



Australian Government



Services
Australia

Meeting of the Interim Services Australia Independent Advisory Board

Friday 15 March 2024

The Interim Independent Advisory Board (the Board) met in Canberra for their third meeting. Members engaged with Services Australia's Chief Executive Officer and had detailed discussions with several of the Agency's Executive team. The members heard about Services Australia's operations, design approaches and tailored, inclusive service delivery.

Board members reflected on the scale of operations including delivery of Centrelink, Medicare, Child Support and other payments and services. Members further discussed the Agency's critical role in responding to emergencies and providing service delivery surge assistance across government agencies.

Members were appreciative of the opportunity to observe the management and delivery of services first hand; in particular the scale and complexity involved. The Board heard from the Services Australia CEO on focussed efforts to improve the Agency's performance. Members discussed the Agency's critical role in building and maintaining public trust in addition to maintaining access to important services.

The Board also advocated for greater use of pilots to trial incremental improvements to service delivery, highlighting this as a way to trial services that are designed with inclusion front of mind.

Services Australia's operations

Members were briefed on the breadth of Services Australia's operations, including providing insights into the 9.4 million customer contacts received per week, and the challenges that Services Australia faces administering the essential, but diverse, services Australians need on a day-to-day basis.

The Board offered observations including:

- Complications in end-to-end digital relate to policy and legislative barriers where parts of assessing or processing a transaction require human intervention or judgement.
- Single parts of the delivery ecosystem cannot be managed in isolation, for example, diverting resources to answer calls more quickly results in a higher number of claims on hand, which in turn leads to additional customer calls to enquire on the status of their claim.
- The importance of reflecting the knowledge and deep experience of the delivery of services in policy development.

Designing services with the customer at the centre, based on research and insights

The Board explored the comprehensive customer experience framework Services Australia has developed and shared across government, which informs a strategic design approach. Members discussed how knowledge gained from customer insights is operationalised in service design and to influence government policies.

The Board offered advice to inform strategies to manage the challenges of designing customer centric services in government. Members are motivated to influence how good practice and use of technology could safely support service delivery to help customers get timely responses to enquiries and faster finalisation of their claims.

Targeted and tailored servicing and approaches for people experiencing vulnerability

The Board was briefed by Services Australia on the multi-layered services it provides to people in accordance with its Vulnerability Strategy and Action Plan, and Reconciliation Action Plan. Members discussed the best way for Services Australia staff to have the awareness of individuals' circumstances required to enable them to provide a targeted and tailored service response, particularly for people in crisis situations and with complex needs.

The Board recognised that simplistic categorisation of people as "vulnerable" risks reinforcing negative stereotypes about particular cohorts. Labelling people as "vulnerable" also risks people 'falling through the cracks' when they do not identify with the term. Recognising that anyone could find themselves in a vulnerable position due to changes in their circumstances, members provided insights on improvements to the system that could help people to maintain resilience in the face of circumstances that may lead to vulnerability.

First Nations engagement

The Board was briefed on the service delivery network and deep connections Services Australia has in support of First Nations customers and communities.

Members discussed the ongoing work of Service Australia's National Agreement on Closing the Gap Implementation Plan. The Board congratulated officials on their approach and encouraged them to continue this very important work.

myGov legislation

The Board was briefed on the progress of the myGov User Audit, Recommendation 3 – to legislate myGov as national service delivery infrastructure. Members acknowledge the intent behind Recommendation 3 was to introduce legislation that would provide a framework for myGov's commitment to, experience, and transparent and accountable management, of its performance.

Board members observed other challenges in delivering joined up services including:

- Privacy and secrecy laws restricting the sharing and use of information across different programs even when it could improve service delivery.
- Jurisdictional boundaries arising from various levels of government (e.g. federal and state) complicating effort to integrate services and remove frictions arising from the need to share the same information multiple times to different government departments.
- myGov has no primacy legislation that enables the flow of personal information across services. Currently, service delivery at Commonwealth level is bound by the statutory provisions for each service.
- As noted in the myGov user audit, fixing myGov also means addressing challenges beyond myGov.
- Clarity and specificity are needed in drafting of legislation to address specific needs and avoid ambiguity.

The Board welcomed reviewing the draft findings and next steps for legislating myGov to further evaluate and provide insights on the findings, ahead of the report being considered by the Minister in mid-2024.