

Centrelink: Moving Forward

Centrelink is developing a series of products to improve the service that it can provide to customers. The guiding principle is to provide each customer with a service offer tailored to meet his or her individual needs.

The Customer Account will consolidate information that Centrelink holds on an individual which is currently held on a number of different databases and is difficult to bring together. Customer Profiling is a method of identifying key indicators of risk through analysis of data on literally millions of past and present customers. Community Connections will provide up to date information on local community support and resource agencies.

Centrelink is currently redesigning structures in Customer Service Centres to allow for greater specialisation. It is anticipated that some officers will specialise more on assessment and referrals. These staff will use these tools to get a better picture of the individual's circumstances, the possible risks they may face and be able to refer them to the most appropriate services available.

It is anticipated that the greater specialisation of staff and the improved assessment and referral tools that they can draw on will together lead to a major improvement in the quality of service that Centrelink is able to offer its customers.

Community Connections

Community Connections is a web based search and discovery facility that is currently being developed by Centrelink and will hold detailed information on local services such as community support and resource agencies. Community Connections aims to link Centrelink, customers and the community and in its first release will assist staff, including those in the new Personal Adviser role, with customer planning and referral by providing links with local service providers. When its second stage is released Community Connections will allow other agencies and customers to have access via the internet.

Key Benefits of Community Connections

For Staff:

- Duplication will be reduced by centralising all Centrelink's locally and nationally stored community information onto Community Connections.
- It will make it easy for staff to find up to date information on community providers.
- Centrelink staff will have access to comprehensive information about community providers to help them provide the best options and outcomes for customers.

For Customers:

- Community Connections will allow Centrelink and other service providers to give more consistent and accurate referrals to community providers;
- It will be available in printed format for customers to take away;
- It will be accessed by customers over-the-counter and will be available over the phone and on the Internet in the near future; and
- It will give details of community agencies available Australia wide for customer convenience.

In the first instance, the database will hold community information relating to emergency relief, accommodation and financial aid, crisis counselling and domestic violence support, community, legal and health services, drug, alcohol and gambling services, support and advocacy groups, transport and mobility education and wider family support will be put onto the database to assist staff help customers with various emergency situations.

Customer Profiling

Customer Profiling will allow Centrelink to identify the most appropriate pattern of contact based on the associated risk and better target interventions with customers, recognising that not all customers require the same level of service and support. Centrelink's data will be analysed to develop profiles of certain risk factors such as risk of homelessness, risk of not declaring income etc. This knowledge will inform Centrelink staff in the kind of referrals they make and the Preparing for Work Agreements they design with customers.

Objectives: The objectives of the implementation of Risk Profiling in Centrelink are to:

- Achieve improved program outcomes for client agencies within the same level of resourcing by better targeting of resource effort according to specific customer characteristics;
- Provide an improved generic framework for managing ongoing contact with Centrelink customers according to the level of program risk;
- Provide more options for program managers in designing program interventions with customers in terms of frequency of contact, content, duration and channel;
- Implement dynamic profiling that provides an ongoing core capability within Centrelink for identifying and responding to emerging program risks and supporting new initiatives (eg Australians Working Together); and
- Provide greater transparency in terms of business partnerships, business assurance and business pricing in the relationship between outcomes and services being purchased, resources allocated and the level of risk identified.

Scope:

- Job Seekers and Students: To identify risk to achieving employment/participation related outcomes, activity test compliance or incorrect payment.
- Age Pensioners: To identify risk to achieving outcomes consistent with retirement program (payment accuracy, maximisation of private income).
- Parenting Payment: To identify risk to achieving parenting related outcomes (economic & social participation and incorrect payment).
- Other Customer Groups: Two other customer groups (Disability & Carers and Families & Children) were not specifically incorporated in this initial stage. However the objective is to build a generic capability for risk profiling and effort will be made to extend this capability to these groups.

Customer Account

Centrelink is developing the Customer Account which will allow staff to provide a much more customised service. Currently, Centrelink's customer information is held on a number of databases on its mainframe system. The Customer Account is a web-based facility that will draw key data from the various databases into a series of screens designed for the

particular needs of the users. Changes through the Customer Account will update the mainframe databases.

In the first instance, users will be those Centrelink officers who deal directly with customers such as Customer Service Officers, Personal Advisors, Social Workers etc. Eventually customers will also have access to their own records and have the facility to update certain information online.

The Customer Account will allow for:

- better understanding of the customer leading to a more holistic focus on their needs and, especially when used in conjunction with Community Connection, will lead to better referrals;
- improved accuracy of customer data from data collected at customer contacts;
- customers no longer needing to repeat their information; and
- faster and more consistent service delivery.

Eventually, it may be possible to share some of this data with other service providers, particularly those services to whom Centrelink refers its customers. This is similar to the Commission's suggestion regarding a 'personal case history'. However, there are some significant privacy issues. In particular, one of the fundamental principles of privacy law that information should only be used for the purposes that it is gathered and that to use it for any other purpose requires the informed consent of the person. This means "Where two or more agencies wanted to share information, consent would have to be recorded for each person, for each agency, for each reason and for each timeframe. The customer would also have to give consent for each agency to access data from the other"¹. The complexity of the issues that need to be addressed becomes obvious.

¹ S Neilsen, "CRM: can it work in government?", The Public Sector Informant, Federal Capital Press p/1, May 2002, Australia