



Australian Government



Services  
Australia

## Meeting of the Interim Services Australia Independent Advisory Board

Friday 20 September 2024

The members met on Friday 20 September 2024 to discuss the response from Services Australia to implement the Government's response to the recommendations made from the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme. Representatives from the agency presented an implementation approach and progress made to date to the Board. The Board provided their insights and views about the plan in how it meets the commitments made to government and is consistent with the broader objectives and customer outcomes for Services Australia.

### ***Vulnerability***

Services Australia's representatives outlined the progress in improving how the agency manages customer vulnerability. This includes how information on a customer's vulnerability is raised, captured, stored and used, to make it easier for people to engage with the agency, and navigate services and payments. The Board acknowledged the agency is working closely with advocates and specialist services through the newly established Vulnerability Taskforce. This Taskforce will help determine how to capture and document customer vulnerability information. Members noted the agency has engaged with a range of peak advocacy organisations and specialist providers to inform the identification and design of future approaches.

### ***Service Delivery***

The Board heard about how the agency is exploring how to embed the customer voice in the early stages of decision making and engagement to improve service delivery. Services Australia shared details of the review of customer experience practices and the upcoming work to embed the customer experience front and centre of everything they do. The Board indicated their ongoing interest to support Services Australia to ensure language used in service delivery practices reduces stigma. Members supported the agency's approach to continue working on a range of reforms. The Board noted the focus on improving customer experience, including initiatives to improve and embed the way the agency listens to customers, and how to bring insights together to inform design and delivery. The Board acknowledged the success of, and continued outcomes, from the Advocate's Channel Pilot, launched in November 2023 with Economic Justice Australia, and how this work helps to make it faster and easier for community legal advocates to get assistance for their vulnerable clients. The Board acknowledged that the Advocates Channel has supported in identifying systemic issues and addressing complex and critical matters. The Board expressed their ongoing interest in building on the future of the Advocates Channel and shaping the implementation of the recommendation for a Customer Reference Group.

The Board noted the importance of connected service delivery to better meet the needs of customers and provide more tailored services, including to people experiencing vulnerability. Legislative reform is seen by the Board as a top priority to enable connected service delivery and vital for understanding and addressing the complex circumstances of individuals. The Board noted the potential for a more connected and integrated service response to lead to better outcomes, exemplified by the potential for better connection between services managed across multiple agencies such as employment services and income support.

The Board noted Services Australia's robust practices in customer research, design and testing and encouraged Services Australia to increase transparency and assurance of their ongoing engagement, research and consultation with customers, along side exploring further formal mechanisms to address the recommendations from the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme.

### ***People and Culture***

Members discussed the recommendations to improve culture, by listening and putting in place practices that enable staff to deliver on customer outcomes. The Board supported the agency's work to invite staff feedback through established mechanisms and encouraged the agency to consider further mechanisms for staff to escalate issues outside of existing management channels. The Board acknowledged the agency's commitment to exploring options to improve the way the agency receives feedback, implements it and then shares the outcomes from the feedback with staff.

### ***Debt Policy***

The Board heard details on work to improve the end-to-end management of debt processes, by embedding a customer-centric approach that is fair, timely and respectful. Members noted the agency is engaging with external organisations to develop an assurance strategy, aligning payment accuracy, compliance assurance and debt management processes. Services Australia continues to work with advocacy organisations, such as through the Civil Society Advisory Group (CSAG) to get feedback and insights, particularly in relation to debt management processes.

### ***Data Governance***

Members supported the agency's work in relation to improving how data exchanges are managed, to ensure a more informed, responsible and transparent customer experience. Services Australia discussed their continued work with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) to strengthen the governance of data matching programs. The Board understands the agency has completed reviews of operational governance frameworks and bilateral agreements. The agency detailed the extensive planning for a robust approach to the joint legal review of data matching program protocols. This approach was supported by members.

### ***Administration***

Services Australia discussed the recommendations to improve and rebuild trust by strengthening and streamlining administrative procedures and policies. The Board noted the agency is working closely with the Department of Social Services, the Department of Finance, and the ATO to better manage administrative processes and procedures. Members acknowledged the new process where matters with potentially significant legal and policy impacts are escalated to senior officials and the Office of Legal Services Coordination.

The Board acknowledged Service Australia's continued reflection on lessons learnt and commitment to addressing the recommendations and findings from the Royal Commission.

The Board supported receiving further updates at future meetings on the response from Services Australia to implement the Government's response to the recommendations made from the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme.