

WORLD CLASS SOCIAL SERVICES

Bringing our social safety net into the 21st century – accessible, reliable support when you need it.

All of us deserve access to the things we need to live a good life. In a country as wealthy as Australia, nobody should be left behind. Despite this, successive Labor and Coalition governments have cut social services, while giving big businesses tax breaks.

The Greens have a comprehensive plan to bring our social safety net into the twenty-first century, support those in need, and create a system that is flexible and responsive to the changing needs of our economy and society.



THE GREENS WILL:

- Immediately **raise Newstart and Youth Allowance by \$75 per week** and bring back the **Parenting Payment Single**
- **Guarantee access to essential community services** including social services, disability services, mental health services and aged care
- **Abolish** punitive measures including **income management and work for the dole**
- Establish an ongoing **Equality Commission**



RAISE NEWSTART AND BRING BACK PARENTING PAYMENT SINGLE

Australia's key unemployment payment, Newstart, hasn't had a real increase in over two decades.¹ At \$274 per week for a single adult, the Newstart Allowance is too low for people to afford the basic essentials of life, making it much harder for them to search for a job effectively. Social services organisations, unions and business groups have all called for Newstart to be increased^{2,3,4} but this has been ignored by the Liberal and Labor parties.

The Greens will take immediate action to increase the singles rate of Newstart Allowance by \$75 per week.

Struggling single parents have been pushed further in to poverty by being forced onto Newstart when their youngest child turns eight. This transfer of 80,000 sole parents to Newstart Allowance in 2013 was associated with an increase in the rate of poverty among unemployed sole parents from 35% in 2013 to 59% two years later.⁵

We will give single parents a helping hand by reversing this welfare to work measure and bringing back a system where single parents have access to the Parenting Payment Single allowance. Moving single parents from Newstart to Parenting Payment Single, and removing the pause in income thresholds, will help more than 90,000 single parents across Australia.

RAISE YOUTH ALLOWANCE

The cost of living in Australia is putting more and more young people under pressure. The current rates of Newstart and Youth Allowance do not come close to covering the cost of basic essentials for living.⁶

The Greens will raise Youth Allowance by \$75 a week and change the eligibility criteria so more students can access the payment. We will change the taper rate for parental means testing from 20 cents in the dollar to 1 cent.

This will ensure that more students can be supported through university.

GUARANTEED ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SOCIAL SERVICES

Access to essential services is the backbone of a fair society. We have a flourishing economy in Australia. This should ensure that we have access to the services we need for a quality life, from the cradle to the grave.

The Greens want to improve the provision of income support and social services across Australia by working towards a clear framework for community service guarantees.

The Greens will:

- Map community service needs - we will work to identify which areas have unmet needs, and where community services need to be expanded;
- Establish a Commonwealth taskforce to work across the Commonwealth Public Service and with state and territory counterparts towards the establishment of comprehensive community service guarantees at a cost of \$61.4 million over three years; and
- Ensure that long waiting lists for aged care home care packages are addressed and ensure everyone has access to quality aged care, by providing an additional 50,000 Level 3 and 4 packages at a cost of \$5.491 billion.

1 ACOSS, Budget Priorities Statement: Federal Budget 2018-19, January 2018

2 Ibid

3 Business Council of Australia, Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Adequacy of the Allowance Payment System for Jobseekers and Others, August 2012

4 ACTU, Jobs You Can Count On - a secure work future for Australia, 23/5/18 <https://www.actu.org.au/actu-media/media-releases/2018/jobs-you-can-count-on-a-secure-work-future-for-australia>

5 ACOSS, Budget Priorities Statement: Federal Budget 2018-19, January 2018

6 ACOSS, Budget Priorities Statement: Federal Budget 2018-19, January 2018

ABOLISH PUNITIVE MEASURES

This Government has a number of punitive measures, which keep people in poverty and undermine their dignity and agency. These punitive measures include compulsory income management, Work for the Dole, the Community Development Program and exploitative youth employment programs like Youth Jobs PaTH.

The Greens share the concerns of people and communities across the country who have campaigned against harsh income support measures, including the Cashless Debit Card.

The Government is increasingly enforcing mutual obligation requirements on people receiving income support payments. The evidence shows that mutual obligations (also called welfare conditionality) can lead to increased poverty and worsened health outcomes.⁷ The Greens believe that mutual obligations should not be a part of our social security system.

The Greens will abolish these measures immediately, and will always ensure that our social security system is based on enabling people to live with dignity and respect. Abolishing these policies will save more than \$2 billion over four years.⁸

The Greens are also committed to abolishing ParentsNext, which is a coercive and controlling program that unfairly targets single mothers. Programs that are supposed to help parents, must be voluntary and designed in partnership with them. We will re-invest money from ParentsNext in programs that are genuine pre-employment programs.

AN INDEPENDENT EQUALITY COMMISSION

The Australian Greens will establish an Independent Equality Commission. The Equality Commission will provide independent advice to the Government and Parliament on setting rates of income support as well as guidance on broader strategies to reduce inequality in Australia.

There is currently no regular independent assessment of the adequacy of income support payments. The Australian Council of Social Services has recommended the establishment of an 'independent commission to advise Government on payment rates'.⁹

In addition to providing regular, independent advice to the Government and Parliament on income support payment rates, the Equality Commission will advise Government and Parliament on the impacts of policy and legislation on inequality. It would undertake and oversee work on how to transform our income support system into a more flexible and responsive system able to support a productive modern economy.

This would include examining best practice models from around the world and trialling new approaches, such as a guaranteed adequate income model.

The Parliamentary Budget Office has costed the establishment and operation of the Independent Equality Commission at \$37 million over the forward estimates.¹⁰



⁷ Professor Peter Dwyer, Welfare conditionality: key messages from the UK WelCond project, 2018, <http://acossevents.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Welfare-conditionality-sanctions-support-and-behaviour-change-Peter-Dwyer.pdf>

⁸ Financial implications prepared by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office are costed and current as at 2018-19 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

⁹ ACOSS, Budget Priorities Statement: Federal Budget 2018-19, January 2018

¹⁰ Financial implications prepared by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office are costed and current as at 2019-20 budget.