many refugees, who can be particularly disadvantaged by cultural and linguistic barriers. DHS data indicates that of all customers accessing Centrelink services, approximately six per cent require an interpreter<sup>7</sup> and around two per cent have entered Australia as refugees.<sup>8</sup>

5. DCALB customers are located across Australia and in all DHS Service Zones.<sup>9</sup> The higher numbers of DCALB customers are generally in metropolitan areas, with 39 per cent of customers in the Sydney Service Zone being from a DCALB. The uneven geographical spread of DCALB customers, and the variation in their needs, creates challenges to providing consistently accessible services across the 313 customer service centres (CSCs) and 25 call centres<sup>10</sup> that deliver Centrelink services.

6. The growing diversity within the DCALB customer group resulting from the increased variety in the countries, cultures and languages of new arrivals is also another challenge. A comparison of the most commonly used languages for all DCALB customers with the languages used by more recently

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<sup>5</sup> On 1 July 2011, the *Human Services Legislation Amendment Act 2011* integrated the services of Centrelink and Medicare Australia into the Department of Human Services (DHS). In this report, references to Centrelink prior to July 2011 are references to Centrelink as an agency. References to Centrelink after July 2011 are references to the activities of DHS, which delivers Centrelink services and payments.

<sup>6</sup> Centrelink, *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–2013*, [Internet]; Centrelink, 2010, available from <[www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/our\\_objectives.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/our_objectives.htm)> [accessed on 10 June 2011].

DHS defines DCALB customers as those people who were born overseas in non-English speaking countries (and so excludes those born in New Zealand, USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Ireland or South Africa), or for whom English is not the main language spoken at home.

<sup>7</sup> The estimated figure is likely to be an underestimate. DHS advised that the requirement to record whether a customer requires an interpreter has only been mandatory since September 2000, therefore, some long-term DCALB customers requiring an interpreter may not be included in the data.

<sup>8</sup> A customer is counted as a refugee if they have held a selected range of Refugee or Humanitarian visa sub-classes.

<sup>9</sup> Service Zones refer to geographical areas of Australia. DHS' network is divided into 16 Service Zones.

<sup>10</sup> Call centres are now known as DHS Smart Centres.

arrived DCALB customers illustrates this increasing diversity. The main preferred spoken languages, other than English, for all DCALB customers are Vietnamese, Greek, Arabic, Italian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish, Turkish and Serbian; whereas the current languages in high interpreter demand for more recently arrived DCALB customers are Arabic, Karen, Burmese, Persian, Dari, Chin, Chaldean, Assyrian, Dinka, Nepali and Kirundi.<sup>11</sup>

## The Multicultural Servicing Strategy

7. The Multicultural Servicing Strategy (MSS), *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–13*<sup>12</sup>, formalises the approach to providing Centrelink services to DCALB customers. The MSS is the latest version in a series of strategies targeted at DCALB customers, which started with the previous Department of Social Security. Broadly, the objective of the MSS is to ensure that services are accessible, flexible and meet the needs of DCALB customers so that they can access and participate in government programs and achieve equitable outcomes.

8. The MSS has four main components—Language Services, the Multicultural Services Officer (MSO) Program, Stakeholder Engagement Strategies, and Employee Support Tools and Strategies. In support of the MSS, at least \$35 million has been spent across the main components in each of the last two years.<sup>13</sup>

9. Centrelink language services for DCALB customers include free interpreter services in around 235 languages, and a Multilingual Call Centre where customers can speak directly to bilingual staff in 33 languages. In 2010–11, the Multilingual Call Centre received 824 000 calls. There is also a range of translated written and audio information available on the DHS website.

10. The MSO Program is a national network of around 70 employees, located across the Service Zones, whose responsibilities include:

- disseminating information to, and gathering feedback from, customers and community organisations;

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<sup>11</sup> Centrelink, *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–2013*, op. cit.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Funding for the MSS has been estimated and is likely to be an underestimate as DHS was unable to provide a figure for total expenditure.

- participating in local community and inter-agency networks with the aim of improving services to DCALB customers;
- being information conduits between the Multicultural Services Branch (MSB)<sup>14</sup> and the Service Zones;
- integrating multicultural service issues into Service Zone business priorities; and
- providing training and support to staff on multicultural service delivery.<sup>15</sup>

11. In addition to MSOs' community engagement role, there are broader stakeholder engagement strategies for the MSS, which include:

- state and national community consultation forums to provide feedback on the quality and effectiveness of services to DCALB customers;
- a national newsletter—*The Journey*—to provide information on events and changes to policies and payments affecting DCALB customers; and
- regular information via SBS radio, community radio stations and ethnic newspapers throughout Australia.

12. Further to the support and training that MSOs provide to Customer Service Advisors (CSAs), there are a range of support tools for staff on the intranet, including: online learning packages; fact sheets on different cultural and linguistic groups; and *A Guide to Ethnic Naming Practices* that provides the naming conventions of 66 different language groups.

13. The MSS, including its objectives, is currently being revised to reflect the new departmental arrangements and the Service Delivery Reform program.<sup>16</sup> DHS has advised that it is progressively extending the MSS from covering only Centrelink services to all the services delivered by DHS, including Medicare and Child Support services.

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<sup>14</sup> The Multicultural Services Branch (MSB) performs a range of co-ordinating and support functions for the MSS, including the interpreter and translation services, and multicultural communication and marketing. MSB supports the MSO Program and manages relationships with other organisations at the national level, for example, the National Multicultural Advisory Group.

<sup>15</sup> Centrelink, *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–2013*, op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Announced in 2009, and running until 2021, the Service Delivery Reform program has three objectives: to make people's dealings with government easier through better delivery and coordination of services; to achieve more effective service delivery outcomes for government; and to improve the efficiency of service delivery.

## Audit objective, criteria and scope

14. The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the management of the MSS for the delivery of Centrelink services. The management of the MSS was assessed against the following criteria:

- there are effective planning arrangements to identify and address the evolving needs of DCALB customers;
- service delivery arrangements meet the current needs of DCALB customers; and
- there are effective performance monitoring and reporting arrangements which are used to improve service delivery.

15. Given the nature of the audit topic, a wide range of government and non-government stakeholders (including multicultural community organisations) were interviewed. In addition to the documentary evidence, data and interviews with DHS staff, the conclusions and findings of the audit draw on the stakeholder interviews. Further, a desktop review of eight overseas organisations that play a role in social policy, services and payments was conducted to inform the audit.

16. The audit scope did not include:

- other DHS services delivered to multicultural customers, such as Medicare services;
- Centrelink services for Australian customers living overseas (many of whom are from a DCALB); and
- DHS services targeted at Indigenous customers.

17. In 2009 the Commonwealth Ombudsman reviewed Centrelink's interpreter services and concluded that Centrelink's policies generally aligned with best practice principles in the use of interpreters. Therefore, the audit did not focus in detail on this aspect of the MSS.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Commonwealth Ombudsman, *The Use of Interpreters*, Report No. 03/2009, 2009.

## Overall conclusion

18. Australia is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in the world. Since 1945, seven million people have migrated to Australia, and today one in four Australians were born overseas.<sup>18</sup>

19. People from a diverse cultural and linguistic background (DCALB) can face barriers, particularly difficulties with English language and literacy, which impact on their ability to participate in society and access government services. The Australian Government's *The People of Australia—Australia's Multicultural Policy*, promotes four policy principles that support Australia's approach to multiculturalism. Principle 2 is of particular relevance to the Government's expectations around participation and the services available to people from a DCALB:

Principle 2: The Australian Government is committed to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.<sup>19</sup>

20. As a key Australian Government service delivery agency, DHS plays an important role in contributing to this commitment. Reflecting the diversity of the Australian population, approximately 20 per cent of the 7.1 million customers receiving Centrelink services are identified as coming from DCALBs, with around six per cent of customers requiring an interpreter to access Centrelink services.<sup>20</sup>

21. The approach to providing Centrelink services to DCALB customers is formalised in the Multicultural Servicing Strategy (MSS)—*Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–13*. The MSS comprises four main components—Language Services, the Multicultural Services Officer Program, Stakeholder Engagement Strategies, and Employee Support Tools and Strategies.

22. Overall, through effectively managing the MSS, DHS identifies and addresses the current and evolving needs of DCALB customers accessing Centrelink services. The coordinated interaction between the four components of the MSS, driven by the Multicultural Services Branch (MSB) and

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<sup>18</sup> Australian Government, *The People of Australia—Australia's Multicultural Policy*, 2011, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> Data provided by DHS.



Multicultural Services Officers (MSO), allows priorities to be determined and subsequent strategies to be developed and implemented. Complementing the central focus is a flexible approach at the Service Zone level, which allows services to be tailored to the local communities. Notwithstanding the overall success of the approach to delivering Centrelink services to DCALB customers, there are opportunities to improve the management of the MSS. These include strengthening the performance management and reporting arrangements to better support management's decision-making and build on the services currently provided to DCALB customers.

**23.** The governance and coordination arrangements for the MSS support a consistent understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the many staff involved. As the central area responsible for multicultural services, MSB provides a strategic framework for the MSS and gathers, analyses and disseminates information to support the strategy and shape its future directions. More broadly, among the MSOs, Service Zone managers and front-line Customer Service Advisors (CSAs), there is a common recognition of the important role all staff have in making services accessible to DCALB customers.

**24.** A central component in the effective management of the MSS is the MSO Program. A national network of around 70 MSOs, based in all Service Zones, often works in active partnership with other local service providers such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions, Humanitarian Settlement Service providers and Job Services Australia providers to deliver coordinated services to DCALB customers. MSOs also provide outreach services to individual DCALB customers and support and train front-line staff to provide culturally competent services. Stakeholders and staff provided consistently positive feedback about the work performed by MSOs.

**25.** Providing accessible and flexible services to DCALB customers is an objective of the MSS. Through the MSS, accessibility is addressed in many ways including: providing language services and translated written information to DCALB customers; conducting training and providing support to staff; and using targeted measures such as refugee servicing units. Closely linked to accessible services are flexible services that evolve in response to the changing needs of DCALB customers. Examples of the flexibility in DHS' approach to delivering Centrelink services to DCALB customers include:

having strategies to find interpreters in emerging languages<sup>21</sup>; and developing audio/visual information on Centrelink services for DCALB customers with low literacy levels in their own language.

26. A desktop review comparing Centrelink multicultural services with eight international organisations playing a role in social policy, services and payments indicates that DHS delivers a comparatively wide range of multicultural services. The Multilingual Call Centre which enables customers to speak directly to bilingual staff about Centrelink services in 33 languages is one example of the wide range of services. Only one other organisation offered a similar but reduced service, providing 11 languages on a bilingual basis.

27. As previously mentioned, performance measurement and reporting is the main area where there is scope for improvement with the MSS. The processes and strategies underpinning the MSS, combined with the views from a wide range of stakeholders and staff, support the conclusion that Centrelink services are accessible and flexible. However, there is an absence of regular and reliable data and reporting on important indicators for DCALB customers, such as their relative levels of satisfaction with Centrelink services and the relative accuracy and timeliness of their payments. This makes it difficult for DHS to directly assess the impact of the MSS and make management decisions in response. Stakeholders are likewise limited in their ability to assess the effectiveness of the MSS through external reporting by DHS.

28. The limited customer satisfaction data that is available suggests that DCALB customers with no or low language barriers are as satisfied with Centrelink services as the general customer population. Those customers with less proficiency in English appear to still have relatively high levels of satisfaction, however, these are somewhat lower than the general customer population.

29. To help DHS better understand the impact of various components of the MSS, the ANAO has made one recommendation aimed at improving performance measurement and reporting. In this context, the planned expansion of the MSS from Centrelink services to all DHS services provides an opportunity to build on the current arrangements. Further, from an operational perspective, the established expertise and existing processes and

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<sup>21</sup> Emerging languages are languages of newly arrived DCALB customers that have not previously been required in Centrelink.

strategies will form a sound basis for an expansion of the MSS, which is consistent with the Australian Government's expectation that government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from DCALBs.

## Key findings

### Governance and coordination (Chapter 2)

30. The governance and coordination arrangements for the MSS are effective in supporting consistent, accessible and flexible services for DCALB customers across the 16 Service Zones, and the network of 313 CSCs and 25 call centres. Relevant staff have a good understanding of their various roles under the MSS, with ownership for the MSS appropriately shared between MSB and the Service Zones.

31. MSB and the MSO Program are important components of the governance arrangements. MSB provides effective support and coordination, while encouraging flexibility for local priorities and circumstances at the Service Zone level. MSOs and their supervisors have accountabilities and responsibilities to both their Service Zone and to MSB. MSOs regularly interact with MSB, for example, to report on national MSS priorities and local-level initiatives. MSOs and their supervisors also have influential relationships with CSC managers, which facilitate the negotiation of training for staff and the sharing of information gathered from stakeholder engagement. These interactions and relationships help to provide an effective link between MSB and the Service Zones, as well as being a key mechanism for embedding multicultural issues at the CSC level.

### Accessibility and flexibility (Chapter 3)

32. Improving access to government services for DCALB customers is a key principle of the Australian Government's multicultural policy and Access and Equity Framework.<sup>22</sup> DHS' management of the MSS is effective in improving access for DCALB customers to Centrelink services and facilitates the flexibility to respond to their evolving needs. A desktop review of

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<sup>22</sup> The Access and Equity Framework sets out four principles for Australian Government funded service delivery ('responsiveness', 'communication', 'accountability' and 'leadership') and provides a guide for agencies to deliver and report on services and programs that are responsive to the needs of Australians from DCALBs. Australian Government, *Access and Equity in Government Services Report 2008–10*, 2011.

multicultural services delivered by eight foreign government organisations playing a role in social policy, services and payments shows that, based on publicly available information, a comparatively wide range of multicultural Centrelink services are delivered.

33. Refugee servicing units improve access to services for recently arrived refugee customers, while the language services and translated materials directly improve access for customers with limited English proficiency. Stakeholders were generally satisfied with the language services offered to access Centrelink services, which is consistent with a 2009 Commonwealth Ombudsman report<sup>23</sup> that concluded that Centrelink's policies aligned with best practice for the use of interpreters. While challenges remain in finding high quality interpreters in emerging languages, DHS has demonstrated initiative and flexibility in locating these skills. A range of other issues facing DCALB customers, such as understanding DHS letters and the cost of using mobile phones to contact call centres in cases where customers do not have fixed phone lines, are less readily resolved due to resource and other constraints.

34. To help improve customer accessibility, staff are provided with support and training to assist them with using interpreters, and to increase their cultural awareness and understanding. The majority of training and support for staff is delivered informally by MSOs. The effectiveness of this training was reflected in staff feedback and stakeholders' positive views on the cultural competency of front-line employees. The development work currently being undertaken in DHS around mandatory core training provides an opportunity to also enhance formal training requirements and include an element of multicultural training in the final package.

35. Closely linked to accessibility is flexibility in service delivery. Several initiatives show that DHS has identified and responded to the changing needs of DCALB customers by adopting a flexible approach to delivering Centrelink services. These initiatives include: active strategies to find interpreters for emerging languages to meet the growing diversity of DCALB customers; and developing audio/visual information materials on Centrelink services for groups of DCALB customers who arrive in Australia with low literacy levels in their own language.

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<sup>23</sup> Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Use of Interpreters*, Report No. 03/2009, 2009.

36. Flexibility in service delivery can also depend on the funding model underpinning a program or strategy. Rather than having a direct budget, the different components of the MSS are funded through various internal budgets, where the funding arrangements are not generally directly based on the number and diversity of DCALB customers. The planned expansion of the MSS from Centrelink services to all DHS services provides an opportunity to share the benefits of the MSS more broadly. However, as the number of DCALB customers and services covered by the MSS increases, so too will the number of activities and resources required. Therefore, one important consideration for DHS will be resource allocation for the MSS.

37. Measuring customer satisfaction provides an important indicator of whether DHS is providing accessible and flexible services, and meeting the diverse needs of its DCALB customers. The limited survey results that are available suggest that customers for whom language is not a particular barrier to accessing Centrelink services are generally as satisfied as other customers. However, the results also suggest that those customers who face language barriers are somewhat less satisfied than overall customers. Reliable customer satisfaction results are required to more accurately assess the views of DCALB customers with limited English proficiency.

#### **Engagement with external stakeholders (Chapter 4)**

38. DHS effectively engages with external stakeholders about the delivery of Centrelink services, both in terms of information sharing and active participation arrangements.<sup>24</sup> The engagement arrangements with external stakeholders at the national level focus on information sharing with Australian Government agencies and peak multicultural community organisations. MSB plays the central role in engaging with these external stakeholders.

39. The engagement with external stakeholders in the states and territories is mainly undertaken by staff in the Service Zones, in particular by the MSOs. At the Service Zone level, these external stakeholders include: federal, state, territory and local government agencies; multicultural community organisations; and non-government service providers such as Job Services

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<sup>24</sup> Engagement with external stakeholders encompasses varying levels of participation, which the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development classifies into: information sharing arrangements, through which a government agency disseminates information to and collects information (such as feedback) from stakeholders; and active participation arrangements, which involve a more advanced relationship that is based on the principle of partnership.

Australia providers, Humanitarian Settlement Service providers and English language training organisations.

40. DHS has a wide range of engagement arrangements in relation to the delivery of Centrelink services, and is perceived by external stakeholders as a valued contributor or partner. Broader stakeholder engagement has also enabled DHS to collect and share feedback on issues encountered by DCALB customers in relation to Centrelink services and other government agencies' policies.

### **Performance measurement and reporting (Chapter 5)**

41. In order to assess performance it is important that agencies have in place key performance indicators (KPIs) that enable the measurement and assessment of progress towards meeting relevant objectives. KPIs should cover both the outputs being delivered and the outcomes being achieved, as they relate to the overall objective(s). In addition, a mix of quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (descriptive) indicators, with associated targets, allows agencies to assess the appropriateness, success, shortcomings and/or future directions of programs and strategies.

42. The public and internal processes used to measure and report on the performance of the MSS include a range of quantitative and qualitative output measures, such as the number of languages in which services are provided and descriptions of the partnerships undertaken with community stakeholders. While many of the qualitative output indicators contain elements that are consistent with the SMART<sup>25</sup> criteria, the lack of targets, historical data and clarity around the definition of quantitative indicators means that an important part of the reporting on the performance of the MSS is limited.

43. In addition to the shortcomings with the output measures for the MSS, there are very few regular and reliable outcome indicators that measure, for example, DCALB customers' satisfaction levels, complaint levels or the accuracy and timeliness of payments made to DCALB customers. The lack of such indicators limits the ability of DHS and stakeholders to accurately assess the direct impact and effectiveness of the MSS.

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<sup>25</sup> SMART is one of a number of methodologies that can be used to determine if a group of selected indicators contain a range of characteristics (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timed) that allow for the identification of effective delivery of a program objective.

44. Much of the customer and survey data collected in relation to Centrelink services includes indicators of whether the customer is from a DCALB. There is scope to make further use of existing data to improve the performance monitoring and reporting for the MSS, particularly in relation to the outcome areas outlined above.

45. Customer satisfaction is a key outcome indicator for determining the effectiveness of the MSS. DHS regularly conducts customer surveys, however no results have been publicly reported for DCALB customers in recent years. The satisfaction results for DCALB customers that have been internally reported are generally only reliable for those DCALB customers who speak English. DHS has advised that as part of the Service Delivery Reform program, it is re-examining its approach to customer surveys. This presents an opportunity to put in place a system from which DHS can obtain and report results for DCALB customers, including for those customers who do not speak English.

46. Another relevant indicator is complaint levels for DCALB customers compared to complaint levels for all customers. However, for a number of reasons, including that DCALB customers are more likely to make a complaint via community groups rather than using the more common complaint channels, the level of complaints from DCALB customers are under-reported. The current work around the implementation of a common DHS approach to the recording and reporting of feedback provides an opportunity to investigate ways in which to better capture complaints made by DCALB customers to community groups. A common approach would also allow such complaints to be subject to the same quality assurance processes that apply to complaints made through other channels.

47. DHS also has a range of service quality indicators for the Centrelink services it delivers, such as measures of the accuracy and timeliness of payments. Generally, these are only reported for all customers, that is, there is no standard disaggregation for DCALB customers. DHS advised that it would be possible to disaggregate a number of these service quality indicators for DCALB customers and/or other DCALB sub-groups (such as refugee customers). Disaggregation by DCALB customer groups would assist with identifying any performance gaps when the results for DCALB customer groups were compared to those for all customers.

## Summary of agency response

48. The Department of Human Services (the department) welcomes this report. It accurately reflects the work the department undertakes to address the needs of customers from a diverse cultural and linguistic background.

49. It is pleasing that the auditors encountered consistently positive feedback about the work performed by the department's front line multicultural staff – the Multicultural Service Officers. In addition, the conclusion that the strategies within the Multicultural Servicing Strategy (MSS) and the corresponding services and processes are flexible and accessible is welcomed, particularly as this conclusion was drawn from a range of stakeholders and staff. The report also acknowledges the wide range of multicultural services the department offers when compared with eight international agencies.

50. The department will continue to build on the strong performance highlighted in the report.



# Recommendations

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**Recommendation No. 1**  
**Para 5.41**

To improve performance measurement and reporting for the MSS, the ANAO recommends that DHS develop, monitor and report on key performance indicators that:

- (a) reflect better practice characteristics such as being relevant and measurable; and
- (b) include outcome indicators such as measures of the relative service quality for DCALB customers.

**DHS response:** Agreed



# Audit Findings



# 1. Introduction

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*This chapter provides background information on the Multicultural Servicing Strategy that supports the delivery of Centrelink services. It also outlines the audit approach including the audit objective, scope and methodology.*

## Background

**1.1** Australia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. The 2006 Census of Population and Housing indicated that 22 per cent of people in Australia (4.4 million persons) were born overseas<sup>26</sup> and since that time this has continued to grow.<sup>27</sup> A further 26 per cent of people who were born in Australia had at least one parent who was born overseas.<sup>28</sup> At the census date, 16 per cent of Australians spoke a language other than English, 17 per cent of whom did not speak English well or at all.<sup>29</sup> In total, almost 400 different languages were spoken in homes across Australia.<sup>30</sup>

**1.2** People from a diverse cultural and linguistic background (DCALB) can face barriers to accessing government services. In addition to difficulties with English language and literacy, other barriers can include: problems with skills recognition; the effects of torture and trauma; fear of government; cultural misunderstandings; and discrimination. To help people overcome these barriers, the Australian Government's 2011 multicultural policy, *The People of Australia—Australia's Multicultural Policy*, 'acknowledges that government services and programs must be responsive to the needs of our culturally diverse communities'. The policy also 'commits to an access and equity framework to ensure the onus is on government to provide equitable services to Australians from all backgrounds'.

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<sup>26</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2008, Census Tables - Cat. No.3105.0.65.001*, 2008.

<sup>27</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *1301.0 – Year Book Australia, 2009–10*, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2008, Census Tables, Country of Birth of Person, Proficiency of Spoken English/Language by Sex Cat. No. 2068.0*, 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *2006 Census of Population and Housing: Media Releases and Fact Sheets*, 2007.

## Providing Centrelink services to DCALB customers

**1.3** As one of the Australian Government's primary service delivery agencies, the Department of Human Services (DHS) has a key role in helping to meet the commitments outlined in the multicultural policy. DHS administers more than \$130 billion in payments and delivers over 200 services to the community on an annual basis. A significant part of DHS' responsibilities is the delivery of Centrelink services.<sup>31</sup>

**1.4** In 2010–11, Centrelink administered \$90.5 billion in payments and provided services to 7.1 million customers. Around 20 per cent of these customers are identified as being from a DCALB<sup>32</sup>, a proportion that has remained relatively stable over the past decade.<sup>33</sup> Centrelink defines DCALB customers as those people who were born overseas in non-English speaking countries (and so excludes those born in New Zealand, USA, Canada, United Kingdom, Ireland or South Africa), or for whom English is not the main language spoken at home.<sup>34</sup> Within this broad group there are sub-groups that can be particularly disadvantaged by cultural and linguistic barriers, in particular, migrants with limited English competency and many refugees. DHS data indicates that of all customers accessing Centrelink services, approximately six per cent require an interpreter<sup>35</sup>, and around two per cent have entered Australia as refugees.<sup>36</sup>

**1.5** DCALB customers are located across Australia and in all DHS Service Zones<sup>37</sup> as shown in Table 1.1.

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<sup>31</sup> On 1 July 2011, the *Human Services Legislation Amendment Act 2011* integrated the services of Centrelink and Medicare Australia into the Department of Human Services (DHS). In this report, references to Centrelink prior to July 2011 are references to Centrelink as an agency. References to Centrelink after July 2011 are references to the activities of DHS, which delivers Centrelink services and payments.

<sup>32</sup> Centrelink, *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–2013*, [Internet]; Centrelink, 2010, available from <[www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/our\\_objectives.htm](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/internet/internet.nsf/individuals/our_objectives.htm)> [accessed on 10 June 2011].

<sup>33</sup> Centrelink Annual Reports from 2002–03 to 2010–11.

<sup>34</sup> DBM Consultants Pty Ltd, *Centrelink's National Customer Survey*, 2008, p. 308.

<sup>35</sup> The estimated figure is likely to be an underestimate. DHS advised that the requirement to record whether a customer requires an interpreter has only been mandatory since September 2000, therefore, some long-term DCALB customers requiring an interpreter may not be included in the data.

<sup>36</sup> A customer is classified as a refugee if they have held a selected range of Refugee or Humanitarian visa sub-classes.

<sup>37</sup> Service Zones refer to geographical areas of Australia. The DHS network is divided into 16 Service Zones.

**Table 1.1****Distribution of customers from a DCALB by Service Zone, January 2012**

Service Zone	% of Service Zone customers from a DCALB	% of Service Zone customers with a spoken language other than English <sup>(a)</sup>	% of Service Zone customers who are refugees
Sydney	38.9	14.0	1.2
Central New South Wales	35.3	13.7	4.7
Northern Victoria	30.8	11.6	2.2
Eastern Victoria	26.0	7.1	2.0
West Victoria	21.9	7.2	2.0
Western Australia	18.0	3.5	1.9
South Australia	16.7	4.5	2.0
Mid-Coast New South Wales	15.7	4.1	1.2
Border Ranges	14.8	4.0	1.7
Southern New South Wales	13.3	2.8	0.7
Southern Queensland	11.1	2.2	1.1
Northern Australia	8.6	4.4	0.7
Pacific Coast	8.4	1.1	0.3
Northern Queensland	7.5	1.1	0.4
Sunshine Coast	6.4	0.4	0.1
Tasmania	5.8	0.9	0.8
<b>Total <sup>(b)</sup></b>	<b>20.4</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>1.7</b>

Source: DHS.

Notes: (a) The data includes customers who speak indigenous languages. This data is likely to underestimate the percentage of customers who do not speak English. DHS advised that the requirement to record whether a customer requires an interpreter has only been mandatory since September 2000, therefore, some long-term DCALB customers requiring an interpreter may not be included in the data.

(b) The total proportion of DCALB customers in Table 1.1 differs from that in Table 1.2 because the former is based on individual customer data while the later is based on payments data where an individual customer may receive more than one payment type.

**1.6** Higher numbers of DCALB customers are generally located in metropolitan areas, with 39 per cent of customers in the Sydney Service Zone, for example, being from a DCALB. The uneven geographical spread of DCALB

customers, and the variation in their needs, creates challenges to providing consistently accessible services across the 313 customer service centres (CSCs) and 25 call centres<sup>38</sup> that deliver Centrelink services.

**1.7** The growing diversity within the DCALB customer group resulting from the diversity in the countries, languages and cultures of new arrivals is a further challenge. While DHS does not maintain longitudinal data in this area, many older DCALB customers were migrants from Europe following the two decades after World War II. The 1970s saw an increase in South East Asian refugees, while a growing proportion of new arrivals have originated from Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries since the 1980s.

**1.8** A comparison of the most commonly used languages for all DCALB customers with the languages used by more recently arrived DCALB customers illustrates the increasing diversity. The main preferred spoken languages, other than English, for all DCALB customers are Vietnamese, Greek, Arabic, Italian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish, Turkish and Serbian; whereas the languages in high interpreter demand for more recently arrived DCALB customers are Arabic, Karen, Burmese, Persian, Dari, Chin, Chaldean, Assyrian, Dinka, Nepali and Kirundi.<sup>39</sup> Also, having been in Australia for an extended period of time does not necessarily reduce a customer's reliance on language services. Some DCALB customers may revert back to their first language as they get older<sup>40</sup> or during times of stress, while others may associate mainly within their own community and not have the need to use English regularly.

**1.9** The cultural backgrounds of DCALB customers are also diverse. For example, some refugee customers come from relatively affluent backgrounds, are well educated (and can often speak English), and are familiar with aspects of modern western societies (such as banks, supermarkets, and making appointments for a particular time). Others are illiterate in their own language and some have lived in rural tribal societies and are unfamiliar with most aspects of modern western societies such as Australia.

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<sup>38</sup> Call centres are now known as DHS Smart Centres.

<sup>39</sup> Centrelink, *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–2013*, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> The proportion of DCALB customers receiving the aged pension is increasing as post-World War II and subsequent migrants have become eligible.



## DHS relationships with Australian Government agencies

**1.10** DHS delivers a wide range of Centrelink payments and services for a number of agencies, with the majority delivered on behalf of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Table 1.2 outlines some of the major Centrelink payments delivered by DHS, and the proportion of recipients who are from a DCALB.

**Table 1.2**

### Proportion of customers from a DCALB by major payment type, January 2012

Payment type	% of customers from a DCALB
Special Benefit <sup>(a)</sup>	88.0
Parenting Payment Partnered	36.0
Carer Payment	29.3
Austudy	25.5
Age Pension	23.9
Carer Allowance	23.8
Newstart	20.5
Family Tax Benefit	20.1
Disability Support Pension	16.8
Sickness Allowance	12.8
Parenting Payment Single	12.5
Youth Allowance	11.6
<b>Total all payments</b>	<b>19.8</b>

Source: DHS.

Notes: (a) Special Benefit payments target customers who are in severe financial need due to circumstances outside their control and who cannot receive any other Centrelink pension or benefit.

**1.11** While only delivering a small number of services on behalf of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC), DHS coordinates closely with a range of Humanitarian Settlement Service providers that are contracted by DIAC to provide assistance to recently arrived refugees.<sup>41</sup> DHS also refers

<sup>41</sup> DHS provides citizenship testing for DIAC in limited locations and DHS social workers are contracted by DIAC to provide independent expert assistance for complex family violence cases involving visa applicants. Centrelink, *Annual Report 2009–10*, 2010, p. 38.

refugee customers to organisations that deliver the Adult Migrant English Program under contract to DIAC.

## The Multicultural Servicing Strategy

**1.12** The Multicultural Servicing Strategy (MSS), *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–13*<sup>42</sup>, formalises the approach to providing Centrelink services to DCALB customers. The MSS is the latest version in a series of strategies targeted at DCALB customers, which started with the previous Department of Social Security.

**1.13** The MSS specifies a number of goals, commitments, aspirational principles and objectives.<sup>43</sup> Broadly, the objective of the MSS is to ensure that service delivery is accessible, flexible and meets the needs of DCALB customers so that they can access and participate in government programs and achieve equitable outcomes. The MSS, including its objectives, is currently being revised to reflect the new portfolio arrangements and the Service Delivery Reform program.<sup>44</sup> DHS has advised that it is progressively extending the MSS from covering only Centrelink services to all the services delivered by DHS, including Medicare and Child Support services.

**1.14** To assist in focusing effort, the Multicultural Services Branch (MSB)<sup>45</sup> has identified annual Multicultural Priorities in consultation with Service Zones. Table 1.3 sets out the Multicultural Priorities for 2010–11 and 2011–12.

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> The eight objectives for the MSS are set out in Appendix 1.

<sup>44</sup> Announced in 2009, and running until 2021, the Service Delivery Reform program has three objectives: to make people's dealings with government easier through better delivery and coordination of services; to achieve more effective service delivery outcomes for government; and to improve the efficiency of service delivery.

<sup>45</sup> The Multicultural Services Branch (MSB) performs a range of co-ordinating and support functions for the MSS, including the interpreter and translation services, and multicultural communication and marketing. MSB supports the Multicultural Services Officer Program and manages relationships with other organisations at the national level, for example, the National Multicultural Advisory Group.

**Table 1.3****Multicultural Priorities for 2010–11 and 2011–12**

2010–11	2011–12
Contribute to the development and delivery of relevant government priorities such as Service Delivery Reform, Social Inclusion, National Compact and general access and equity principles.	Work with other DHS agencies to develop, design and deliver programs and services in line with the Government's Service Delivery Reform approach.
Ensure service delivery is convenient, accessible and meets the diverse needs of the multicultural community.	Deliver high quality services and ensure service delivery is convenient and accessible to Australia's multicultural community.
Improve service delivery to refugees.	Work with community representatives to design and develop programs and services that are flexible and engaging, and targeted to the needs of the multicultural community.

Source: DHS.

**1.15** The MSS has four main components—Language Services, the Multicultural Services Officer (MSO) Program, Stakeholder Engagement Strategies, and Employee Support Tools and Strategies.

## Language Services

**1.16** Free language services are provided for customers accessing Centrelink services. A national register of 2972 professional contract interpreters covers around 235 languages. These services can be pre-booked or can be accessed 'on demand' from all Customer Service Centres (CSCs). While much of the interpreters' work is conducted by phone, rostered sessional interpreters also work on-site in 70 CSCs where demand for assistance in certain languages is high.<sup>46</sup>

**1.17** A national multilingual call centre can be accessed from anywhere in Australia. The call centre is operated by bilingual Customer Service Advisors (CSAs) who are supported by telephone interpreters where required. In 2010–11 the Multilingual Call Centre received 824 000 calls.

**1.18** A range of written and audio information on Centrelink services is available to customers in 64 languages. Currently there are 126 customer information products available in up to 35 languages (not all products are

<sup>46</sup> Centrelink, internal brochure *Multicultural Servicing in Centrelink – at a glance*, 2011.

available in all languages).<sup>47</sup> A free translation service for the documents required from customers using Centrelink services is also provided.

## **Multicultural Services Officer Program**

**1.19** The MSO Program is a national network of around 70 MSOs. Each Service Zone receives funding for a minimum of two MSOs. The balance of available funding for additional MSOs is allocated between Service Zones on the basis of the number of DCALB customers, with a higher weighting for refugee customers. The MSO Program also has important linkages with the other MSS components.

**1.20** MSOs are responsible for:

- disseminating information to, and gathering feedback from, customers and community organisations;
- participating in local community and inter-agency networks with the aim of improving services to DCALB customers;
- being information conduits between MSB and the Service Zones;
- integrating multicultural service issues into Service Zone business priorities;
- providing training and support to staff on multicultural service delivery; and
- facilitating communication between DHS and DCALB customers by ensuring that CSCs have appropriate language service levels.<sup>48</sup>

## **Stakeholder Engagement Strategies**

**1.21** In addition to the MSOs' community engagement role, there are broader stakeholder engagement strategies for the MSS, which include:

- state and national community consultation forums to provide feedback on the quality and effectiveness of services to DCALB customers;
- a national newsletter—*The Journey*—to provide information on events and changes to policies and payments affecting DCALB customers; and

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<sup>47</sup> Centrelink, *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–2013*, op. cit.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

- regular information via SBS radio, community radio stations and ethnic newspapers throughout Australia.

## Employee Support Tools and Strategies

1.22 The support and training that MSOs provide to staff on multicultural service delivery is supplemented by a range of support products such as:

- online learning packages that explore multicultural issues and intercultural communications;
- a *Working with Interpreters* DVD; and
- *A Guide to Ethnic Naming Practices* that provides the naming conventions of 66 different language groups.

## Resources for the Multicultural Servicing Strategy

1.23 DHS was unable to provide an estimate of the total expenditure on the MSS due to the various components of the strategy being funded in different ways, and managed by different parts of the organisation. Based on available information, Table 1.4 indicates that at least \$35 million in 2009–10, and \$37 million in 2010–11 was spent across the main components of the MSS.

**Table 1.4**

### Estimate of Multicultural Servicing Strategy resources

MSS expenditure item	2009–10 (\$m)	2010–11 (\$m)
Translation and interpreter services <sup>(a)</sup>	12.2	12.8
MSO Program	5.0	5.6
Communications <sup>(b)</sup>	1.1	1.8
Multicultural Services Branch	4.7	4.9
Multilingual Call Centre <sup>(c)</sup>	11.9	12.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>34.9</b>	<b>37.1</b>

Source: ANAO analysis of DHS documentation.

Notes: (a) This includes payments to interpreters and translators who work for DHS on contract. It excludes interpreters and translators for indigenous languages.

(b) This includes expenditure on SBS radio, a proportion of other media expenditure, translation costs for Communications Division information brochures (but not other divisions' brochures) and three full-time equivalent employees.

(c) This covers salary and administration costs including overhead staff salaries.

## Legislative and policy environment

**1.24** The MSS operates within the context of legislation, government policies and guidelines that relate to multicultural Australians. The *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999* states that the Secretary is to have regard to ‘the need to be responsive to ... cultural and linguistic diversity’.<sup>49</sup>

**1.25** In 2011, the Australian Government released a new multicultural policy, *The People of Australia—Australia’s Multicultural Policy*. Of the policy’s four principles, one is of particular relevance to the delivery of Centrelink services to DCALB customers:

Principle 2: The Australian Government is committed to a just, inclusive and socially cohesive society where everyone can participate in the opportunities that Australia offers and where government services are responsive to the needs of Australians from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.<sup>50</sup>

**1.26** DIAC is the Australian Government department responsible for general multicultural policy and it co-ordinates the preparation of a whole-of-government annual report against the Government’s Access and Equity Framework. The Framework sets out four principles for Australian Government-funded service delivery (‘responsiveness’, ‘communication’, ‘accountability’ and ‘leadership’—see Appendix 2), and provides a guide for agencies to deliver and report on services and programs that are responsive to the needs of Australians from DCALBs.<sup>51</sup> Access and Equity reports have been tabled since 1993.

**1.27** The Access and Equity Framework is connected to the Australian Government’s 2009 Social Inclusion Agenda through the delivery of programs and services that support social inclusion outcomes for disadvantaged Australians. Under the Social Inclusion Agenda, the Australian Government has specifically identified ‘vulnerable new arrivals including refugees’ as one of a number of at-risk groups.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999* (Cth) s.8(c).

<sup>50</sup> Australian Government, *The People of Australia—Australia’s Multicultural Policy*, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> Australian Government, *Access and Equity in Government Services Report 2008–10*, 2011.

<sup>52</sup> Department of Human Services, *Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Migration’s Inquiry into the economic, social and cultural impacts of migration in Australia*, 2011, p. 5.

## Audit approach

### Audit objective, criteria and scope

1.28 The objective of the audit was to assess the effectiveness of the management of the MSS for the delivery of Centrelink services. The management of the MSS was assessed against the following criteria:

- there are effective planning arrangements to identify and address the evolving needs of DCALB customers;
- service delivery arrangements meet the current needs of DCALB customers; and
- there are effective performance monitoring and reporting arrangements which are used to improve service delivery.

1.29 The audit scope did not include:

- other DHS services delivered to multicultural customers, such as Medicare services;
- Centrelink services for Australian customers living overseas (many of whom are from a DCALB); and
- DHS services targeted at Indigenous customers.

1.30 In 2009 the Commonwealth Ombudsman reviewed Centrelink's interpreter services and concluded that Centrelink's policies generally aligned with best practice principles in the use of interpreters. Therefore, the audit did not focus in detail on this aspect of the MSS.<sup>53</sup>

### Audit methodology

1.31 The audit was conducted by:

- examining and analysing DHS documentation, records (including the MSO Activity Reporting Tool and complaints databases) and data from surveys on customer satisfaction with Centrelink services;
- interviewing DHS staff delivering Centrelink services and representatives from a wide range of government agencies,

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<sup>53</sup> Commonwealth Ombudsman, *The Use of Interpreters*, Report No. 03/2009, 2009.

non-government service providers and multicultural community groups; and

- a desktop review of websites and annual reports (where available) of agencies from four other countries. The desktop review involved a comparison of Centrelink multicultural services with those delivered by eight government organisations having a role in social policy, services and payments in the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand and the states of New York and California.

1.32 The audit was conducted in accordance with the ANAO's auditing standards at a cost to the ANAO of approximately \$457 000.

### **Structure of the report**

1.33 The remaining chapters in the report are:

- Chapter 2—Governance and Coordination;
- Chapter 3—Accessibility and Flexibility;
- Chapter 4—Engagement with External Stakeholders; and
- Chapter 5—Performance Measurement and Reporting.



## 2. Governance and Coordination

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*This chapter examines the governance and coordination arrangements supporting the MSS in three key areas: the clarity of roles and responsibilities; the effectiveness of the support and coordination from the Multicultural Services Branch; and the degree of flexibility in the service network for local priorities.*

### Introduction

**2.1** Sound governance and coordination arrangements underpin the effective implementation of programs, strategies or policies. Consideration needs to be given to the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of those involved and the integration of the governance arrangement into the agency's broader corporate governance framework.<sup>54</sup>

**2.2** Given the size and geographic dispersion of Centrelink services, the governance and coordination arrangements for the MSS are particularly important if DCALB customers are to receive a consistently accessible service across the 16 Service Zones and the network of 313 CSCs and 25 call centres. The uneven spread of DCALB customers across the service network, and the diverse needs of different DCALB groups, requires a degree of flexibility and innovation at the local level in order to be responsive to local communities.

**2.3** To achieve the objectives of the MSS, a number of staff groups need to understand their roles and responsibilities. The Multicultural Services Branch (MSB) within DHS is required to provide a strategic framework for the MSS and gather, analyse and disseminate information to support the strategy and shape its future directions. Specialist staff, such as MSOs, and their supervisors play central roles in implementing the MSS. It is equally important, however, that front-line CSAs in the Service Zones, CSC managers and other managers recognise that they also have key roles in making services accessible to DCALB customers.

### Governance and coordination arrangements

**2.4** The governance and coordination arrangements supporting the MSS are formalised in a 2009 document *Multicultural Servicing Partnership* –

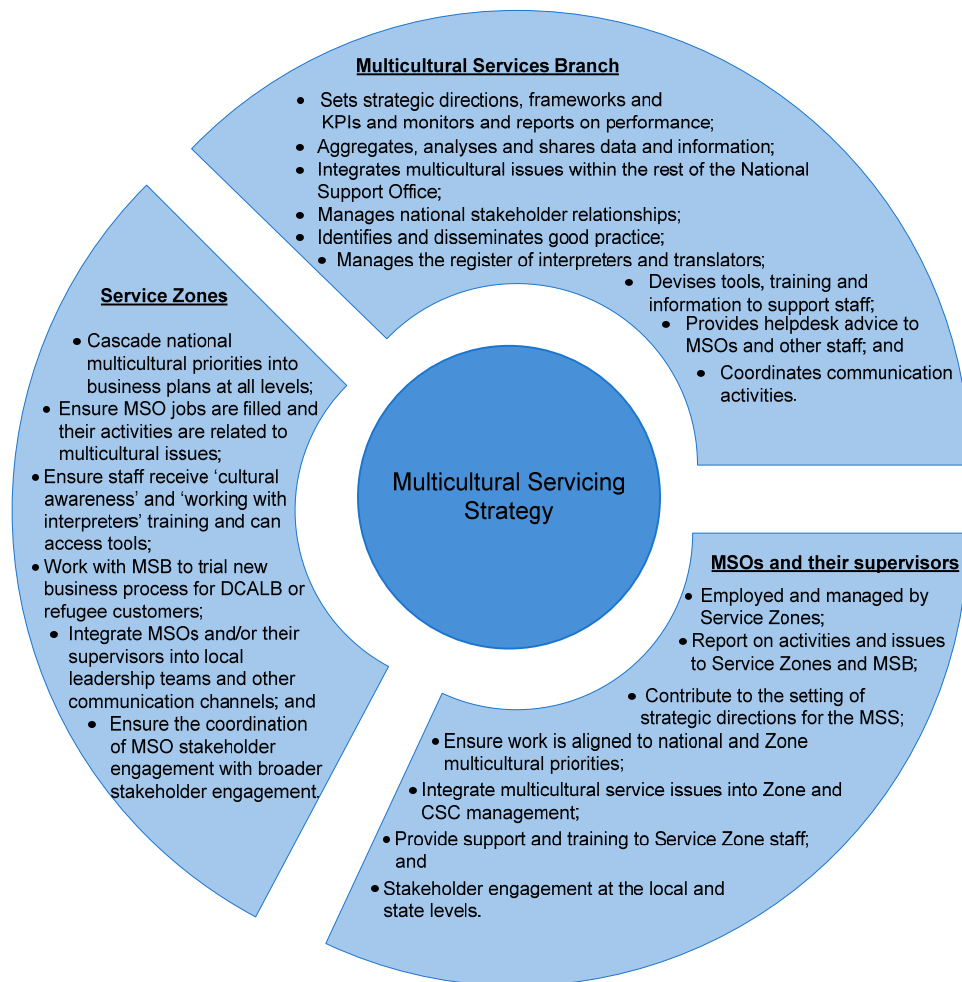
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<sup>54</sup> ANAO and Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Implementation of Programme and Policy Initiatives: Making Implementation Matter, Better Practice Guide*, 2006, p.13.

*Multicultural Services Branch and Area Multicultural Managers.* Figure 2.1 depicts key roles and responsibilities for: MSB; MSOs and their supervisors; and managers in the Service Zones.

**Figure 2.1**

**Key roles and responsibilities for the Multicultural Servicing Strategy**



Source: Documentation provided by DHS and ANAO interviews with DHS staff.

**Understanding of roles and responsibilities**

2.5 Organisational planning and operational processes show that roles and responsibilities are well defined and understood. Service Zone and CSC business plans integrate the MSS national priorities. Staff in MSB and the Service Zones demonstrated a consistent understanding of their roles, with

ownership for the MSS appropriately shared between MSB and the Service Zones.

**2.6** Figure 2.1 indicates that MSOs and their supervisors have relatively complex lines of accountability—they report to both the Service Zones and to MSB. MSOs need to regularly interact with MSB. This includes reporting on MSS priorities and issues and local level initiatives, while also receiving information on policy and program changes that may affect DCALB customers. Within the Service Zone, MSOs also need to have influential relationships with a range of managers including CSC managers. These relationships allow MSOs to negotiate opportunities to deliver training and support to front-line staff and to share information gathered from stakeholder engagement. Most MSOs reported that they were included in the regular leadership team meetings of the CSCs in their zones, which assisted in communication flows and the integration of their work into general business.

**2.7** From an operational perspective, MSOs play an important role in the day-to-day functions of the Service Zones. Through providing direct support for staff (such as training and assistance with complex customer cases) and outreach work with the multicultural community, MSOs contribute to wider organisational goals such as reducing the number of customers who need to use a CSC. Recognising this contribution, several Service Zones had supplemented the allocated funding for the MSO Program with additional funding from Service Zone budgets.

## Support and coordination from the Multicultural Services Branch

**2.8** MSB has a key role in gathering and sharing information and disseminating good practice. The branch also provides strategic support and coordination for the MSS.

### Gathering and sharing information

**2.9** In order to meet the needs of DCALB customers, and to identify any emerging or systemic issues, it is important that information on multicultural servicing gathered from various sources is analysed and, where appropriate, shared across the Service Zones. This assists in providing consistent and relevant service to DCALB customers, and encourages the adoption of good practice.

**2.10** MSB performs this function in a variety of ways including through producing quarterly Multicultural Program Reports. The reports are based on information collected from MSOs (through the MSO Activity Reporting Tool), Service Zones, and the community (through state and national multicultural advisory committees and forums). The reports are distributed to staff via the intranet and provide breakdowns of MSO activities, as well as issues that have been raised during the quarter and any action that is being undertaken to address them. Good practice initiatives are also often highlighted as a way of sharing this information across the Service Zones.

**2.11** MSB also publishes on the intranet a monthly update targeted at MSOs, which provides information including service issues, initiatives, and policy issues. MSOs indicated that they found this information a useful way to communicate policy changes, new initiatives, and particular issues affecting their zone. Also facilitating the flow of information are the strong working relationships between MSB, MSOs and their supervisors in the Service Zones.

**2.12** In November 2011, MSB facilitated the first of a series of national teleconferences with MSOs. The aim of the teleconferences is to provide MSOs with an opportunity to share good practice and discuss common issues. MSOs are invited to suggest topics for discussion and present their work. A summary of the discussion is then emailed to all MSOs, program managers and regional managers to increase awareness of multicultural issues and programs across the Service Zones.

**2.13** Overall, MSB fulfils the role of gathering and sharing information effectively. There is scope, however, to improve the sharing of good practice. Some of the successful initiatives were not documented with sufficient detail and analysis to facilitate the easy adoption or adaption by other Service Zones. It was also difficult to locate information on some good practice initiatives, particularly if they were not recent, because the information was generally held by the individual MSO or the Service Zone that had implemented it. These process issues have the potential to restrict the sharing of information and limit the ability to replicate or learn from the work of MSOs or Service Zones. The introduction of a central repository where examples of successful practices can be stored and widely accessed would assist to improve this area.

## **Strategic support and coordination**

**2.14** The MSB webpage on the DHS intranet contains analyses and resources ranging from statistical information to staff training support tools such as

cultural awareness training. MSOs and their supervisors indicated that they were aware of the resources that MSB produced and found them useful in supporting their work. However, the awareness and use of resources by other staff in the Service Zones was lower.

**2.15** Statistical profiles data is placed on the intranet by MSB and enables disaggregation of data for DCALB customers by Service Zones, benefit type, country of birth and language spoken. This data is used by Service Zones to understand their DCALB customers in more detail and is also used by MSB to analyse key issues for DCALB customers by payment type. These short analytical pieces, 'portfolio profiles', are available on the intranet and include suggested strategies which Service Zones may adopt to address particular DCALB issues. The case study below details one portfolio profile on DCALB Child Care Benefit customers.

#### Case Study: Strategic support and coordination by MSB

##### Portfolio profile on DCALB Child Care Benefit customers

A June 2011 portfolio profile on DCALB Child Care Benefit customers provides statistics on which Service Zones have high numbers of refugee customers receiving the benefit and noted that:

*customers from a DCALB lack knowledge of child care services, programmes and requirements. For example, many are unaware that they need to make separate child care arrangements when transitioning from the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) to the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP).*

There are a variety of ways that DCALB customers can unwittingly accumulate child care debts. One common scenario occurs because DCALB customers participating in the AMEP receive free child care while attending the program. If they are subsequently referred to LLNP (which is a common pathway for refugees), they need to apply for approved Child Care Benefit to assist with the payment of any child care costs. Many customers, being unaware of this, simply continue with the childcare arrangements put in place under AMEP and begin to incur debts to child care providers.

The portfolio profile prepared by MSB on DCALB Child Care Benefit customers suggests a number of possible strategies to address this issue including 'negotiating the inclusion of a Centrelink module in the AMEP curriculum' and 'review child care training material for staff to ensure multicultural information and considerations are included'. Both of these strategies had been adopted in Service Zones where child care debts were raised as an issue during the fieldwork for the audit. MSOs presented the Centrelink module to AMEP courses which included an explanation of some of the issues around child care assistance and MSOs also worked to raise the awareness of CSAs of this issue. A number of MSOs had gone considerably further at the local level to tackle this issue in partnership with local child care providers, Humanitarian Settlement Service providers and LLNP providers, indicating flexibility at the local level to pursue local partnerships.

**2.16** MSB has processes to link with other areas of DHS at both the operational and leadership levels. MSB staff have responsibilities for liaising with staff, for example, specialising in 'families', 'carers' or 'seniors', so that

MSB is aware of any prospective policy or operational changes. This enables MSB staff to exchange information so that the perspectives of DCALB customers can be taken into account or targeted communications strategies for DCALB customers can be developed. The MSB manager plays a similar role at the leadership level. An example of this occurred when seven place-based trials were being developed in 2008 as part of an innovative approach to service delivery and community capacity building. The MSB manager made a successful business case for two of the seven trials to be focused on refugee youth in two areas with high DCALB customer numbers – Broadmeadows in Melbourne and Fairfield in Sydney.

**2.17** MSB also acts as an information conduit and relationship manager with national organisations including Australian Government policy agencies. This aspect of MSB's role is examined in Chapter 4.

## **Flexibility for local priorities**

**2.18** The different circumstances of Service Zones, including the uneven spread of DCALB customers across the service network, requires a degree of flexibility and innovation to accommodate local priorities. Staff in the Service Zones indicated that there was sufficient flexibility within the national framework to address local priorities. One common local priority pursued by MSOs in the Service Zones was encouraging customers to use online services. MSOs assist the CSCs to achieve targets for this priority by working with DCALB customers, community groups and other groups that work with DCALB people to encourage the use of online services. Some MSOs had created 'how to' information sheets in high-use languages and placed them strategically around the online access points in CSCs. CSC managers indicated that these activities made a valuable contribution to meeting local priorities.

**2.19** Another example of the flexibility available within the network to pursue local priorities is outlined in the case study below.

### Case Study: Flexibility for local priorities

#### Pathways to Primary Industry initiative

The Pathways to Primary Industry initiative was instigated by the MSO in Western Sydney to assist and support unskilled refugees in finding employment. Through consultations with the refugee community the MSO identified that there was a group of refugees, mainly African and Burmese/Karen people, with farming experience, who lacked the confidence to approach employers due to their limited English skills.

In response to this, in March 2008, a network of government and non-government organisations was formed by the MSO to work with the refugees, providing them with increased support and opportunities to access agricultural vocations. This included training in agriculture through TAFE New South Wales, establishing networks with rural industries in Western Sydney to increase employment opportunities, and the creation of partnerships with community and government agencies.

As a result of this initiative, in January 2009, two course participants began working at a local farm. A number of participants continued training at TAFE and in 2009, 11 participants had graduated from the course with eight gaining full-time employment. The Pathways to Primary Industry initiative was then replicated in the Liverpool/Campbelltown area in March 2009, with 13 participants gaining employment. The initiative was again replicated in Wollongong with 14 participants graduating from the course.

## Conclusion

**2.20** The governance and coordination arrangements for the MSS are effective in supporting the delivery of consistent, accessible and flexible Centrelink services for DCALB customers across the 16 Service Zones, and the network of 313 CSCs and 25 call centres. Relevant staff have a good understanding of their various roles under the MSS, with ownership for the MSS appropriately shared between MSB and the Service Zones.

**2.21** MSB and the MSO Program are important components of the governance arrangements. MSB provides effective support and coordination, while encouraging flexibility for local priorities and circumstances at the Service Zone level. There is, however, scope for improvement in the documentation and dissemination of good practice examples to better facilitate their dissemination across the service network.

**2.22** MSOs and their supervisors have accountabilities and responsibilities to both their Service Zone and to MSB. MSOs regularly interact with MSB, for example, to report on national MSS priorities and local level initiatives. MSOs and their supervisors also have influential relationships with CSC managers, which facilitate the negotiation of training for staff and the sharing of information gathered from stakeholder engagement. These interactions and relationships help to provide an effective link between MSB and the Service

Zones, as well as being a key mechanism for maintaining an ongoing focus on DCALB customers' needs at the local level.



## 3. Accessibility and Flexibility

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*This chapter examines the effectiveness of the arrangements used to provide accessible and flexible Centrelink services to DCALB customers.*

### Introduction

**3.1** There are a number of policies that set out Australian Government agencies' obligations to provide accessible and flexible services for DCALB customers. In addition to the Australian Government's multicultural policy, *The People of Australia—Australia's Multicultural Policy*, the longstanding principles of access and equity state that 'all Australians should be able to access government programs and services equitably, regardless of their cultural, linguistic or religious backgrounds'.<sup>55</sup>

**3.2** As one of the Australian Government's primary service delivery agencies, DHS has a key role in applying these principles. Accordingly, one of the objectives of the MSS is to:

Ensure our service delivery is convenient, accessible and meets the needs of the multicultural community by assessing the needs of people from a diverse cultural and linguistic background and ensuring that the key service delivery mechanisms of face-to-face, phone and electronic are accessible.<sup>56</sup>

**3.3** DCALB customers can face a number of barriers to accessing government services, including difficulties with English language and literacy. In order to facilitate access to Centrelink services, DHS needs to be aware of the differing and evolving needs of DCALB customers and be able to offer services in ways that help to overcome these barriers. Further, it is important that DHS has sufficient flexibility in its service delivery approach to recognise where local or tailored approaches are needed to meet DCALB customer needs.

### Accessibility

**3.4** The MSS includes a number of measures designed to deliver accessible services to DCALB customers. These measures include language services,

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<sup>55</sup> Australian Government, *Access and Equity in Government Services Report 2008–10*, 2011, p. 12.

<sup>56</sup> Centrelink, *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–2013*, op. cit.

translated materials, the training and support provided to employees and initiatives targeted at particular customer groups. Further, MSOs play an important role in supporting accessibility.

## **Language services**

**3.5** In order to make Centrelink services accessible to DCALB customers with low English language proficiency, a range of free language services are provided. These allow customers to access Centrelink services in their preferred language.

**3.6** The main language services provided include:

- a Multilingual Call Centre using bilingual employees and phone interpreters;
- pre-booked and on-demand phone interpreter appointments; and
- on-site interpreter services.

**3.7** The Multilingual Call Centre is part of the call centre network<sup>57</sup> and is staffed by bilingual CSAs. This allows the majority of DCALB customers to have their questions answered, in their preferred language, at the time of their call. Customers are able to directly access 24 languages<sup>58</sup>, and a further nine languages through a call back system. The four most common languages—Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Vietnamese—represent over 50 per cent of the calls taken by the Multilingual Call Centre. The call back languages<sup>59</sup> are additional languages spoken by CSAs which do not warrant a separate language queue due to insufficient demand. In 2010–11, the Multilingual Call Centre received 824 000 calls.

**3.8** The Language Services Unit located within MSB manages a panel of 2972 contract interpreters, covering around 235 languages. For customers who speak a language not covered by the Multilingual Call Centre, or if there is an overflow of calls to the Multilingual Call Centre, an interpreter can be booked

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<sup>57</sup> The Multilingual Call Centre is spread over several call centres, with the call centre at Liverpool being the main centre.

<sup>58</sup> These languages are Arabic, Assyrian, Bosnian, Cantonese, Croatian, Dari, Dinka, Filipino, Greek, Hindi, Indonesian, Italian, Khmer, Korean, Macedonian, Mandarin, Persian, Polish, Russian, Serbian, Spanish, Sudanese Arabic, Turkish and Vietnamese.

<sup>59</sup> The call back languages are Dutch, German, Kirundi, Portuguese, Sinhalese, Tamil, Tetum, Tongan, and French.

through the Language Services Unit and a phone interview is conducted between the interpreter, a CSA, and the customer.<sup>60</sup>

**3.9** Locations with concentrated DCALB communities have on-site sessional interpreters in the main languages of the area. Sessional interpreters are contract interpreters who are physically located in the CSCs for specific periods of time. This means that on particular days DCALB customers are able to meet with the sessional interpreter and a CSA and interact face to face, as is often their preference. Sessional interpreters are currently located in 70 CSCs.

**3.10** In March 2009, the Commonwealth Ombudsman published a report on the use of interpreters in four government agencies, including Centrelink.<sup>61</sup> The report found that Centrelink policies generally aligned with best practice for use of interpreters. Supporting this finding, DHS provided data which showed that for the period August 2010 to December 2011, less than one per cent of customer requests for interpreters were unable to be met. Overall, stakeholders were satisfied with the language services offered for Centrelink services, although some CSAs and community groups commented that phone interviews with interpreters, while being a valuable service, took longer, and the quality of the phone line and the interpreter could vary.

**3.11** One ongoing barrier to the accessibility of government services noted by the Commonwealth Ombudsman relates to the cost of calling agencies, particularly for people without landlines.<sup>62</sup> Community groups indicated that many refugees and new migrants rely solely on mobile phones because of the cost of fixed line rental and the time required to find stable accommodation. DHS provides a range of 1800 numbers (free from a landline) and 1300 numbers, such as the Multilingual Call Centre, that are charged at a fixed rate from a landline (generally the price of a local call).<sup>63</sup> However, both 1800 and 1300 numbers incur an additional cost, based on the length of the call, for calls made from a mobile phone. Given that it can take time to be connected to a

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<sup>60</sup> The interpreters are not DHS staff and so can only speak to customers with a CSA present.

<sup>61</sup> Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Use of Interpreters*, op. cit. The other government departments included in the review were the Australian Federal Police, DEEWR, and DIAC.

<sup>62</sup> Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Speech – Promises, prospects and performance in public administration*, Canberra, July 2011. The Ombudsman further noted that research from the Australian Communications and Media Authority in April 2011 found that the number of people without a landline was increasing, with mobile phone-only users accounting for 14 per cent of the population.

<sup>63</sup> That rate may vary between telephone service providers.

CSA or an interpreter, the cost to a customer calling on a mobile phone can be substantial.

**3.12** While improving access to 1800 and 1300 numbers for mobile phones users may have cost implications for DHS, this will be an ongoing issue for the department, across all the services it delivers, as the proportion of customers without a landline increases.

### **Translated and online material**

**3.13** DHS provides a range of printed and electronic information in languages other than English for DCALB customers. A free service of translating documents required to access Centrelink services is also offered to DCALB customers. During 2010–11, 3385 translations were completed.

**3.14** As part of operational reforms, DHS has been encouraging customers to conduct more of their day-to-day interactions via the online system. This includes checking payments and updating personal details. Staff and stakeholders noted that while some DCALB customers are happy to use online servicing, many have reservations as they tend to have a strong preference for face-to-face communication. This is due to a number of factors including language and literacy barriers, not fully understanding government processes, and cultural preference. As part of the shift to online servicing, DHS will need to balance the support and options available to DCALB customers against the resource implications.

#### ***Fact sheets***

**3.15** Fact sheets on a range of topics are available on the DHS website in 62 foreign languages. Not all fact sheets are available in all languages, with fact sheets targeted to the most common payment types for particular language groups.<sup>64</sup> The titles of the translated fact sheets are in English so customers may need assistance accessing them depending on their English proficiency.

**3.16** Generally, CSAs were aware of the translated fact sheets; however, their use varied. The standard practice in some CSCs was to provide DCALB customers with the relevant fact sheets during the course of an interview so they could take them away. In other CSCs, use of the fact sheets depended on the practice of the individual CSA.

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<sup>64</sup> For example, fact sheets on the aged pension are translated into Greek and Italian as these are the most popular languages for this payment type.

**3.17** There are also a number of publications and information booklets on Centrelink services translated into different languages. Currently there are 126 products (written and audio), available in up to 35 languages, although not all products are available in all languages.<sup>65</sup> While many of these products can be printed or ordered from the Internet, in the CSCs visited during the audit most of these translated publications were not available in the public areas.

**3.18** To help improve customers' understanding of the payments available to them and their obligations, DHS should consider providing relevant fact sheets as standard practice when assisting DCALB customers, in addition to more clearly displaying translated material in public areas.

### *Letters and forms*

**3.19** Written communication can be a barrier to accessibility, with stakeholders and CSAs indicating that letters and forms can cause problems for some DCALB customers.<sup>66</sup> While letters contain a reference to the availability of the Multilingual Call Centre, they are written in English, regardless of whether the customer is flagged in the database as needing an interpreter. As a result, a number of community groups indicated they were often approached by DCALB customers for help in understanding DHS letters and forms.

**3.20** Stakeholders suggested a variety of ways to address the problems, including having an introductory paragraph that outlines the nature of the letter (for example whether it is for information or if customer action is required to avoid their payments being jeopardised), in the preferred language of the customer. This paragraph could also advise the customer to contact the Multilingual Call Centre if they require assistance. Stakeholders acknowledged that the difficulties in addressing the problems posed by written communications are compounded by the low literacy levels that some DCALB customers have in their own language. To address this situation, another suggestion included greater use of telephone calls from bilingual CSAs as an alternative to letters.

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<sup>65</sup> For example, the CD-ROM and DVD, *Looking for work*, has been translated into Amharic, Arabic, Assyrian, Chin, Dari, Dinka, French, Karen, Kirundi, Nuer, Oromo, Pushto, Somali, Sudanese Arabic, Swahili and Tigrinya.

<sup>66</sup> In 2010–11, Centrelink sent over 109 million letters to customers. Centrelink, *Centrelink Annual Report 2010–11*, 2011, p.17.

**3.21** The content of DHS letters, and the method of production, means that addressing the issue is difficult, with potential resource implications. Letters can deal with a range of issues and be complex to produce as they draw on a number of standardised paragraphs that are combined for the particular circumstances of the customer and the payment type. Despite these difficulties, continuing to consider options to better communicate with DCALB customers should assist DHS to improve customers' understanding of their obligations and may contribute to improved compliance.

### **Training and support for employees**

**3.22** Having culturally competent staff improves the accessibility of services for DCALB customers. Cultural competence includes: being respectful to DCALB customers; being aware of, and sensitive to, cultural differences; and appropriately using interpreters.

**3.23** One of the aspirational principles of the Multicultural Servicing Strategy (MSS) is to:

...ensure that our employees are equipped with the skills and knowledge to provide culturally competent and appropriate services. We will continue to recruit employees from a diverse range of backgrounds who have cultural knowledge and linguistic skills. We will continue to develop new and innovative ways to train and develop our employees.<sup>67</sup>

**3.24** MSB, in consultation with the People Capability Division in DHS Canberra, has developed a range of facilitated and e-learning multicultural training. There are various modules available that are tailored to cultural awareness, including specialised training for providing services to recently arrived refugees and DCALB youth. There are also facilitated and online learning modules about working with interpreters. DHS staff delivering Centrelink services can also access a range of online guidance material such as *A Guide to Ethnic Naming Practices* that provides the naming conventions of 66 different languages, and fact sheets with cultural information on a range of ethnic groups. Some CSAs indicated, however, that they found it difficult to find the time to use the learning modules or support tools available on the intranet because of customer service pressures.

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<sup>67</sup> Centrelink, *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–2013*, op. cit.

*Participation in formal and informal training*

3.25 MSOs and front-line staff indicated that formal multicultural training for staff has been limited in recent years. Training has tended to be more informal, such as MSOs discussing issues at team meetings. This is supported by an analysis of the activities entered into the MSO Activity Recording Tool. The MSO activities relating to supporting staff can be analysed to calculate the total number of activities and hours that have been recorded on providing formal training, informal training and support to staff. The results are presented in Table 3.1 and indicate that MSOs provided significantly higher levels of informal training and support compared to formal training, both in terms of number of activities and total hours.

**Table 3.1**

**Multicultural training and support provided to employees**

	Formal training <sup>(a)</sup>	Informal training and support <sup>(b)</sup>	Total
<b>2009–10</b>			
Number of finalised activities	780	3091	3871
Total hours	2100	4661	6761
Average hours per activity	2.7	1.5	1.7
<b>2010–11</b>			
Number of finalised activities	729	2608	3337
Total hours	2386	3414	5800
Average hours per activity	3.3	1.3	1.7

Source: ANAO analysis of the MSO Activity Recording Tool database.

Notes: (a) Including induction training.

(b) Including coaching, staff feedback and presenting at team meetings.

3.26 CSAs found the support provided by MSOs to be useful and of high quality. MSOs assisted them with complex cases involving DCALB customers and provided informal training and coaching. Overall, CSAs indicated that they had sufficient access to training and support to effectively provide services to DCALB customers. Many CSAs, however, indicated that they would also benefit from more structured training including refresher modules.

3.27 Prior to July 2011, responsibility for participation in all training, including induction, rested with the service network. Managers acknowledged that they were responsible for ensuring their staff had the training and support to service DCALB customers but noted the difficulty in balancing operational

requirements with releasing staff for training. One way in which MSOs and their supervisors had attempted to deal with the difficulty of negotiating employees' release for training was to provide short bursts of informal training on multicultural issues in team meetings.

**3.28** DHS advised that, from July 2011, responsibility for mandatory core training was centralised and that a new Human Services induction program is being introduced as part of this core training. A mandatory cultural capability framework is in the process of being rolled out but its focus is on Indigenous cultures. It is unclear at this stage whether some form of multicultural training will be included in the new induction program, or elsewhere in the mandatory core training. Given that DCALB customers comprise around 20 per cent of the total customer base, and that each of the Service Zones has at least five per cent of their customers from a DCALB, consideration should be given to including an element of multicultural customer service training in the mandatory core training.

#### *Stakeholders' views*

**3.29** Most multicultural community groups and non-government service providers indicated that they found staff delivering Centrelink services were culturally competent. A number of community groups rated staff highly in terms of their cultural competency in comparison with employees from other government and non-government service providers.

**3.30** Stakeholders were particularly positive in relation to the cultural competency of MSOs, including MSOs' understanding and responsiveness to DCALB customers. In relation to CSAs, while views were generally positive, a number of stakeholders commented that at times more assistance could be provided to DCALB customers to complete forms or to check DCALB customers' understanding of key points made in discussions, particularly in relation to customers' obligations.

### **Refugee servicing units**

**3.31** Six refugee servicing units have been created over the past decade to improve access and to provide consistency in the processing of refugees' claims for Centrelink services.<sup>68</sup> Refugee servicing units have been set up in

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<sup>68</sup> Refugee servicing units are located in Fairfield NSW, Broadmeadows VIC, Footscray VIC, Stones Corner QLD, Central Business District SA, and Cannington WA.



capital city areas that receive a large number of newly arrived refugees. In regional and other areas, refugees are managed through standard customer service channels.

**3.32** Refugee servicing units consist of experienced CSAs who are able to assist refugees in a culturally appropriate and timely manner. As part of the contractual arrangements with DIAC, Humanitarian Settlement Service providers are required to transport newly arrived refugees to CSCs so that they can lodge claims for Centrelink services, and this usually takes place within a week of arriving in Australia. Timeliness and cultural awareness are particularly important for these groups as they often have no other form of income or support, and settling into a new country can be a stressful experience.

**3.33** The refugee servicing units demonstrate how DHS has responded to a customer group need and improved accessibility to services. Stakeholders, particularly Humanitarian Settlement providers, noted that the quality of the services provided by the units was meeting the needs of recently arrived refugees, particularly those who lived in the area. However, due to the limited number of units, some refugees have to travel long distances to receive the specialised assistance.

### **Multicultural Service Officers**

**3.34** One of the roles that MSOs undertake is to directly assist DCALB customers to access Centrelink services. MSOs deliver information to DCALB customers through their outreach work, particularly at Adult Migrant English Program courses and Language Literacy and Numeracy Program courses that many new migrants and refugees attend after arriving in Australia. MSOs conduct sessions during these programs to outline Centrelink services and customers' rights and responsibilities. Some MSOs are also available for set periods to allow AMEP and LLNP course participants to speak to the MSO about their individual circumstances in a one-on-one situation.

### **Flexibility**

**3.35** Closely linked to accessibility is flexibility in service delivery, particularly in relation to responding to the evolving needs of customers. DHS has implemented a number of initiatives in response to the needs of DCALB customer groups.

## Emerging languages

**3.36** The increasingly diverse customer base poses the ongoing challenge of meeting the need for emerging languages, that is, languages that have not previously been used by customers. Finding interpreters for emerging languages, particularly African and South East Asian languages, can be difficult due to the number of dialects that are spoken.<sup>69</sup> For some newly arrived groups there may not be an established community from which to seek assistance. The case study below provides an example of how DHS has responded to the need for additional language services.

### Case Study: Emerging language group – Kurdish Feyli

The Kurdish Feyli language is an emerging language that has been recently added to the languages offered for accessing Centrelink services. The need for this language was identified by the refugee servicing units (see paragraph 3.31) who were unable to find interpreters for these customers.

Once alerted to this emerging need, the Language Services Unit within MSB approached the Kurdish community and interpreters who spoke other Kurdish dialects to see if they were able to provide assistance. Through working with these groups, MSB has been able to find 17 Kurdish Feyli interpreters who are now members of the interpreter panel.

## African consultations

**3.37** Among the customer groups requiring a more flexible service delivery approach are refugees from various parts of Africa. From July 2002 to June 2007, Australia received 57 142 humanitarian entrants. Of these, around 60 per cent were from Africa. In 2006 and 2008, Centrelink conducted a series of consultations around understanding and responding to the needs of this group. One of the key issues highlighted in the consultations was that some of the people were illiterate in their own language and had very little exposure to the culture of western societies, which created significant barriers to accessing government services. The following case study provides an example of how Centrelink responded to better meet the needs of this group.

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<sup>69</sup> For example, Nigeria has over 600 dialects.

### Case Study: African Consultations

To obtain feedback on Centrelink services and programs, as well as provide feedback to other agencies on broader settlement issues, consultations were held with stakeholders in all states in 2006 and 2008. The stakeholders included customers, African community elders, community workers, DIAC, DEEWR, state and local government agencies, humanitarian settlement services providers, and Migrant Resource Centres.

During these consultations a number of service issues were identified including written communication, service delivery processes, payments, interpreters, and debt. These consultations also identified the community's strong preference for oral communication.

To address these issues, a number of initiatives were implemented such as:

- the creation of a DVD on youth issues for African families and young people using role plays and case studies;
- the trial of a radio play, providing introductory information on Centrelink payments on community radio;
- the development of a suite of new audio factsheets to assist those illiterate in their own language; and
- the development of a 'virtual network'. The 'virtual network' was a database of the customers and community members who participated in the consultations and was used as a means of communicating with participants and receiving feedback from them.

## Resource flexibility

**3.38** Flexibility in service delivery can also depend on the funding model underpinning a program or strategy. Rather than having a direct budget, the different components of the MSS are funded through various internal budgets. For example, Service Zones receive budget allocations to provide translation and interpreter services. Other functions, such as communications, are divided between the DHS corporate communications area and individual initiatives, which may be undertaken at a local level.

**3.39** DHS was unable to provide a figure for the total amount spent on the components and activities of the MSS. The department was able to provide some funding allocations for 2010–11, which showed that the largest areas of MSS expenditure were translator and interpreter services (\$12.8 million) and the Multilingual Call Centre (\$12 million). Generally, for those areas where figures could be provided, the funding arrangements were based on factors such as the previous year's expenditure, or a proportion of funding received through New Policy Proposals, rather than the number and diversity of DCALB customers. The exception was translation and interpreter services, where DHS advised it fully funds demand each year.

**3.40** The planned expansion of the MSS from Centrelink services to all DHS services provides an opportunity to share the benefits of the MSS more

broadly. However, as the number of DCALB customers and services covered by the MSS increases, so too will the number of activities and resources required. Therefore, one important consideration for DHS will be resource allocation. Establishing a budget allocation approach that allows DHS to understand the full cost and appropriately allocate resources to meet demand will be important to maintaining the success of the MSS and providing accessible and flexible services to DCALB customers.

## Customer satisfaction

**3.41** Customer satisfaction levels provide an important indicator of whether Centrelink services are meeting the diverse needs of its DCALB customers. A number of different surveys to measure customer satisfaction with Centrelink services are regularly conducted. These include an annual national customer survey and quarterly CSC and call centre surveys.

**3.42** Results from the national customer survey (as shown in Table 3.2), and the quarterly CSC survey (as shown in Table 3.3), indicate that DCALB customers are as satisfied with Centrelink services as customers overall. These surveys, however, are unable to provide reliable results for those DCALB customers unable to complete the survey in English. The methodological limitations with the customer surveys are outlined in more detail in Chapter 5.

**Table 3.2**

### Results from the national customer satisfaction survey

Result	2008	2009	2010
Overall customer satisfaction	86.3% (1.6%)	85.3% (1.7%)	84% (1.8%)
DCALB customer satisfaction	92.7% (4.4%)	88.4% (4.1%)	81.5% (7.4%)

Source: DHS.

Note: Percentages in brackets represent the error margins around the 95 per cent confidence interval for the sample estimate. For example, this means that there is 95 per cent confidence that the actual population level of satisfaction in 2008 did not deviate from the sample estimate of 86.3 per cent by more than plus or minus 1.6 per cent.

**Table 3.3****Results from the CSC customer satisfaction survey**

	Jul– Sep 09	Oct– Dec 09	Jan– Mar 10	Apr– Jun 10	Jul– Sep 10	Oct– Dec 10	Jan– Mar 11	Apr– Jun 11
Overall customer satisfaction	89.1% (0.5%)	91% (0.5%)	88.8% (0.5%)	89.3% (0.5%)	88.3% (0.5%)	89.2% (0.5%)	88% (0.5%)	89.3% (0.5%)
DCALB satisfaction	89.2% (1.7%)	91.3% (1.5%)	89.2% (1.7%)	89.7% (1.7%)	89.8% (1.6%)	89.2% (1.7%)	87.7% (1.8%)	89.2% (1.6%)

Source: DHS.

Note: Percentages in brackets represent the error margins around the 95 per cent confidence interval for the sample estimate. For example, this means that there is 95 per cent confidence that the actual population level of satisfaction in July to September 2009 did not deviate from the sample estimate of 89.1 per cent by more than plus or minus 0.5 per cent.

**3.43** The results from the call centre surveys provide some insights on the relative satisfaction of those customers who have poor English proficiency but who were able and willing to complete the survey in Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin or Vietnamese (the four most commonly preferred languages of DCALB customers). These results are presented in Table 3.4 and indicate that while satisfaction levels for customers using these four languages are generally above 80 per cent, they are lower than the satisfaction levels for all customers.

**Table 3.4****Results from the call centre satisfaction survey**

	Jul– Sep 09	Oct– Dec 09	Jan– Mar 10	Apr– Jun 10	Jul– Sep 10	Oct– Dec 10	Jan– Mar 11	Apr– Jun 11
Overall customer satisfaction	92.2% (0.7%)	92% (0.7%)	91.5% (0.7%)	91.1% (0.7%)	90.6% (0.7%)	91.9% (0.7%)	89.4% (0.8%)	90.5% (0.8%)
LOTE customer satisfaction	86.1% (5.2%)	84.3% (5.3%)	81.1% (5.9%)	81.6% (5.6%)	76.2% (10.9%)	84.7% (5.5%)	81.7% (5.5%)	88.9% (5.0%)

Source: DHS.

Notes: LOTE (language other than English) customer satisfaction includes customers who completed the survey in Arabic, Vietnamese, Cantonese, or Mandarin.

For the survey LOTE is the only DCALB identifying information available.

Percentages in brackets represent the error margins around the 95 per cent confidence interval for the sample estimate. For example, this means that there is 95 per cent confidence that the actual population level of satisfaction in July to September 2009 did not deviate from the sample estimate of 92.2 per cent by more than plus or minus 0.7 per cent.

**3.44** While there are no reliable results for DCALB customers that include all those with poor English proficiency, the results available suggest that

customers for whom language is not a particular barrier are generally as satisfied as other customers. However, the results also suggest that those customers that face language barriers are somewhat less satisfied than overall customers. As recommended in Chapter 5, reliable customer satisfaction results are required to more accurately assess the views of DCALB customers on the accessibility and flexibility of Centrelink services.

## International review of multicultural services

**3.45** An ANAO desktop review of multicultural services delivered by eight foreign government organisations<sup>70</sup> playing a role in social policy, services and payments showed that, based on the information on websites and from annual reports, a comparatively wide range of multicultural Centrelink services are delivered. Some of the key findings were:

- There is a more comprehensive range of translated resources available on Centrelink services (and in a greater number of languages). For instance, none of the organisations reviewed offered multicultural multimedia resources, whereas DCALB customers accessing Centrelink services can order CDs and DVDs online.
- Overall, the section outlining the multicultural services offered to customers was more easily identified and comprehensive on the Centrelink website. However, some of the overseas organisations' websites could be translated in other languages, unlike the Centrelink website, which is only available in English. For example, the websites of agencies from New York State, California and the United Kingdom could be translated in several languages through the Google translation functionality. While the quality of such translation may be variable, it still may be of some assistance to DCALB customers.
- Most agencies did not offer services equivalent to the Multilingual Call Centre. Only one of the agencies reviewed, the New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, offered eleven Multilingual lines. In comparison, 24 languages are directly available at the Multilingual Call

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<sup>70</sup> The organisations reviewed were: New Zealand Ministry of Social Development; New York State Office of Children and Family Services; New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance; California Department of Social Services; California Department of Community Services and Development; United Kingdom Department for Work and Pensions; United Kingdom Directgov services; and Service Canada.

Centre delivering Centrelink services, in addition to nine call-back languages.

- No agency appeared to have services comparable to the MSO Program.

## Conclusion

**3.46** DHS' management of the MSS is effective in improving access to Centrelink services for DCALB customers, and has demonstrated flexibility in responding to their evolving needs. Through language services, staff training and tailored initiatives DHS has been able to address many of the barriers commonly faced by DCALB customers. While challenges remain in finding high quality interpreters in emerging languages, DHS has demonstrated initiative and flexibility in locating these skills. A range of other issues facing DCALB customers, such as understanding DHS letters and the cost of using mobile phones to contact call centres in cases where customers do not have fixed phone lines, are less readily resolved due to resource and other constraints.

**3.47** A desktop review of multicultural services delivered by eight foreign government organisations shows that, based on publicly available information, a comparatively wide range of multicultural Centrelink services are delivered by DHS.

**3.48** Measuring customer satisfaction provides an important indicator of whether DHS is providing accessible and flexible services, and meeting the diverse needs of its DCALB customers. The limited survey results that are available suggest that customers for whom language is not a particular barrier to accessing Centrelink services are generally as satisfied as other customers. However, the results also suggest that those customers who face language barriers are somewhat less satisfied than customers overall. Reliable customer satisfaction results are required to more accurately assess the views of DCALB customers with limited English proficiency.

## 4. Engagement with External Stakeholders

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*This chapter examines the effectiveness of the arrangements for engaging with external stakeholders about the delivery of Centrelink services for DCALB customers.*

### Introduction

**4.1** The Australian Government has highlighted the importance of engaging with external stakeholders in matters relevant to multiculturalism. The Social Inclusion policy refers to the need to build partnerships and coordinated service delivery between different levels of government, organisations and communities.<sup>71</sup> In addition, the National Compact recognises the need to engage and work collaboratively with the not-for-profit sector to improve community wellbeing and deliver better policy and programs.<sup>72</sup> The Access and Equity Framework also encourages agencies to integrate external stakeholder engagement into their service delivery processes by:

Collaborating [...] between agencies and with other partners to identify and address issues relating to cultural diversity, through publicising good practices, sharing information, coordinating programs or collaborating on projects.<sup>73</sup>

**4.2** The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) considers engaging with stakeholders as:

a sound investment and a core element of good governance. It allows governments to tap wider sources of information, and improves the quality of the decisions reached.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Australian Government, *Principles for Social Inclusion – Everyone’s Job*, November 2008.

<sup>72</sup> Australian Government, *National Compact – Working Together*, 2011.

<sup>73</sup> Australian Government, *Access and Equity in Government Services Report*, op. cit. p. 15.

<sup>74</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making*, OECD, Paris, 2001, p. 11.



**4.3** Engagement with external stakeholders encompasses a range of interactions with varying levels of participation, which the OECD classifies into:

- information-sharing arrangements<sup>75</sup>, through which a government agency disseminates information to and collects information (such as feedback) from stakeholders; and
- active participation arrangements, which involve a more advanced relationship that is based on the principle of partnership.<sup>76</sup>

## Stakeholder engagement at the national level

**4.4** The stakeholder engagement arrangements relating to the delivery of Centrelink services at the national level focus on information sharing with Australian Government agencies and multicultural community organisations. MSB is responsible for establishing and managing relationships with stakeholders at the national level.

### Engagement with federal government agencies

**4.5** In relation to service delivery to DCALB customers, MSB has ongoing interactions with:

- FaHCSIA and DEEWR, on whose behalf DHS delivers Centrelink payments and services to DCALB customers; and
- DIAC and the Australian Taxation Office (the ATO), whose operations have linkages with DHS' services for DCALB customers.

#### *Engagement with FaHCSIA and DEEWR*

**4.6** DHS has a Bilateral Management Agreement<sup>77</sup> with FaHCSIA which indicates that, in addition to making a range of payments, Centrelink will also deliver multicultural services on behalf of FaHCSIA. As part of this arrangement, MSB and FaHCSIA meet on a quarterly basis to share

<sup>75</sup> 'Information sharing' includes the OECD's framework 'Information' (a one-way relationship in which government produces and delivers information) and 'Consultation' (a two-way relationship in which citizens provide feedback to the government) categories. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Citizens as Partners: Information, Consultation and Public Participation in Policy-Making*, OECD, Paris, 2001, p. 23.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> A Bilateral Management Agreement sets out a range of broad governance and reporting processes to develop and deliver government programs for which agencies have joint responsibility.

information and address strategic, policy and operational issues regarding service delivery to DCALB customers. MSB also reports on its delivery of multicultural services against agreed performance indicators.

**4.7** DHS also has a Bilateral Management Agreement with DEEWR. While the Agreement does not refer to multicultural services, MSB and DEEWR hold quarterly relationship meetings where the primary focus is to share knowledge and expertise on factors influencing education and employment outcomes for DCALB customers.

**4.8** In addition to the quarterly meetings, MSB liaises on an ad-hoc basis with FaHCSIA and DEEWR. Examples of this liaison include MSB's requests for advice on policy intent and MSB providing feedback (both oral and written) on policy and service delivery based on how new and current policies affect DCALB customers.

**4.9** The relationships with FaHCSIA and DEEWR are constructive and representatives from both departments indicated that MSB's input was an important consideration for policy development and implementation.

#### *Engagement with DIAC and the ATO*

**4.10** DHS, DIAC and the ATO deliver services to mutual DCALB customers. In this context, MSB meets, separately, with DIAC and the ATO on a quarterly basis. MSB uses these forums to discuss operational matters, facilitate information-sharing arrangements and consider potential joint initiatives with both agencies. One such operational matter is DIAC's provision of data on newly arrived refugees<sup>78</sup> to MSB to facilitate the refugees' registration and submission of payment claims when they first present to a CSC.

**4.11** The relationships with DIAC and the ATO are constructive and representatives from the agencies indicated that MSB's ability to raise pertinent issues and provide assistance with the development of multicultural services was valued. DIAC and the ATO also referred to DHS' leadership role in undertaking innovative service delivery initiatives such as the place-based initiatives (refer paragraph 4.19).

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<sup>78</sup> This arrangement only relates to Protection Visa (Subclass 866) holders under the onshore component of DIAC's Refugee and Humanitarian Program.

## Engagement with multicultural community organisations

**4.12** National engagement with multicultural community organisations is undertaken through the National Multicultural Advisory Group (NMAG). MSB has convened and resourced two-day annual NMAG meetings since 1997. NMAG is comprised of representatives from nine peak national multicultural community organisations<sup>79</sup> and DHS. Representatives from several policy departments also attend as observers or guest speakers. The purpose of this forum is for DHS to:

- receive feedback on the quality and effectiveness of Centrelink services;
- receive feedback on the impact of new and existing policies and/or legislation on customer service;
- explore future service delivery developments; and
- build stronger DCALB community relationships.

**4.13** Stakeholders interviewed by the ANAO who attend NMAG meetings indicated that they valued the forum. They considered it to be an important conduit between the Australian Government and multicultural community organisations, which facilitated the sharing of information and the creation of relationships.

## Stakeholder engagement at the Service Zone level

**4.14** The engagement with external stakeholders in the states and territories is mainly undertaken through Service Zones, in particular by the MSOs. At the Service Zone level, external stakeholders include: Australian, state, territory and local government agencies; multicultural community organisations; and non-government service providers who deliver services on behalf of Australian government agencies. Table 4.1 describes the non-government service providers and their relevance to Centrelink services provided to DCALB customers.

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<sup>79</sup> The multicultural community peak bodies represented are: the Australian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Alliance; the Centre for Multicultural Youth; the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia; the National Association for Multicultural and Ethnic Children's Services; the National Ethnic Disability Alliance; the National Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network; the National Welfare Rights Network; the Refugee Council of Australia; and the Settlement Council of Australia.

**Table 4.1**

**Non-government service providers**

Non-government service provider	Nature of services provided
Job Services Australia providers	A national network of private and community organisations that are contracted by DEEWR to deliver employment services to job seekers. DHS acts as the gateway to these services as it is responsible for assessing the level of disadvantage of job seekers (including DCALB job seekers) and facilitating referrals to local Job Services Australia providers.
Humanitarian Settlement Services providers	These organisations are contracted by DIAC to provide settlement services to refugees, including registration with DHS within three business days of arrival. Local Humanitarian Settlement Services have a collaborative arrangement with DHS to assist refugees to access Centrelink services. <sup>80</sup>
Adult Migrant English Program and Language Literacy and Numeracy Program providers	Adult Migrant English Program providers are contracted by DIAC to provide English language tuition to eligible newly arrived migrants and refugees. Migrants and refugees who complete the Adult Migrant English Program and require additional language assistance may be referred to the Language Literacy and Numeracy Program. The providers of this program are contracted by DEEWR to provide training for eligible job seekers whose skills are below the level considered necessary to secure sustainable employment or pursue further education or training. DHS refers eligible DCALB customers to both Adult Migrant English Program and Language Literacy and Numeracy Program providers. MSOs also present modules with Centrelink services content as part of the curriculum of the programs.

Source: 2010–11 Annual Reports of Centrelink, DIAC and DEEWR; DHS Intranet.

**4.15** The diversity of external stakeholders at the Service Zone level means that the engagement is more varied than at the national level. This difference also applies to the nature of the engagement, which covers both ‘information-sharing’ and ‘active participation’ arrangements.

**Information-sharing arrangements**

**4.16** DHS consults regularly with multicultural communities at local, state and territory levels by convening quarterly Multicultural Advisory Committees. The membership of the committees includes representatives from

<sup>80</sup> There is a documented agreed process between DHS and Humanitarian Settlement Services providers. The process aims to guide the organisations in ensuring seamless service delivery to the parties’ mutual DCALB customers. In relation to DHS’ engagement with Humanitarian Settlement Services providers, the agreed process indicates that Humanitarian Services Settlement can expect DHS to maintain an effective working relationship with them to collaboratively assist customers.

community organisations, agencies from all levels of government, and non-government service providers. The Multicultural Advisory Committees are similar to the NMAG in that they provide a forum where issues relating to service and program delivery that affect DCALB customers are discussed.

**4.17** Within each Service Zone, various staff are also involved in other information-sharing arrangements. MSOs and managers contribute to networks and forums and share information through outreach activities. MSOs, for example: provide information sessions to community groups; organise or attend multicultural events; and present Centrelink services components of the Adult Migrant English Program and Language Literacy and Numeracy Program courses. MSOs also represent a point of contact for external stakeholders who can direct enquiries and provide feedback on matters affecting DCALB customers.

**4.18** External stakeholders provided positive feedback about their interactions with MSOs and other DHS staff. In several instances, they referred to the engagement around Centrelink services for DCALB customers as the standard to which other government agencies should aspire. In particular, there was a consistent view that MSOs were effective representatives, particularly through their engagement work, their connections within the community, and their awareness of DCALB customers' needs.

## Active participation arrangements

**4.19** Active participation arrangements are based on the principle of partnership and involve a closer collaboration with stakeholders than information-sharing arrangements.<sup>81</sup> A number of active participation arrangements tailored to the local conditions of DCALB customers have been undertaken, as illustrated by the following case studies.

### Case Studies: Examples of active participation arrangements

#### Place-Based Service Initiative for Young Refugees

This initiative was one of seven place-based customer service initiatives under the Centrelink Place-Based Services Program. This program aimed to trial citizen-centric service delivery models within a specific location. In particular, it intended to demonstrate how innovative place-based approaches could be used to link policy and programs across portfolios and sectors, and to address economic and social disadvantage at the local level.

MSB instigated the Initiative for Young Refugees, which it has managed with MSOs and their

<sup>81</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Citizens as Partners*, op. cit.

supervisors. Through engagement with external stakeholders, it was identified that a lack of coordination of service responses to young refugee job seekers compounded their difficulties in accessing and using community services. The initiative involved developing a service delivery response in two places with a high concentration of young refugee job seekers (Fairfield in New South Wales and Broadmeadows in Victoria) to:

- address issues faced by the young refugee jobseekers through a Personal Services Coordination model<sup>82</sup>;
- increase the young refugees' access to education, training and employment opportunities and relevant support services; and
- build and increase community capacity to meet local needs through coordinated efforts.

To guide and support this brokerage model, Centrelink partnered with local businesses, community organisations and government agencies through the Action Research Working Group (which was mainly responsible for the implementation and review of the model) and the Partner Reference Group (which aimed to obtain support and ongoing feedback from organisations likely to become involved in supporting the young refugees).

The Initiative for Young Refugees commenced in January 2009 and ended in June 2011. The initiative involved 273 participants.

The initiative was reviewed in December 2009 by the University of Western Sydney as part of a broader evaluation of the Place-Based Services Program. The outcomes of the review were generally positive. The review found that Centrelink's profile and reputation was enhanced as a community player given that it had:

- successfully developed strategic partnerships between local government, state government agencies, and locally based business and community stakeholders; and
- initiated a whole-of-government approach to social inclusion and therefore showed community partners that Centrelink could go beyond its responsibilities and 'play a role larger than handing out money'.

### **The 'Trades Taster' program in Western Australia**

In response to refugees' concerns about their capacity to find employment, a Perth-based MSO approached a local TAFE Director to discuss the possibility of organising a way for refugees who were undertaking the Adult Migrant English Program to try a trade. The result was the development of the 'Trades Taster', which comprised a 10-week program of work skills development that ran concurrently with the Adult Migrant English Program. The pilot program was trialled with a group of 10 students and aimed to provide practical, hands-on experience in trade sectors such as bricklaying, stonemasonry and soft furnishing.

In addition to instigating the program, the MSO was integral to the introduction and promotion of the program in multicultural communities.

MSB considered the program to be successful given its adoption by additional students, its expansion to other TAFE institutes and its coverage of additional trade sectors.

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<sup>82</sup> The Personal Services Coordinator was recruited internally by Centrelink and was responsible for: developing personalised plans to help achieve identified goals; connecting young refugees to services and coordinating the service response; and facilitating the progression and transition of young refugees from one service to another.

**4.20** External stakeholders indicated that they appreciated DHS' efforts to establish and contribute to active participation arrangements with local stakeholders. There was also a view that, in some instances, this effort has involved DHS staff playing a central role that goes beyond their normal responsibilities to deliver Centrelink services to DCALB customers.

## Conclusion

**4.21** DHS effectively engages with external stakeholders about the delivery of Centrelink services, both in terms of information-sharing and active participation arrangements. DHS participates in a wide range of engagement arrangements at the national, state and local levels; it is considered by external stakeholders to be a valued contributor or partner. Broader stakeholder engagement has also enabled DHS to collect and share feedback on issues encountered by DCALB customers in relation to Centrelink services and other government agencies' policies.

## 5. Performance Measurement and Reporting

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*This chapter examines the performance measurement and reporting of the MSS for the delivery of Centrelink services in relation to both its outputs and outcomes.*

### Introduction

**5.1** The Parliament's and the public's consideration of a program's performance, in relation to its impact and cost effectiveness, rely heavily on reliable and appropriate performance information. The OECD has observed that:

How government activities are measured matters. ... Citizens are entitled to understand how government works and how public revenues are used.<sup>83</sup>

**5.2** Program performance measurement and reporting, however, is not just important from an accountability perspective. It is also important for an agency's effective management—it allows managers to provide sound advice on the appropriateness, success, shortcomings and future directions of programs. This information also allows for informed decisions to be made on the allocation and use of program resources, which is particularly important in the current environment where MSB has been given responsibility for extending the MSS to the other services delivered by the department.

**5.3** In order to assess performance it is important that agencies have in place key performance indicators (KPIs) that enable the measurement and assessment of progress towards meeting relevant objectives. KPIs should cover both the outputs being delivered and the outcomes being achieved, as they relate to the overall objective(s). Further, a mix of quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (descriptive) indicators, with associated targets, allows agencies to assess the success or otherwise of programs and strategies.

**5.4** The chapter uses the SMART approach to evaluate the performance indicators used by DHS to measure and report on the performance of the MSS. SMART is one of a number of better practice frameworks that can be used to

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<sup>83</sup> Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Measuring Government Activity*, 2009.



determine if performance indicators display a range of characteristics.<sup>84</sup> Table 5.1 defines the SMART criteria.

**Table 5.1**

**SMART characteristics of performance measures**

Characteristic	Definition
Specific	Clear and concise to avoid misunderstanding of what is to be achieved.
Measureable	Can be quantified and results can be compared to other data and able to show trends if measured over time.
Achievable	Practical, reasonable and credible given available resources and expected conditions.
Relevant	Informative and useful to stakeholders having regard to the context in which the entity operates.
Timed	Specifies a timeframe for achievement and measurement.

## Outputs measurement and reporting

**5.5** DHS measures and reports on a range of output indicators for each of the four components of the MSS. The main public reporting on these indicators is through Annual Reports and annual Access and Equity Reports to DIAC.

### Language Services

**5.6** The output performance indicators for the Language Services component are quantitative indicators that are both internally and externally reported. Table 5.2 outlines these output indicators as reported in the 2010–11 Centrelink Annual Report. Recent data for several of these indicators are presented in Chapter 3 (see paragraphs 3.7 to 3.9).

<sup>84</sup> ANAO Audit Report No.5 2011–12, *Development and Implementation of Key Performance Indicators to Support the Outcomes and Programs Framework*.

**Table 5.2****Language Services output indicators**

Language Service	Output indicator
Translation and Interpreters Services	Number of languages in which services are provided. Number of contractors providing the services. Number of pre-booked onsite interpreter appointments and pre-booked phone interpreter appointments. Number of 'on-demand' phone interpreter requests. Translations of customers' personal documents. Number of CSCs that have rostered interpreters. Number of extra hours per week of sessional and rostered interpreting services.
Multilingual Call Centre	Number of calls from DCALB customers answered.
Assistance by bilingual staff	Number of employees receiving the Community Language Assistance allowance.

Source: Centrelink Annual Report 2010–11.

5.7 For internal purposes, in addition to these indicators, DHS reports quarterly on the proportion of appointments made with interpreters within three days of the customers' requests (97 per cent in June 2011)<sup>85</sup> and the number of requests for interpreters made in CSCs that could not be met (less than one per cent for the period August 2010 to December 2011).<sup>86</sup> To enhance external performance reporting, DHS could consider including these indicators as they provide additional information to support the simple activity indicators.

5.8 While several of the output indicators in the 2010–11 Annual Report are the same as the indicators used in consecutive Centrelink Annual Reports since 2002–03, historical performance information is not provided to the reader. In addition, no targets are set for these output indicators. In this regard, the Language Services outputs, collectively, do not fully meet the SMART criteria.

### Multicultural Services Officer Program

5.9 The output indicators for the MSO Program are quantitative and activity-related. DHS publicly reports on: the number of MSOs; the number of

<sup>85</sup> Data provided by DHS.

<sup>86</sup> Data provided by DHS.

activities undertaken by MSOs (categorised into staff-related activities and customer and community organisations-related activities); and the number of participants involved with the activities. For example, the 2010–11 Annual Report indicated that MSOs undertook 26 485 activities, of which 21 per cent assisted employees delivering Centrelink services, and 79 per cent assisted 209 242 customers and community members.

**5.10** For internal purposes, DHS reports against the same MSO Program output indicators quarterly. The reporting on the number of MSO activities is against two national targets:

- 90 activities to be undertaken per MSO per quarter; and
- 95 per cent of activities to be recorded in the MSO Activity Recording Tool within 14 days of the date the activity took place.

**5.11** The relevance of these activity output indicators and targets is reduced by issues surrounding the definition and reporting of activities by MSOs. MSOs are required to record activities in the MSO Activity Recording Tool at a high level of specificity, which is reflected in the following definition of ‘activity’:

an action that leads to an outcome or further follow up for Centrelink staff, customer, community member or other stakeholders. It incorporates the steps that lead [...] to that outcome. For example: when organising an information seminar - all the activities undertaken such as organising the mail out, booking an interpreter, securing a venue or [...] discussions with the community worker are all separate recordable activities.<sup>87</sup>

**5.12** The activities recorded in the MSO Activity Recording Tool from 2009–10 show that the nature of MSO activities recorded vary in significance, ranging from addressing enquiries by email or by phone, to participating in events held over several days. Most activities recorded in the MSO Activity Recording Tool and reported in Centrelink Annual Reports were activities of one hour or less. For example, in 2009–10 and 2010–11, these small-scale activities represented around 64 per cent of total reported activities. There were also differences in what was recorded as an activity between Service Zones. For instance, in 2010–11, 0.3 per cent of activities recorded by MSOs in one Service Zone were activities of 10 minutes or less, compared to 18.6 per cent for such activities recorded by MSOs in another Service Zone.

<sup>87</sup> Centrelink, *MART User Guide*, October 2010, p. 3.

While a degree of variation can be expected, reflecting differences in local circumstances, large discrepancies between Services Zones over a year suggest that MSOs record their activities differently (for example by not recording small-scale activities or by amalgamating and recording them as one activity).

**5.13** These limitations of the activity-related output indicator reduce the ability of internal and external stakeholders to accurately assess the performance of the MSO Program.

## **Stakeholder Engagement Strategies**

**5.14** The output performance indicators for the Stakeholder Engagement Strategies component of the MSS include a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators that are internally and externally reported. The qualitative reports on the stakeholder engagement describe the engagement activities undertaken and their achievement in various levels of detail.<sup>88</sup> For example, Centrelink's 2008–09 Access and Equity Report to DIAC included details of the African Community Consultations (as described in the case study at paragraph 3.37).

**5.15** Communication with DCALB customers through various media<sup>89</sup> is reported by describing the initiatives and outlining the number of languages they covered. MSB's quarterly report to FaHCSIA, for example, regularly reports on the number and the topics of radio broadcasts and ethnic press articles, and the languages they are presented in.

**5.16** Another output for this component of the MSS is the aggregated number of MSOs' engagement activities that targeted both community members and customers. In addition to the limitations of this activity-based output indicator outlined in paragraph 5.12, the indicator does not clearly reflect the variety of stakeholders with which MSOs engage. It does not differentiate between the two different groups of stakeholders (customers and community groups) and also inaccurately includes non-government service providers and government stakeholders as 'community members'.

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<sup>88</sup> While the public reporting of these activities is general and focuses on key engagement activities, quarterly internal reports at the Service Zone and national levels are more detailed. These reports aim to show how engagement activities address organisational priorities and include key case studies or lists of engagement activities with external stakeholders of Centrelink multicultural services.

<sup>89</sup> These include written information (brochures, factsheets, newsletters, magazines and press articles); radio broadcasts; and audio-visual products (CDs and DVDs).

## Employee Support Tools and Strategies

**5.17** Several qualitative and quantitative indicators of the support provided to the staff who deliver services to DCALB customers are used for internal and external purposes. Qualitative information includes the nature of training courses and support tools provided to staff. It is supplemented by quantitative indicators that include the proportion of staff delivering Centrelink services employed from a non-English speaking background (10.5 per cent in June 2011)<sup>90</sup> and the number of MSO activities benefiting staff (5562 in 2010–11).<sup>91</sup> Until 2009–10, the number of staff the MSOs assisted through their activities was also reported, however, the 2010-11 Centrelink Annual Report did not include this indicator.

**5.18** There is some scope to improve performance measurement and reporting for this MSS component. For example, while the proportion of staff from a non-English speaking background indicator is consistent with the SMART criteria and is a relevant indicator over time<sup>92</sup>, reporting it against the relevant Australian Public Service-wide benchmark data would make reporting more meaningful. DHS could also report on the number of staff who attended formal multicultural training as this data is available from the MSO Activity Recording Tool.

## Outcomes measurement and reporting

**5.19** An important step in identifying and reporting performance measures is to clearly link them with the objectives and intended outcomes of a program.<sup>93</sup> The objectives for the MSS are set out in the document *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–13*.<sup>94</sup> It outlines eight objectives, some of which have multiple parts. It also sets out two ‘aims’ and three ‘aspirational principles’ with these principles each having multiple parts. The result is that there is no clear and succinct public expression of the high-level objectives and desired outcomes of the MSS. Nevertheless, it is possible to distil that the

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<sup>90</sup> Data provided by DHS. The definition of staff from a non-English speaking background is based on an employees’ first language spoken and includes ‘languages other than English’ and ‘English and another language’.

<sup>91</sup> Centrelink, *Centrelink Annual Report 2010–11*, 2011, p.129.

<sup>92</sup> Assuming that there is not a significant proportion of employees for whom this data is missing.

<sup>93</sup> ANAO Audit Report No.5 2011–12, op. cit.

<sup>94</sup> Centrelink, *Supporting Multicultural Australia 2010–2013*, op. cit.

broad objective of the MSS is to ensure that service delivery is accessible, flexible and meets the needs of DCALB customers so that they can access and participate in government programs and achieve equitable outcomes.

5.20 Consistent with this broad objective, relevant outcomes for DCALB customers from the MSS would include achieving:

- similar service quality for DCALB customers compared to all customers including levels of customer satisfaction; and
- similar employment and education outcomes for DCALB customers compared to all customers.

### **Relative service quality for DCALB customers**

5.21 A range of indicators can be used to assess service quality. Key indicators relate to levels of customer satisfaction with various aspects of service and levels of customers' complaints. Other indicators measure objective criteria such as the timeliness and accuracy of payments.

#### *Customer satisfaction surveys*

5.22 DCALB customers' views on the quality of Centrelink services are a key outcome indicator for assessing the effectiveness of the MSS. While no results are publicly reported for DCALB customers, the following customer surveys are conducted on a regular basis.

- The Customer Service Centre Customer Satisfaction survey targets a random selection of current customers who have recently visited a CSC. Phone interviews are conducted in English. If the respondent cannot complete the survey in English, the interviewer offers to ring back if the respondent is able and willing to complete the interview in one of the following four languages—Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese and Vietnamese.
  - Survey results for the past two years supplied by Centrelink indicate that for the DCALB customers who can complete the interviews in English there is generally no difference in the overall satisfaction of these customers compared to the results for all customers.
  - The very small sample size of those that complete the survey in one of the four non-English languages (for example, around 0.3 per cent of the sample over April to June 2011) means that

no statistically valid results for customers who do not speak English are available.

- The Centrelink Call Customer Satisfaction survey targets a random selection of current customers who phoned Centrelink within the previous week. For customers who have contacted the Multilingual Call Centre, the customers who are drawn into the sample have their language flagged and if the language is Arabic, Mandarin, Cantonese or Vietnamese they are called directly by interviewers fluent in that language. Otherwise they are removed from the sample.
  - The results of this survey over the past two years indicate that those customers who complete the survey in one of the four non-English languages are somewhat less satisfied compared to the results for all customers.<sup>95</sup>
- The National Customer Survey is conducted annually with a random selection of around 1850 customers. It does not require participants to have had recent contact with Centrelink services. It is conducted in English and if a respondent cannot complete the survey in English the interview is terminated.
  - The results over the past three years indicate that generally English-speaking DCALB customers have similar levels of satisfaction compared to the levels for all customers.

**5.23** The various survey results are generally only reliable for those DCALB customers who speak English with the exception of the results for the Multilingual Call Centre.<sup>96</sup> While there is no public reporting, there is some internal reporting of the customer satisfaction data for DCALB customers. This includes the quarterly reports from MSB to FaHCSIA as part of the Bilateral Management Arrangement, and some of the metrics for Call Centres delivering Centrelink services when these metrics are reported separately for the Multilingual Call Centre. However, for these reports, the limitations of the data around the lack of representativeness of the results for non-English speaking DCALB customers are not made clear.

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<sup>95</sup> See Table 3.4 at page 61.

<sup>96</sup> The Multilingual Call Centre results are only representative for the DCALB customers who speak Cantonese, Arabic, Mandarin and Vietnamese.

**5.24** The general lack of statistically reliable customer satisfaction data for DCALB customers with low levels of English proficiency is a key limitation to DHS' ability to assess the effectiveness of the MSS. To address this limitation, DHS should consider revising its survey approach so that:

- there is a sufficient sample size to obtain statistically accurate results for DCALB customers, including separate results for customers who do not speak English;
- a methodology is used that allows those non-English speaking customers selected in a sample to be surveyed in their own language; and
- DCALB results are included in the standard survey reports being produced.

**5.25** DHS has advised that, as part of the integration of its services under the Service Delivery Reform program, it is re-examining its approach to customer surveys to ensure a consistent approach. As part of this process consideration is being given to options to include non-English speaking customers in customer surveys. Accurate data on the satisfaction of non-English speaking customers would assist managers in identifying and addressing gaps in performance.

#### *DCALB customers' complaints*

**5.26** The level of complaints from DCALB customers relative to other customers is a potentially important outcome indicator of relative service quality. DHS acknowledges the importance of customer complaints as a source of feedback which can be used to identify problems, improve service delivery and influence future service design.<sup>97</sup> Accordingly, it is important that there are mechanisms in place for the capture, recording, and resolution of complaints from all customers and stakeholders.

**5.27** DHS provides a range of channels for customers to lodge complaints about Centrelink services. The top five channels for all customers are<sup>98</sup>:

- phoning the Customer Relations Unit (1800 number)—56 per cent of complaints are lodged this way;

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<sup>97</sup> Centrelink, *Centrelink Annual Report 2010–11*, 2011, p.109.

<sup>98</sup> DHS advice.



- complaining to a staff member in a call centre—23 per cent;
- sending an online secure email—14 per cent<sup>99</sup>;
- filling in a customer comment card—three per cent<sup>100</sup>; and
- complaining to a staff member in a CSC—one per cent.

**5.28** DHS data on complaints indicates that DCALB customers are less likely to complain. In 2010–11, 46 818 complaints were received from customers accessing Centrelink services, of which 517 were from DCALB customers.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, while DCALB customers make up around 20 per cent of all customers, they make up only 1.1 per cent of all complaints. Community groups, non-government agencies and DHS staff advised that DCALB customers do not generally complain in the same way as most other customers. They are less likely to make complaints and if they do complain, they are more likely to do so via a community group, or directly to an MSO. A number of the community groups indicated that they would pass on these complaints either directly to an MSO, to another DHS contact or via a consultative forum. The reasons for the different approach of DCALB customers to complaints include cultural and language barriers and a potential distrust of government, particularly among refugee customers.

**5.29** MSOs indicated that when they received a complaint from a community group or an individual, their focus was on fixing the issues rather than necessarily recording or reporting the complaint. The decision to record the complaint in the MSO Activity Recording Tool appeared to depend on the nature of the complaint (whether it was a reoccurring issue or an isolated incident) and the practice of the individual MSO. An analysis of the MSO Activity Recording Tool indicated that the number and detail of complaints recorded varied significantly between Service Zones and individual MSOs, suggesting an inconsistent approach to recording complaints.

**5.30** *Our Service Commitments* for Centrelink services sets out the policy for handling customer feedback. This includes the systems, processes and principles that are used when handling customer feedback. Centrelink

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<sup>99</sup> A secure online message is a webpage form completed by the customer and emailed to DHS from the website.

<sup>100</sup> These are available in languages other than English.

<sup>101</sup> Centrelink, *Centrelink Annual Report 2010–11*, 2011, p. 46.

introduced the Integrated Customer Feedback Database (ICFD) in July 2007, as a mechanism for capturing customer feedback and integrating a number of separate feedback systems. While most channels for complaints are centrally recorded in the ICFD, feedback from community/advocacy groups and specialist officers (such as MSOs) is not recorded in the ICFD. Complaints entered into the ICFD are subject to timeliness targets and other quality assurance processes. Therefore, not including complaints from community groups and from MSOs in the ICFD means that these are not subject to these quality control mechanisms. It also means that they do not feed into the centralised complaints information available to inform service delivery improvements.

**5.31** For reporting purposes the complaints entered into the MSO Activity Recording Tool are combined with the DCALB complaints recorded in the ICFD. Centrelink adopted this approach in response to a 2008–09 ANAO audit report that recommended that:

Centrelink use the ICFD (or similar) as the central repository for all customer feedback to enable: a) better quality assurance coverage; and b) accurate and complete records for internal and external reporting purposes.<sup>102</sup>

**5.32** DHS is currently undertaking work around implementing a common approach across all service lines to recording and reporting feedback. This provides an opportunity to investigate ways in which to better capture complaints made by DCALB customers to community groups. A common approach would also allow such complaints to be subject to the same quality assurance processes that apply to complaints made through other channels.

### *Objective service quality indicators*

**5.33** DHS collects a large number of metrics on aspects of service quality. The Operational Balanced Scorecard has more than 300 workload and performance indicators. A significant proportion relate to aspects of service quality, for example new claim timeliness and queue management. The Strategic Balanced Scorecard contains a smaller number of key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to service quality. The KPIs in the Strategic Balanced Scorecard are the source of the subset of KPIs included in DHS' Portfolio Budget Statements.

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<sup>102</sup> ANAO Audit Report No.22 2008–09, *Centrelink's Complaints Handling System*, p. 87.

**5.34** The service quality indicators and KPIs are generally only reported for all customers, that is, there is no standard disaggregation for DCALB customers. However, DHS advised that it would be possible to disaggregate a number of the service quality indicators in the Operational Balanced Scorecard and the Strategic Balanced Scorecard for DCALB customers and/or other sub-groups (such as refugee customers), as the databases from which the service quality indicators are generated generally include these field/s.

**5.35** Disaggregation would assist to identify performance gaps when the results for DCALB customers were compared to those for all customers. Relevant indicators from the Strategic Balanced Scorecard could include:

- the percentage of payments meeting integrity standards; and
- the percentage of calls to the Multilingual Call Centre answered within 150 seconds and the percentage of customers successful on first attempt.

Relevant indicators from the Operational Balanced Scorecard could include the timeliness of new claims for a range of payment types.

### **Relative employment and education outcomes for DCALB customers**

**5.36** A key stated outcome for the MSS is to achieve equity of outcomes and promote social inclusion for DCALB customers. The only performance reporting for the employment and education outcomes of the MSS is on individual initiatives. For example, in the Access and Equity reports provided annually to DIAC, in some cases the employment and education outcomes for individual participants in successful initiatives have been reported. However, there is no internal reporting at a broader strategic level on employment and education outcomes for DCALB customers.

One of the KPIs in the Strategic Balanced Scorecard would be relevant in this regard if it was disaggregated for DCALB customers. It relates to ‘connecting individuals to programs that provide educational, social and economic opportunities’, which is measured by the percentage of activity-tested Newstart Allowance recipients connected to an employment service provider.

### **Effectiveness of stakeholder engagement**

**5.37** MSB, MSOs and Service Zone managers indicated that feedback from stakeholders was the main way they assessed if the MSS was effective in achieving its intended outcomes. Feedback from stakeholders included views on the quality of services provided to DCALB customers, stakeholder

satisfaction with their opportunities to engage about the delivery of Centrelink services, and stakeholder satisfaction with the response to their feedback. There was, however, no independent or quantitative assessment of stakeholders' views. Generally, stakeholders' views were gauged informally by MSOs, their supervisors and other managers during the course of their work. Given the importance of stakeholder engagement for the effectiveness of the MSS, DHS should consider implementing a more structured and independent means of assessing stakeholders' views.

## Conclusion

**5.38** The public and internal processes used to measure and report on the performance of the MSS include a range of quantitative and qualitative output measures, such as the number of languages in which services are provided and descriptions of the partnerships undertaken with community stakeholders. While many of the qualitative output indicators contain elements that are consistent with the SMART criteria, the lack of targets, historical data and clarity around the definition of quantitative indicators means that an important part of the reporting on the performance of the MSS is limited.

**5.39** In addition to the shortcomings with the output measures for the MSS, there are very few regular and reliable outcome indicators that measure, for example, DCALB customers' satisfaction levels, complaint levels or the accuracy and timeliness of payments made to DCALB customers. The lack of such indicators limits the ability of DHS and stakeholders to accurately assess the direct impact and effectiveness of the MSS.

**5.40** Much of the customer and survey data collected in relation to Centrelink services includes indicators of whether the customer is from a DCALB. There is scope to make further use of this existing data to improve the performance monitoring and reporting for the MSS, particularly in relation to the outcome areas outlined above.

## Recommendation No.1

5.41 To improve performance measurement and reporting for the MSS, the ANAO recommends that DHS develop, monitor and report on KPIs that:

- (a) reflect better practice characteristics such as being relevant and measurable; and
- (b) include outcome indicators such as measures of the relative service quality for DCALB customers.

### DHS response

5.42 Agreed. The department agrees with this recommendation and work is underway to address this recommendation. The department has recently tendered for a new customer satisfaction survey. The new survey will include a more significant component of customers from a diverse cultural and linguistic background who speak languages other than English.

5.43 The department will analyse existing performance measures and data to include and improve indicators and measures for customers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds where appropriate across all programs and areas of the Multicultural Servicing Strategy.

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Ian McPhee  
Auditor-General

Canberra ACT  
18 June 2012



# Appendices





## Appendix 1: Objectives of the Multicultural Servicing Strategy

- Support the Minister for Human Services to deliver portfolio responsibilities and contribute to broader government priorities by:
  - collaborating with the DHS to analyse and address the needs of multicultural Australians; and
  - providing quality advice on the potential impacts of new government policy on multicultural Australia.
- Continue to progress and implement the service delivery reform agenda by developing opportunities for multicultural customers to select and use service delivery methods appropriate to their needs and ability across the human services portfolio.
- Continue to provide high quality services to the Australian community by:
  - providing quality advice on the service needs of multicultural customers; and
  - developing innovative strategies for the delivery of services to Australia’s diverse community.
- Contribute to the development and delivery of relevant government priorities, such as Social Inclusion, Closing the Gap, Welfare Reform and COAG Emergency Management by:
  - identifying groups most at risk and devise and implement specific strategies aimed at these groups; and
  - developing and supporting pathways to education and employment for multicultural customers.
- Support our people in effectively transitioning to new portfolio arrangements by providing training and other tools to support our people in multicultural service delivery.
- Improve the integration of new technology in accordance with the Government’s ICT reform agenda by ensuring that technological advances take into account the specific needs of people from a diverse cultural and linguistic background particularly in relation to issues around language and communication strategies.

- Build purposeful relationships across government and the Australian community by maintaining community engagement strategies and build stronger relationships with the multicultural community sector.
- Ensure our service delivery is convenient, accessible and meets the needs of the multicultural community by assessing the needs of people from a diverse cultural and linguistic background and ensuring that the key service delivery mechanisms of face-to-face, phone and electronic are accessible.

## Appendix 2: Access and Equity Framework

Access and Equity Framework principle	Principle component
<p>Responsiveness: Extent to which programs and services are accessible, fair and responsive to the individual needs of clients</p>	<p>Developing and delivering fair programs and services that are based on a sound knowledge of the needs, circumstances and cultural and other characteristics of clients and assess the direct impact on the lives of people.</p>
	<p>Drawing on cultural diversity to improve efficiency and effectiveness of agency programs and to support innovation and success of Australian enterprises:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- auditing and raising the profile of staff cultural skills</li> <li>- providing appropriate staff training</li> <li>- taking steps to recruit culturally diverse employees, volunteers, grantees and contractors</li> <li>- supporting Australia's competitive business advantage arising from the diverse backgrounds, skills and networks of its workforce and population.</li> </ul>
	<p>Identifying and responding quickly to emerging issues affecting particular population groups or arising from Australia's cultural diversity.</p>
<p>Communication: Open and effective channels of communication with all stakeholders</p>	<p>Providing information in a timely manner, in appropriate media, publications, formats and languages.</p>
	<p>Recruiting and training staff who have appropriate linguistic and cultural skills or using interpreting services to ensure effective communication with clients, as necessary.</p>
	<p>Consulting appropriately with diverse communities and client groups about the development of policy, legislation and regulations, the implementation of programs, and the delivery of services.</p>
<p>Accountability: Effective and transparent reporting and review mechanisms</p>	<p>Establishing mechanisms to encourage feedback from people of all cultural backgrounds and allow them to register complaints and raise concerns about the performance of policy developers, program implementers and service providers (including outsourced services).</p>
	<p>Responding to concerns raised by clients to improve agencies' performance.</p>
	<p>Reporting to appropriate audiences of community concerns about agency programs and agency responses to those concerns.</p>
<p>Leadership: Broad approaches to management of issues arising from Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity</p>	<p>Collaborating within and between agencies and with other partners to identify and address issues relating to cultural diversity, through publicising good practices, sharing information, coordinating programs or collaborating on projects.</p>
	<p>Working with state, territory or local governments, non-government and community organisations, and contractors, raising their awareness of their responsibilities and encouraging improvement in their responses to cultural diversity.</p>
	<p>Contributing to the broader goals of cultural diversity policy by, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- strengthening the settlement prospects of migrants</li> <li>- enhancing the ability of all to achieve self-reliance</li> <li>- encouraging social, economic and educational participation for people from diverse backgrounds including issues relating to social cohesion and participation in programs and policies.</li> </ul>

# Index

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## A

Access and Equity Framework, 19, 29, 38, 49, 64, 91

Active participation arrangements, 21, 65, 69, 71

Adult Migrant English Program, 34, 45, 57, 68

Australian Taxation Office, 65, 66

## C

Commonwealth Ombudsman, 20, 39, 51

Complaints, 23, 80, 81, 82

Customer satisfaction, 18, 21, 23, 60, 61, 62, 63, 78, 79, 80

## D

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 33, 65, 66, 68

Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 33, 65, 66, 76, 79

Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 33, 38, 65, 66, 68, 83

## E

Employee support and training, 17, 19, 20, 22, 37, 43, 44, 45, 47, 54, 55, 56, 68, 77

## H

Humanitarian Settlement Service providers, 17, 33, 45, 57

## I

Information sharing arrangements, 21

Interpreter services, 39, 50, 51, 59, 74

## J

Job Services Australia providers, 17, 22, 68

## L

Language Literacy and Numeracy Program, 45, 57, 68

Language Services, 35, 50, 58, 73, 74

Language Services Unit, 50, 58

ANAO Audit Report No.42 2011–12  
Management of the Multicultural Servicing Strategy  
for the Delivery of Centrelink Services

## M

Mobile phones, 20, 51, 52, 63

Multicultural policy, 29, 38, 49

Multicultural Services Branch (MSB), 16, 17, 19, 21, 34, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 54, 65, 66, 67, 72, 79

Multicultural Services Officer Program (MSO Program), 17, 19, 36, 43, 47, 63, 74, 75, 76

Multicultural Services Officers (MSOs), 17, 19, 20, 21, 36, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 55, 56, 57, 67, 68, 69, 74, 75, 76, 82

Multilingual Call Centre, 18, 35, 50, 59, 62, 74, 79

## N

National Multicultural Advisory Group, 67

## O

Objective service quality indicators, 82

Online services, 46

Operational Balanced Scorecard, 82, 83

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 64, 65, 72

Outcomes, 22, 72, 73, 77, 78, 83

Outputs, 22, 72, 73

## R

Refugee customers, 20, 23, 31, 32, 35, 36, 45, 47, 51, 56, 57, 66, 68, 83

Refugee servicing units, 17, 20, 56, 57, 58

Resources, 13, 21, 37, 44, 59, 60, 73

## S

SMART criteria, 22, 72, 73, 84

Strategic Balanced Scorecard, 82, 83

## T

Translation services, 17, 20, 52, 53

## W

Written communication, 53

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---

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