



Australian Government



Services
Australia

Meeting of the Interim Services Australia Independent Advisory Board

Friday 15 November 2024

Members met on Friday 15 November 2024 to discuss a range of government priorities and previous matters brought forward to the Interim Independent Advisory Board (the Board).

The Minister, the Hon Bill Shorten MP, thanked Board members for their ongoing advice to shape the design, delivery and implementation of government services.

Verifiable credentials proofs of concept

The Board heard from Services Australia (the Agency), the Department of Finance and the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) on the progress of verifiable credentials proofs of concept (PoCs), including the Trust Exchange. This work is exploring how to expand the use of Digital ID by leveraging and uplifting the Australian Government Digital System to incorporate the use of digital wallets and verifiable credentials. There is also work underway to consider alternative ID proofing options for people to create a digital ID who are in vulnerable communities.

The Board noted the ongoing roles and responsibilities of each agency in collectively progressing this work, with Services Australia working closely with the Department of Finance as the policy lead for Digital ID, and the ATO leading a verifiable credentials proof of concept around myID.

The Board was provided with updates on the use cases being tested as part of each PoC over the coming months. Agencies are engaging with a wide range of stakeholders across industry, government and the community to understand the potential economic, social and community impacts. Members acknowledged the progress of these PoCs and reiterated the importance of the use cases meeting the needs and expectations of Australians.

Debt Management

The Agency gave the Board an overview of the work underway to make immediate and impactful improvements to debt management approaches. The Agency briefed members on key activities including:

- education and engagement with customers in an effort to prevent debt
- addressing overpayments at the point of contact with the customer
- waiving debts that are not cost effective to pursue, within legislative constraints, and
- improving business processes and making better use of data.

The Board acknowledged the Agency's commitment to improving its approach to debt management and noted the key focus areas align with the Government's response to the recommendations from the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme.

Centrepay Reform

The Board heard from the Agency about activities to reform Centrepay to ensure it better supports and protects customers. The Board acknowledged the significant research, consultation and engagement activities the Agency has undertaken to identify opportunities to improve Centrepay. In particular, the Agency's approach to collaborating with key advocacy groups and undertaking community engagement in remote and regional locations.

The Board reflected on the Agency's commitment to ensuring Centrepay offers customers autonomy, self-determination and agency to manage their finances, while also implementing strengthened safeguards. Members provided advice on customer needs and expectations through reform initiatives. The Board noted the Agency's intent to return in 2025 for further advice on the next steps of this work.

Closing the Gap priority areas in government service delivery

The Board discussed the Closing the Gap measures that relate to the Agency. The Board provided advice on the Agency's progress to meeting the objectives of the Closing the Gap Action Plan. The Board noted the Action Plan was co-designed with the National Indigenous Coalition.

The Board welcomed regular updates on how the administration of service policy is addressing Closing the Gap priority focus areas. The Board noted the role of the National Indigenous Coalition in supporting the Agency with testing performance against objectives within the Action Plan.

Considering recommendations from Economic Justice Australia

At the October Board meeting, Economic Justice Australia presented 13 recommendations to address key issues affecting access to social security entitlements. The Board discussed the Agency's progress in responding to the recommendations, which included:

- proof of identity (POI) requirements
- specialist and outreach service delivery
- changes to debt letters
- Family Tax Benefit and the maintenance action test, and
- intersection of Social Security and Child Support.

The Board noted the response to the 13 recommendations, including work already underway and next steps. The Board acknowledged that, to address the full suite of recommendations, consideration would need to be given to feasibility and policy constraints. The Board acknowledged the Agency's commitment to ongoing collaboration and engagement with Economic Justice Australia, other stakeholders and policy partners to harness opportunities to address key issues and deliver improved outcomes for customers.

Making government services simple through the use of emerging technologies

The Board was presented the updated Automation and Artificial Intelligence Strategy refined through further stakeholder engagement. The Board noted the in-depth consultation since the Strategy was last tabled with the Board and provided support for the Strategy noting that it will be finalised by the end of the year.