

Welfare and Unemployment

The 'Welfare to Work' policy was introduced in 2005 and came into effect in mid-2006. It instituted changes to the welfare system in Australia which created much concern in the community sector.

- New applicants for income support were shifted from Disability Support Pension and Parenting Payment to lower payments such as Newstart Allowance and Austudy.
- The policy introduced more stringent activity requirements for these people with disabilities and parents, together with very long term unemployed people and mature age unemployed people.
- A new penalty regime involving 'breaching' – or taking away payments when welfare recipients fail to meet participation requirements – was criticised as having the potential to remove basic support from very vulnerable people.

Why is this an issue in 2007?

- These changes represented a significant downgrading of assistance available to the most vulnerable people in Australia, and continue to have far-reaching effects on welfare recipients.
- The welfare system should be a safety net, supporting those in our society who require assistance for a variety of reasons. Many of these changes are unbalanced and have been assessed as having unintended consequences that will make life harder for many vulnerable people.
- The Uniting Church's experience in community services suggests that welfare recipients who are able to work, want to work. We are keen to see increased employment assistance and high levels of support for job seekers.

Ask your candidates

- What do you believe is the purpose of the welfare system? Do you agree with the current policy direction?
- How would you use your position as a Member of Parliament to support people and families on low incomes?

FAST FACTS

People with disabilities who apply for payments and are assessed as able to work part-time are no longer able to get the Disability Support Pension. At the time the policy was introduced, ACOSS estimated that **81,000 disability pension recipients would be put on lower payments.**

An estimated 800,000 children grow up in households where nobody has a job (ACOSS, 2006).

An estimated 49% of those **most affected** by the changes live in **rural and regional areas.**

The risk of poverty is generally highest for **young people, students, and unemployed people**, at these people are most likely to be on the lowest welfare payments.

"UnitingCare works with disadvantaged Australians everyday. We know from experience that it's not easy for them to get and keep a job... Problems like insecure housing or homelessness, poor access to public transport and child care and inadequate opportunities for training and re-skilling compound to make it extremely difficult for them to participate. Effective welfare to work programs must identify and address both the needs of job seekers and the many barriers they face to employment."

Lin Hatfield Dodds, UnitingCare Australia National Director, Media Release, 15th September 2005.

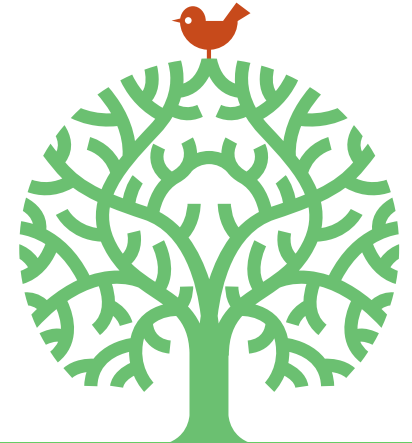


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