APS SUBMISSION

PUBLIC SERVICE IS TO SERVE THE PUBLIC - BUT IT SELDOM APPEARS AS SUCH TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC.

THE PUBLIC FEELS THAT THEY ARE PREVENTED FROM DIRECT COMMUNICATION WITH PS AS IN THE PAST.

I write as a former Commonwealth Public Servant; as a Senator’s media officer and as a Social Security officer. My husband was a Comm PS for 32 years until retrenched and my daughter has chalked up 31 years and still a PS. In addition my husband and I are now pensioners on part Aged pensions. As a family we have seen great changes in the PS, however most have been detrimental. I live in a tiny town that is almost an aged persons centre and I hear many complaints about govt depts.

My husband worked his last 12 years in a Social Security Computer Centre when errors seldom occurred and he is aghast at what has been occurring in the past few years relating to so-called modernisation with software that obviously is totally unsuited to Centrelink’s requirements, such as the debt collection software that created a huge debacle and distress to thousands. (My husband stays abreast of the latest software.)

**Remaining long-term staff are quite dedicated and passionate about their roles,** I know my daughter is as she works with the most vulnerable in society. However the strain of always being worried about retaining their positions each year causes experienced staff to leave for easier jobs with better pay or leave because of workplace health issues caused by overwork.

**Almost all policies are as if everyone that is affected is in city**.

All Canberra based public servants should be sent to regional state areas for a month to learn about how their department works in “real life”, rather than in isolation.

More than ever it seems as if policy makers in Canberra make up new policies to retain their own jobs rather than making practical policies that will assist the public.

**Lack of time for staff to know their own job.**

Staff often hear about policy changes in the media because they are so under-staffed and over-worked in their office that they have no time to catch up on changes if in fact they have been sent to offices before being released to the media.

In recent years there has been too many casual staff, who cannot answer the most basic questions, obviously they haven’t been trained in any way. That applies to both call centres and in office.

Medicare staff that were placed with Centrelink have been mostly a front of office receptacle for forms and handing out money yet are now expected to understand the intricacies of the Social Security Act! (I once read it in its entirety but know few staff bothered)

**E-mail to save govt money when an email address is given.**

Email addresses are always asked for but seldom used by a dept. Recently the ATO emailed me information about refunds then posted 6 two page letters!

**Almost all policies are as if everyone has a computer**.

I have been using computers since 1981 but I can tell you that the majority of my age group, particularly in regional areas, is not computer literate and many still do not own a computer. Many oldies complain often that they are expected to use computers but have no intention of buying one.

**QUESTIONS**

**First:** with Centrelink can the ridiculous term “customer” cease being used for beneficiaries and pensioners? NOTHING IS BOUGHT! MANY ARE BEGGING!

**Second:** Why are Centrelink staff no longer allowed to personally interact with pensioners and beneficiaries as a first port of call? **People want to talk in person.**

**People don’t want self-service.**

**Centrelink staff should be looking at a person so they can judge the truth, particularly for those on job allowances.**

**Call centres are not the answer - the waiting period is so long the call ends before anyone has spoken!**

One of my sons has worked for nearly 20 years for one of the bigger charities that has **people begging for food vouchers and he states that the volume has dramatically increased in recent years** and the people always are greatly distressed that they are unable to communicate with Centrelink staff.

**Third**: why is photo ID required for a mygov account when staff may never sight the person they are communicating with?

Another person can easily act as the said person and no-one at the govt end of the computer would ever know.

**Fourth:** Why can’t people contact a Medicare office by phone?

No phone number is given on any communication posted.

**Fifth**: why are many departments prevented from responding to a letter with a letter?

**Sixth**: Why not employ more staff rather than less to reduce over-payments?

Centrelink debt could be better managed from escalating in the first place by employing more staff to work as investigators in offices. The cost of outsourcing this role has been exorbitant. As someone who worked as an investigator, Centrelink staff have the authority to ask questions and enter premises that a private investigator may not. It was not a pleasant job but it saved a lot of money for the govt and also put a lot of people on the correct benefits.