

Jobs & Skills Summit 2022

Social Security Round Table National Council of Single Mothers & their Children (NCSMC)

Empower single mothers to parent, to future plan, and to gain secure employment.

Single Mother Families - An Australian asset.

NCSMC welcomes the opportunity to examine, to understand the function, and to locate enhancements of the Social Security System within the context of the Jobs & Skills Summit.

Reversing successive government decisions which reduced the child threshold to 8 years and a reliance upon Jobseeker. Recent research found that the majority of the single mothers who lost access to the Parenting Payment were survivors of family violence and coercive control.

Solid Ground

Restore access to the Parenting Payment Single (PPS) for families whose youngest child is 16 years.

Benefits

- Increases women's safety
- Increases the ability for women to protect and raise children
- Increases economic security.
- Provides solid ground for women to gain entry into paid work, undertake work ready tasks, study & skill enhancement. It enables future planning.
- Jobseeker was never designed for single parents. Financial returns from paid work are much less on Jobseeker with payments reduced at \$150 per fortnight, at 40c per \$1. Whilst for PPS its \$250.80 per fortnight (3 children).

A national reset. It is a myth that impoverishing families assists with productivity

Strategies used

- Harsh levels of payments, below the poverty line, with no objective or independent data. Driven by ideology and out-of step with the community.
- Increased thresholds
- Paused Indexation with no connection to cost of living increases
- More complex processes eg Disability Support Pension.
- Burden of Proof - e.g the failed single mother verification
- Poorly managed, traumatising, and short DV exemptions
- Wait periods and poor information
- Ceased stakeholder engagement. NCSMC access to regular DSS Departmental meetings ceased in 2014.



ROBODEBT

Robodebt is an example of the disdain and the poor treatment of social security claimants.

Co-Design Principles

NCSMC recently developed an 'information sheet' for women to understand Workforce Australia especially the Point System. This is in addition to the 'tips and information' for participants of ParentsNext. The sheets are timestamped, confirming consultation with the relevant Departments. This is unacceptable for public policy to be operating with information gaps, especially with systems that suspend payments.

Income Support Strategies and Policies are Gendered

More women will experience financial insecurity, interrupted paid work, insecure tenancy and or homelessness, harmed by violence and trauma whilst undertake caring roles.

- Nearly half the children in sole parent families live in poverty (44%) compared with 13% for children living with both parents. In single parent families in which the main earner is a woman the rate of poverty (37%) is twice that in which the main earner is a man (18%).
- 85% of single parent households are run by women, the most recent Census showed there are now 1 million single parent families in Australia. It is 850,000 women taking on the mother load of paid and unpaid care.

Think outside the box: Work Ready for single mothers

Social Security policy levers

- Enable volunteer work for single mothers of all ages. An important and significant step forward for women affected by gendered violence
- More flexibility for study options. Important for woman affected by gendered violence or who have had a longer absence from workplace.



continued

- Pension Education Supplement: Part-time study assistance to be equal for single mothers as full-time study. Current rules allow 50% course load to maintain full-time assistance. Women report that Services Australia factor in semester breaks which puts them under the threshold. Study, writing assignments and or field placements are not taken into consideration.
- Typically, a Jobseeker (single mother) is not eligible for assistance. Access is gained when in receipt of the PPS. Furthermore, if they defer the course, stop studying or have a break in enrolment they lose eligibility.
- Create a central place to access funds for required licences, certificates and other workforce needs. Achievable through the reimagining a pre-employment program known as ParentsNext. Participants concerns were validated by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights on 4 August 2021.

Social Security & Paid Employment Recommendations

Social Security policy levers continued

- Install a Services Australia 'reconnect process' for claimants who have not accessed an income support payment for up to 12 months due to paid work. Gaining income support is too difficult and prolonged that leaving becomes a risk.
- Enable access to the range of concession and health care cards for three-months once in paid employment, even if not eligible. Catching up on health needs will assist with employment longevity. We know that women forgo their health needs due to hardship.
- Undertake research to ascertain the obstacles for study or why women leave. We suggest that a key determinant will be when women lose access to the Parenting Payment Single (youngest child turns 8 years).
- Be informed of the churn of women into employment services RTO's or other courses that are a financial gain for the entities.
- For those unemployed for more than 3 months, maintain Jobseeker payments for up to 3 months after commencement of paid employment (threshold up to \$58,108), to allow for women to make up for downward spiral of debt incurred whilst on Jobseeker (such as payment plans), enabling them to stay in their jobs longer and build a financial buffer.

Obstacles

- Employment services are not viewed as trusted places but entities that can suspend and control finances. Government procurement arrangements must take some responsibility for the policy setting. A complete overhaul is required with potential for significant savings and reinvestment.
- Child Care: affordable, accessible with In-home options is essential. However, it so much more than a productivity measure. Activity limits to be lifted. Reinvigorating childcare as childhood wellbeing and development function. Furthermore, lifting the activity test would assist with women's capacity to accept on call or sporadic employment options which is at odds with the activity limits.

Violence Against Women & Children in the context of Jobs, Skills Summit

Recent research found that the majority of the single mothers who lost access to the Parenting Payment Single were survivors of family violence and coercive control. The report states that 90,000 wanted to leave but couldn't, whilst 8,000 women a year are forced to return to abusive partners. We can no longer pretend that we don't know the breadth of this issue.

- Women with children may be prohibited from leaving an area. Power through the family law is granted to the perpetrator of violence. Women cannot leave even if they have secure employment and safety.
- Trauma and grief counselling to be accessible and affordable and to be considered as part of a future planning terrain.
- Crisis payment is too rigid with 7-day application requirement.
- Whilst mutual obligations continues the first exemption should commence at 12 months (immediate action).
- NCSMC welcomes the amendment to the Fair Work Act to provide 10 days of paid family and domestic violence leave as part of the National Employment Standards and endorse the extension of the paid leave entitlement to casual employees and that full entitlement will be accessible from the commencement of employment.



Waste of Resources - Broken System & Spirit

- Suspend all mutual obligations and work for the dole requirements. Reinvest the money into a "Productivity Payment" for individuals. It is much more than incentivizing; it will assist to keep paid employment as it cost money to commence and to maintain employment if the employee has been living with hardship and is parenting.
- Community controlled organisations and voices to critique the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP).

Gender

Restore the indirect and direct cost of 'care' in national policies.

- The care cost was removed from the child support scheme in 2008, a time when patriarchal policies were dominant and gender was ignored.
- The gender work of unpaid care is a key driver for restoring access a parenting payment. Single mothers with children aged 8 to 16 years are not unemployed they are parenting with a quest to enter or increase paid employment.
- Review, through the lived reality, the Carer Allowance and Carer Payment to ascertain if they are 'fit for purpose' and can support paid employment and or the obtain of skills whilst balancing care demands. Especially in one parent households.

Other Considerations

- Immigration. Abolish the 4 years wait period for income support won't assist for interrupted, seasonal, low paid or periods of non-employment.
- A safe experience for backpackers. Social Media strategies has the potential in increase safety such e.g the development of the concept 'Selfies for Safety'
- Independent and intersectional research must inform policy.
- Women's economic security to be part of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and children whilst the social security system to be reviewed as 'fit for purpose'.

Savings

1. Abolish Income Management
2. Abolish mutual obligations and work for the dole
3. Reimage ParentsNext. Establish a carer hub using the current participants funds, which are under subscribed, and a minor cost component of the program

The lived reality

I got a job in traffic control business. I had to pay \$900 for my licence. That was all of my Centrelink support, and I already had an advance payment, I don't get paid for a few weeks. I don't have any money for food, for petrol, for my rent, or my medical appointment and my medication (Sarah had been undergoing chemotherapy on her elbow).

13th August 22

I am a single mother to a 13 year old. I've been suffering extreme and very long domestic violence for nearly 15 years from my son's father. We have been separated for 4 years. Received a 16 week exemption from my mutual obligations. They won't give me another exemption even though there has been multiple breaches of IVP to which I need to go to court. The stress of going through this is very damaging. Let's hope more can be done.

22nd August 22

NCSMC has sought support from DEWR to seek Services Australia involvement for this individual and the systemic issue

I got a job interview and there are not a lot of jobs in my area. I didn't have any petrol, I phoned (name removed of large crisis provider), they told me that they can't help me with petrol for a job interview but they maybe able to help if i get the job.

15th August 22

After leaving my ex I was offered employment 6 hours away. However, he wouldn't permit me to move because it would impact his relationship with the children. He then moved 4 hours away and hasn't seen the kids for years. I could have bought a house with my secure employment. The kids would have had access to good schools, beaches, and a healthy lifestyle. I lived with anger, alcohol abuse, threatened violence, coercive control and then was financially ruined after I ended the relationship.

23rd August 22