



Australian Government
Department of Human Services

2010-11 Annual Quality Review

child support



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About this review

The Annual Quality Review

In 2009, the Delivering Quality Outcomes (DQO) review was undertaken by David Richmond (AO) to explore decision making and quality assurance processes within Child Support. In developing the report, Richmond consulted extensively with staff and stakeholders.

The review made 115 recommendations while acknowledging the complex and dynamic environment in administering the Child Support Scheme. The report also recognised the extensive change program associated with introducing recent legislative changes and the work towards improvement already underway.

One of the recommendations (3.1.38) of this review was to provide visibility of the quality of Child Support's services through the Annual Quality Review. As such, the aim of this annual review is to:

“... provide an overview of the ‘state of play’ across a range of quality indicators and customer experiences...”

Each year Child Support intends to publish an Annual Quality Review report. This report will explore key aspects of Child Support's quality performance in supporting separated parents.

The Child Support Environment

David Richmond highlighted in his review the complexities faced by Child Support, which he urged must be recognised as part of the context in which the organisation operates:

“The Child Support Program operates, by any standard, in a very dynamic environment of review, change and adjustment. Change is driven in part by variations in patterns of customer demand and by conscious changes in Government Policy”

“A real challenge for programs dealing with the consequences of relationship breakdown and stress is the nature of the behaviour between the parties. Often this will reflect profoundly difficult and sometimes irresolvable issues of relationships and/or in some cases wider, equally profound, social and economic circumstances.

In judging quality of service, resolution of issues, effectiveness of case and issue management and overall performance such fundamental tensions and conflicts must be recognised as part of the context in which the Program operates.”

A copy of the full DQO review is available on www.csa.gov.au

The DQO review has been the roadmap for Child Support to make significant quality improvements and provide better outcomes for our customers. Many of the programs referred to in the Annual Quality Review report are the result of implementing the DQO recommendations. This has contributed to improvements in the effectiveness and efficiency of decision making and tangible collection outcomes for customers.

Overview

This first Annual Quality Review includes details of Child Support's achievements against performance measures as well as information about recent quality improvements.

The performance measures are focused around Child Support's purpose which is to ensure that child support is paid in full and on time. Child Support has focused significant effort in improving service quality to achieve better collection outcomes for customers.

In response to the DQO Review, Child Support has implemented a Quality Assurance Framework. This provides a foundation for Child Support's focus on quality outcomes and approach to continuous improvement.

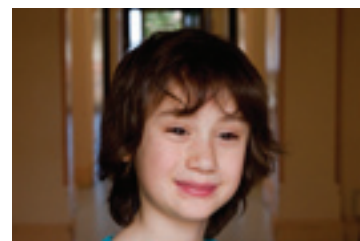
Feedback provided by customers and staff is an important means of describing Child Support's quality performance. Results from Child Support's customer satisfaction survey and specific comments made about areas for improvement are included in this report to provide an insight into our customers' experience. Feedback about Child Support's quality performance as reported by frontline staff provides this report with additional perspective.

This initial Annual Quality Review will provide a foundation for future reports. It is anticipated that Child Support will continue to develop and refine the way performance quality is measured.



Driving quality: Child Support programme of work

The eight elements of the Quality Assurance Framework ensure Child Support meets its objective of 'getting it right the first time' and better collection outcomes for customers. The framework is shown below:



The framework has given structure and focus to recent quality improvement programs. These programs complement Child Support's existing quality assurance and quality controls. Many of these programs are currently being rolled out within Child Support and will continue to be embedded over the 2011-12 financial year. Key aspects of these quality improvement programs are outlined below.

Governance & Accountability

Defining ownership of the quality of Child Support services and decisions through structured governance arrangements and specific accountabilities is vital to achieving quality outcomes.



Governance and Accountability

Structure

A revised structure and business model has been introduced, directly aligning with the service delivery model. This has included moving from a state based structure to a national business line model.

A review of job roles, including responsibilities for service quality, was undertaken. The review redefined job roles in order to provide greater clarity and parity of roles, responsibility and management spans of control. Implementing the jobs roles has commenced and will continue during 2011-12.

Quality Committee

A Quality Committee was established to provide governance in overseeing quality performance and the implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework. The Quality Committee assesses, discusses and makes recommendations relating to quality assurance and systemic issues impacting on the services delivered to customers.

Quality definition

Child Support has developed a specific definition of service quality. This clearly defines what quality outcomes and customer experience Child Support is aiming to achieve.

Business Ownership Framework

A Business Ownership Framework was introduced defining ownership responsibilities and accountabilities for all processes and products. This will strengthen Child Support governance and improve accountability for decision making and timely issue resolution.

Staff Capability

The majority of customers interact with Child Support staff directly over the phone. Their ability to provide accurate information, decisions and options for customers is vital. Building staff capabilities and skills is a cornerstone of enhancing quality performance.



Staff Capability

A new approach for developing staff

Child Support has a new, more structured approach to skilling frontline staff. Team Leaders and technical experts work together to identify skill needs and provide individual staff with tailored training and feedback on their work.

Skills pathway

Child Support has undertaken significant research to develop a skills pathway. This will assist staff to self-assess and develop their technical competency. It includes self-paced options such as e-learning. Child Support will continue to add content to the Pathway to reflect a broader range of topics during 2011-12.

A new structure for supporting staff

A new business model and more collaborative approach has been introduced to the delivery of technical support services for frontline staff.

Developing Technical Experts

Child Support has run workshops to provide technical experts with the opportunity to work through complex technical issues and policy. This ensures that they can provide accurate advice to frontline staff on customer issues.

Processes & Procedures

Robust processes and procedures promote accuracy and consistency. Several Child Support processes and procedures have been redesigned to promote quality customer outcomes and enhance the service delivery experience.

Processes and Procedures

New approach to customer management

Child Support has started introducing a nationally consistent customer management approach. This approach simplifies internal business processes to result in more efficient customer management and better outcomes for customers. A central theme of the approach is that collection is everyone's responsibility. This supports frontline staff to understand the importance of ensuring child support is paid in full and on time.

Change of Assessment reform

Reforms to the Change of Assessment process have provided customers with special circumstances with access to a simpler, quicker process with decisions that are explained in a way that customers can understand. These improvements include a simplified application form, streamlined process and standardised notices of decisions.

Customer referrals to external services

Child Support has introduced an integrated referral framework to assist staff in matching customers with appropriate external services. This provides a systematic way of identifying customers who may need intensive support and/or referral to other Government or community providers for early intervention and assistance.

Revised documentation of procedures

Child Support has made extensive refinements to procedural instructions which guide frontline staff through all customer interactions and decisions. These revisions focus on streamlining resourcing tools and improving clarity of instructions.

Specialised teams

Where a specific need is identified Child Support now convenes specialist teams to take referrals from other business areas. This ensures that customers receive specialised support and accurate information in complex situations.

Aligning care decisions with Centrelink

Child Support and Centrelink have successfully implemented the alignment of care measure. Mutual customers only need to tell either Child Support or the Family Assistance Office of changes to care arrangements. This facilitates a "tell it once" approach.



**Robust processes
and procedures
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Systems & Data

Reliable systems and data provide the foundation for efficiency from which quality outcomes can be achieved. Several initiatives have been undertaken to improve data integrity and system performance.

Systems and Data

Improvements to customer database

Significant software enhancements, including a revised help function, have been built into Child Support's customer database.

Automating processes

The introduction of electronic scanning of incoming mail has improved the timeliness and quality of customer documentation by eliminating manual keying.

Workload management

Child Support has undertaken a review of key processes to better understand the time and effort involved in addressing specific customer issues. In future this will allow Child Support to work more efficiently and effectively.

Online service improvements

Child Support has made technology enhancements to communication channels including online information services and secure customer communications.

Decision Monitoring

Decision monitoring provides Child Support with visibility of performance quality. Business intelligence obtained through quality assurance activities provides a means of identifying and correcting issues.

Decision Monitoring

National decision monitoring

Child Support has undertaken an extensive co-design process with all business areas to design a robust national decision monitoring program. This will roll out in the 2011-12 financial year.

Business area decision monitoring

Child Support has designed business area specific decision monitoring plans. These will monitor critical activities within business areas and assess them against the standard quality assurance elements. This allows Child Support to target specific areas of risk. These activities will be implemented in the next financial year.

Quality audits

Internal auditing increased the focus on assessing the quality of processes and procedures. This is to ensure maximum efficiency and consistency within projects and programs.

Feedback Management

The management of feedback from staff, customers and stakeholders in Child Support is critical to understanding and improving the quality of our service. Improvements have been made to complement the existing approach to incorporating feedback into the ongoing improvement agenda.

Feedback Management

Issue register trial

A centralised issues register has been trialled. It will be rolled out in the 2011-12 financial year to allow all staff the means to communicate feedback, generate ideas and identify issues for resolution.

Issue escalation process

A streamlined escalation process has been designed for the referral of systemic concerns requiring immediate attention.

Working with policy department

Child Support has worked to strengthen its relationship with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs who are responsible for child support policy. This has enabled Child Support to continue to share learning and improve both child support policy and service delivery.

Policy suggestions mailbox

An electronic mailbox for suggestions for improvements to child support policy was launched as an access point for frontline staff to share feedback and policy suggestions on behalf of customers. A dedicated team and working group will explore these suggestions.

Performance Reporting & Recognition

Understanding performance and rewarding quality work is vital to achieving outcomes for customers. Child Support has started work to improve the quality of reporting and the process for recognising performance excellence.

Performance Reporting and Recognition

Reporting

An improved framework for reporting has been developed and implementation of an early version has commenced. The new reporting will allow better visibility of performance across the business, down to an individual team level. Child Support will continue to implement this reporting and expand the breadth of information included over the coming years.

Recognition of performance

Child Support has worked extensively to review and revise staff roles and responsibilities. Tied to this is increased recognition of good staff performance.



Communication

Child Support has consciously increased communication about quality to raise awareness and to strengthen service quality in the Child Support culture. Child Support has also worked to improve the quality of our communication with customers.

Communication

Communication about the Quality Assurance Framework

A comprehensive staff communication strategy is in place to publicise key messages about getting it right the first time and improving service quality.

Annual Quality Review report

The Annual Quality Review has been established to facilitate reporting of quality outcomes and performance to external stakeholders. This report gives external accountability for Child Support's quality performance.

Trialling SMS and outbound dialling

Child Support has trialled the use of automated outbound dialling and Short Message Service (SMS) to communicate more efficiently with customers.

Customer letters

Extensive consultation and a co-design approach were adopted to engage customers and stakeholders to improve two priority letters. This resulted in revised payer account statements and assessment notices scheduled for release in the 2011-12 financial year. This will make it easier for customers to understand the child support scheme.



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Quality performance

Quality Measures

For Child Support, quality service means that:

- the children of separated parents can rely on the transfer of an accurate level of financial support, in full and on time;
- the customer service experience is responsive, holistic, inclusive of all parties, respectful of privacy, and supportive of productive relationships for the benefit of children and;
- customers are provided with timely, well-informed, technically correct and consistent decisions that are documented and explained to all customers in a way they can understand.

The focus for quality measures in this initial Annual Quality Review have been guided by the collection and debt recovery themes in the DQO review. All the work undertaken to improve service quality is to ensure that child support is paid in full and on time. Future Annual Quality Reviews may also focus on additional measures which contribute to achieving key outcomes for customers including improved collection.

The measurements outlined below identify the positive impact these improvements have had on tangible customer outcomes.

Rate of Child Support debt growth

The growth of total outstanding child support debt has reduced from 7.45 per cent during 2009–10 to 2.37 per cent for 2010–11.

	30 June 2009	30 June 2010	30 June 2011
Growth of child support debt	7.41%	7.45%	2.37%

Percentage of active paying parents without a child support debt

The number and proportion of active paying parents without a child support debt is steadily increasing compared to the previous financial year. Close to 74.5 per cent of all active paying parents had no debt at the end of June 2011 compared to 72.7 per cent at the end of June 2010.

	30 June 2009	30 June 2010	30 June 2011
Percentage of active paying parents without debt	71.85%	72.68%	74.49%

Percentage of active paying parents with debt under a payment arrangement

The percentage of active paying parents with a payment arrangement for outstanding child support was 44.35 per cent in 2010–11. This is consistent with the previous year and maintained the previous improvement seen in 2009–10 when there was an increase of 5 percentage points.

	30 June 2009	30 June 2010	30 June 2011
Percentage of active paying parents with debt under arrangement	39.23%	44.70%	44.35%

Complaints

The number of escalated complaints has reduced significantly over the past two years. In 2010–11, 7,443 complaints were received compared to 9,553 in 2009–10, a reduction of 22.10 per cent.

This improvement built on our success in reducing complaints in 2009–10, by focusing on customer issues being effectively managed and resolved at the first opportunity. This includes strategies such as:

- establishing the Customer Review and Quality Improvement business line in February 2010 to help customers with complex needs and provide review services with the intention of re-establishing an effective relationship between Child Support and the customer;
- involving front-line supervisors earlier in managing and resolving complaints including improved access to call recordings;
- better staff understanding of the impacts of customer complaints and the need for complaints to be effectively managed and resolved; and
- training for all staff through e-learning on how to handle complaints.

These measures directly improved the way staff interacted with customers. Escalated complaints in 2010–11 relating to staff behaviour reduced by 38 per cent and those related to decision making reduced by 21 per cent compared to 2009–10. These results were complemented by strong customer satisfaction levels with Customer Service Officers.

Telephony response

Child Support delivers the majority of its services via the phone. Child Support aims for a service standard of 80 per cent of telephone calls being answered within 30 seconds. At 30 June 2011, 85.10 per cent of customer calls were answered within 30 seconds with more than 2.9 million calls answered from customers and 3.1 million outbound calls made to customers.

There has also been a reduction in the number of inbound calls which reflects proactive efforts to improve quality customer service.

Objections to Child Support decisions

Fewer objections were received from customers regarding decisions about child support assessments and the collection of child support in 2010–11 than previous years. In 2010–11 17,179 objections were received, compared to 19,557 in 2009–2010.

Customer Feedback

Customers Having a Say is a telephony based, point of service survey which is measured against five customer service principles. Child Support uses this survey to gather feedback from customers about their satisfaction with service and suggestions for improvement.

Customer satisfaction

During 2010–11 customer satisfaction results tracked consistently above the target of 70 per cent every month. The table below shows the performance each month over the last year.

Figure 1: Satisfaction with service provided by Child Support overall

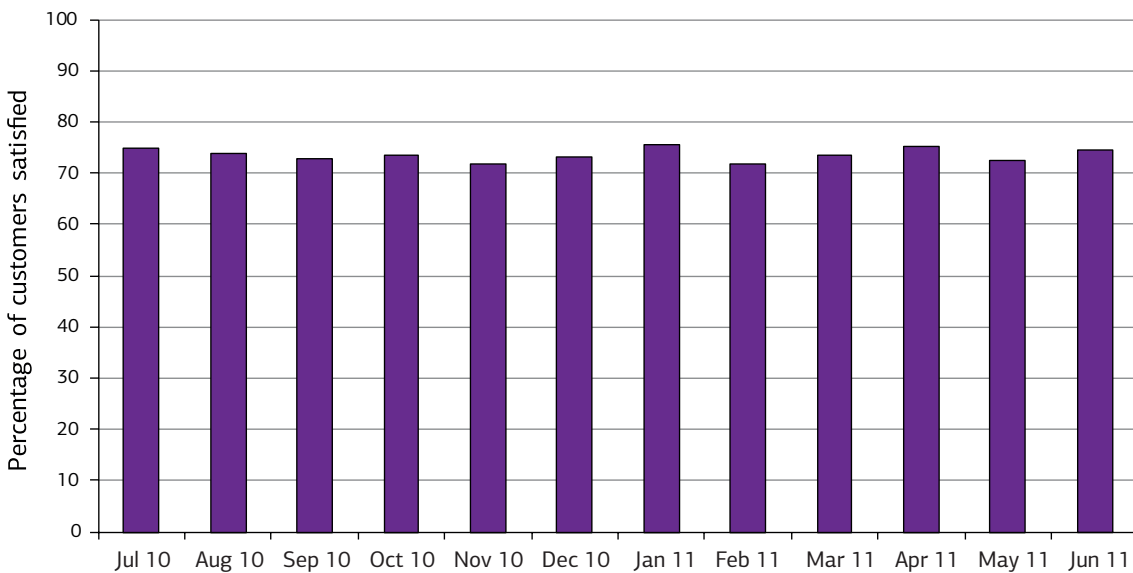
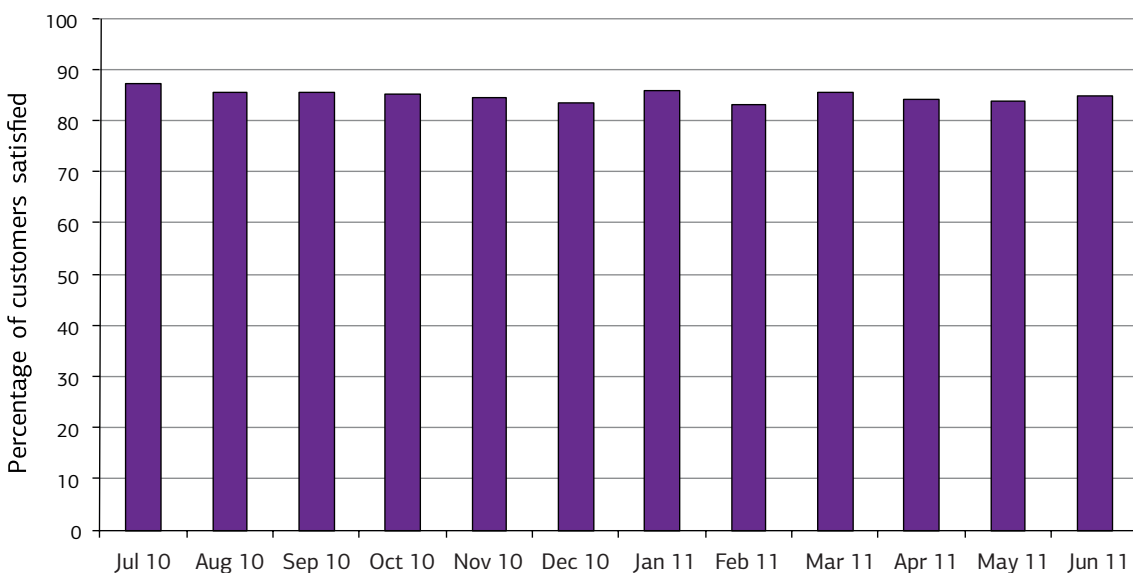


Figure 2: Satisfaction with service provided by customer service officers



Customer suggestions

For one week each month customers are given the opportunity to leave a recorded response to the statement: *Please provide one suggestion on how you think Child Support can improve their service to you. This information is incorporated into the ongoing improvement agenda as part of the systemic approach to feedback management.*

The majority of customers provide positive feedback and compliments in response to this statement. Of the customers who commented on overall service quality, 77 per cent of customers responded either positively or were neutral. Customers who commented on their customer service experience with staff, reported to have a positive experience and represented 65 per cent of all responses in this category.

Comments are an effective way for customers to provide specific feedback and suggestions about the Child Support service. A common issue was the change of assessment process. Some typical feedback on this issue was;

"It shouldn't take two months to get the change of assessments through." (Oct 2010)

"... the lengthy forms that I used to get, I don't know if you still do that. But they're complicated, complex and just so irritating." (Dec 2010)

In response to customer and stakeholder feedback Child Support have been making the change of assessment process easier and quicker for separated parents in special circumstances. This involves earlier and more frequent contact between customers and decision makers, shorter decision timeframes, and the introduction of more user-friendly forms.

Staff Feedback

Child Support conducted a focused survey with a targeted group of staff. Staff were asked about what aspects Child Support was getting right and what aspects could be done better.

The following elements were identified as working well within Child Support:

- the new approach to improving staff capability; and
- the creation of specialist teams to ensure consistent quality of complex decisions.

The two elements which were consistently identified by respondents as areas where Child Support could improve were:

- the customer management database; and
- the co-operation and collaboration between business areas.



Child Support will continue to focus on embedding the Quality Assurance Framework and the principles of quality to achieve better collection outcomes for customers.

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