

Question on Notice

No. 667

Asked on 17 May 2018

MR R STEVENS ASKED THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL AND MINISTER FOR JUSTICE (HON Y D'ATH) –

QUESTION:

With references to Victims Assist—

Will the Attorney-General advise the current processing times for (a) emergency payments and (b) general payments (broken down by the four types of victims)?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Mermaid Beach for his question.

The Victims Assist Queensland (VAQ) scheme was established by the then Labor Government in 2009 to assist victims in recovering from the consequences of violent crime in a timely fashion while minimising the stress and trauma that may be involved in the process. VAQ offers support to 4 types of victims (primary victims; witness secondary victims; parent secondary victims; and related victims) and provides financial assistance to cover costs associated with recovery, as well as emergency and funeral expenses.

In the 2017-18 financial year to 30 April 2018, VAQ granted more than \$16.77 million in financial assistance to 1,727 individual applicants to assist victims and their families in their recovery from the impact of violent crime.

In response to part a), VAQ continues to prioritise urgent applications for interim assistance (urgent and emergency expenses) and applications for funeral assistance. In the 2017-18 financial year to 30 April 2018, the approximate average processing times for emergency payments has been:

- 14 calendar days for funeral expense assistance applications;
- 35 calendar days for interim assistance applications for primary victims;
- 28 calendar days for interim assistance applications for related victims;
- 23 calendar days for interim assistance applications for witness secondary victims; and
- 26 calendar days for interim assistance applications for parent secondary victims.

In response to part b), between 1 July 2017 and 30 April 2018 VAQ has received a 70% increase in applications for financial assistance, compared to the same period in 2016-17. This increase coincided with the commencement of legislative amendments made by the Palaszczuk Government to expand the scope of the scheme to ensure all victims of domestic and family violence, including elder abuse, were able to access financial assistance. As a result of increased applications, in the 2017-18 financial year to 30 April 2018, the average time taken to process general applications for assistance has been:

- 158 calendar days for primary victims;
- 168 calendar days for related victims;

- 114 calendar days for witness secondary victims; and
- 173 calendar days for parent secondary victims.

VAQ informs victims of likely timeframes for processing an application for assistance prior to and after an application is lodged and are also made aware the option to apply for interim assistance should they require assistance with urgent or emergency expenses.

Once applications are with a government assessor, VAQ's efficient assessment processes have meant that VAQ is currently well within expected assessment service delivery standards for funeral, interim (urgent and emergency expenses) and general applications.

In the 2017-18 financial year to 30 April 2018, the average time taken for an assessor to consider an application for assistance are:

- 6 calendar days (target 15 days) for funeral assistance assessment;
- 12 calendar days (target 21 days) for interim assistance assessment; and
- 69 calendar days (target 80 days) for general assessment.

Government assessors are required to gather information from a number of sources, including the Queensland Police Service, health practitioners, insurers and service providers which can delay processing times. As VAQ's financial assistance scheme is a complementary scheme, in some matters, VAQ must wait until other processes such as Workers Compensation have been finalised before finalising an application, which can also contribute to increased processing times.

Upon completion of an assessment, in most cases it takes VAQ 1 to 2 weeks to process payment to victims and service providers. This timeframe varies depending on whether additional information is required prior to making payment (e.g. receiving updated banking details, receipts or invoices for expenses).

The 2018-19 budget provides VAQ with increased funding of \$11.4 million over two years to provide financial support to victims of crime.