

Hope for the vulnerable

Unwelcome budget speculation

You may have read in the papers recently about the proposed changes to welfare in the next federal budget, particularly for people living with disability.

Anglicare is concerned about what these changes might mean for the most vulnerable in our community.

Every day at Anglicare we meet people that are struggling to survive on welfare payments. One example is that of a couple, both with disabilities, who have only \$15 a fortnight left after covering the basic costs of living to cover any unexpected costs. Most people on welfare find themselves not only economically excluded but socially excluded as well.

Most people want to work but many people cannot due to their disability or other barriers.

Anglicare advocates for an adequate income for all, this means raising welfare. Anglicare supports those that call for system change to break down the barriers that prevent people with disabilities gaining an adequate education and meaningful employment but not in any way that increases the vulnerability of people with disabilities.

Follow the media trail

In a [speech](#) to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry QLD, 'Towards a Strong Economy', Opposition Leader Tony Abbott proposed:

- making Work for the Dole mandatory;
- income management for the long-term unemployed,
- a benefit for people whose disabilities can be readily treated, and
- suspending the payment of young people's unemployment benefits in places where there are unfilled, unskilled jobs.

The proposals were criticised by the [Australian Council of Social Service](#), the [Greens](#), [UnitingCare Australia](#), and the National Welfare Rights Network, among others. A personal perspective from a Disability Support Pension (DSP) recipient appeared on ABC's [The Drum \(31/3/11\)](#). Additional commentary from the not-for-profit sector appeared in an article from [The Australian 1/4/11](#) – including some offering comfort and aid to the Opposition.

The Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, [hit back](#) by saying that the Opposition's proposal was "recycled and twice reheated" — and that it was also uncoded. Journalist Adele Horin [National Times, 2/4/11](#) and Frank Quinlan, Executive Director of Catholic Social Services [Eureka Street, 4/4/11](#) have since added their voices to the debate — questioning income management, but also calling for a reform of the welfare system.

Regardless of where you stand, an earlier report in the [Courier Mail 17/3/11](#) warns that a 'horror' Federal Budget is on the way, with cuts to welfare programs and (another) crackdown on DSP. The Prime Minister later used the inaugural Gough Whitlam Oration to [confirm](#) that "tough decisions" would be made. Changes to DSP access procedures were [announced](#) in the 2010–11 Federal Budget. PM Gillard may well introduce further welfare to work reforms in the May budget.

Enough is enough!

Between 1999 and 2005, the Federal Government imposed stringent tests and greater participation requirements for welfare applicants. The current Federal Government seeks to again raise the bar of accessibility to the Disability Support Pension ('DSP').

To impose further restrictions on welfare recipients is to create further disadvantage for already vulnerable people.

Anglicare SA does not accept that even in times of economic uncertainty and government debt, such actions can be justified.

To make cuts in these areas denies dignity to those in need and threatens to push individuals and families into poverty. It will also lead to greater need for crisis and other social services, as people are left with inadequate income to support themselves and their families.

Welfare in context

Government expenditure on social welfare has increased since 1980. By 2001 Australia had increased its commitment to welfare, as a percentage of GDP, from 11.32 per cent to 18.0 per cent.¹ But in 2004 Australia was ranked the eighth lowest out of 29 OECD countries in terms of welfare provision.²

SACOSS has found that 'the cost of living for pensioners and welfare recipients rose faster than for the population as a whole over the last year.'³ SACOSS notes that welfare recipients are generally forced to spend all of their income. In the past year, the cost of living has grown faster than the rate of Newstart Allowance.⁴ This leaves many people falling further behind. As the Productivity Commission has stated: '[p]eople with disabilities and their carers are among the most disadvantaged groups in Australian society'.⁵ A lack of other supports places added strain on these members of society.

Our vision for people with disabilities is:

- All people of differing abilities are able to participate without discrimination in their community.
- People living with disability are able to live with financial dignity and confidence through involvement in meaningful activities of their choice within their community.
- People living with disability are supported to live secure, independent, fulfilling lives in an appropriate and affordable place of their choice.

Now is the time to act!

As the decision makers prepare to finalise the Federal Budget, it is important that members of the community, like you, speak out to make it clear that these changes are not welcome. Here are some ideas on what you can do:

1. **SEND a letter** to your local Federal MP: use the attached **letter** as a guide for writing a letter to your Federal MP. To find out who your MP is, go to www.aec.gov.au.
2. **WATCH YouTube**. Watch the youtube clip and send it on to your friends
3. **WRITE** a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.
4. **PRAY** for our leaders
5. **GET OTHERS INVOLVED** — send this email to your networks and encourage others to have their say!

For more information visit:

Income Management Fact Sheets ([FaHCSIA](#))
Evaluation of Income Management ([FaHCSIA & AIHW](#))
ACOSS [Policy Analysis](#) on Income Management (June 2010)
ANGLICARE Sydney Senate Inquiry [Submission](#) on income management
ANGLICARE Australia Senate Inquiry [Submission](#) on income management
Anglicare Advocacy www.anglicare-sa.org.au/advocacy
Contact Jacqui on 8305 9281 or advocacy@anglicare-sa.org.au

What's next?

Reconciliation Week is from 26 May–3 June. We will send you an invitation to events running in this week.

- In the meantime, the **UN High Commissioner for Refugees** is visiting Australia on 7 May. Add your [voice](#) and ask the Commissioner to take action to address concerns about the Northern Territory intervention.

We had a fantastic Harmony Day!

Watch the [YouTube](#) clip to see how Anglicare supporters celebrated that 'Everyone Belongs'.

¹ South Australian Council of Social Service, *Cost of Living Update* (February 2011) no 5, p18

² Ibid

³ This is based on calculations using the ABS's Analytical Living Cost Index (ALCI). See SACOSS, above n 5, 2

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Productivity Commission, Disability Care and Support, Draft Report – Chapter 2 Why the Change is Needed (February 2011), 2.1.