**Improving citizens’ experience of government and delivering fair outcomes for them.**

Please start with Centrelink. In my own experience having to sort matters out for my 93 year old mother has been one of the most stressful and difficult things I have ever done. Two weeks running I spent 7 hours over one week hanging on the phone and nearly as long a second week. I work full time and cannot spend hours at a time hanging on so have to keep calling back when on a lunch break and just have to give up most of the time. My mother is 93 and has been on the aged pension since she was 65 and out of the blue for no reason her pension was stopped. As she is resident in a nursing home this sort of treatment is difficult to manage as 85% of her pension is required to be paid to the nursing home. There was no warning, no contact, nothing!!! When I did eventually get to speak with someone they said that the reason was that they wanted to know where she got the money to go into a home. All of this documentation had been provided at the time of her going into care. Again this experience of trying to have her assessed and provide the documentation was an experience which I can’t even begin to detail because the anxiety it caused was just horrendous. There seems to be a disconnect. Paperwork is provided and then there appears to be no record of it so the customer is treated like some kind of miscreant and penalised in a way that threatens their existence. Then it has to be provided all over again. Do they not keep files or records? The mere fact that a person has to be a customer of Centrelink suggests surely that they are not terribly well off financially so penalising them by stopping payments is cruel.

I am 73 and still working mainly for the reason that the thought of having to deal with Centrelink fills me with dread. When my partner 67 recently was forced to apply for a part pension because of his inability to obtain work, he was granted the princely sum of $67.00 per fortnight and a health care card. The Centrelink operator told him that I too was entitled to a Health Care Card and for me to apply for it. I did this in February and nothing happened. So I rang one day when I had a few hours to spare and they said I hadn’t provided all the documents. I had to ask what documents I hadn’t provided as I had no idea. I provided the missing document and then when I rang a few weeks later to see what was happening their response was “oh, we didn’t know you were partnered”. Never at any time was I contacted or advised. I explained that I was partnered and it was in fact my partner who was advised that I was entitled to apply for the card. “Oh she said then I will send it to processing.” I have rung again and been told it is still in processing. It is now 28 June. Needless to say I have now given up. I could go on and I know others with similar tales to tell of abysmal resolution of their issues. If we had money we wouldn’t have to deal with Centrelink but unfortunately a lot of people do and it is distressing when they put up blocks for no apparent reason.

Centrelink is a service which older Australians have to rely upon and it really needs to be sorted out. There must be a more efficient and humane way for this to operate.

Good luck with your review and thank God for you independent people who are undertaking this gargantuan task. If you could improve citizens’ experience of dealing with this department you would

save a lot of stress and angst.

By the way, I find Medicare very effective and functional and also my dealings with the Immigration Department have been most helpful and efficient.

Thank you for your time.