

# Economic Justice Australia – Candidate Survey

EJA will be publishing all responses in full at [www.ejaustralia.org.au](http://www.ejaustralia.org.au).

We will also publish which candidates/parties have been asked to fill in this survey and have not responded.

Please return this survey to [hello@ejaustralia.org.au](mailto:hello@ejaustralia.org.au).

Candidate Name

Party (if applicable): **Australian Greens**

## Increase the rate of social security payments to above the poverty line

1. [The Treating Families Fairly Report](#) found the Covid-19 Supplement of \$550 per f/n was used for meeting basic needs, paying off household debt, and other strategic expenditures to improve long-term financial security. *Do you agree a permanent increase in social security payments and pensions is necessary and would benefit social security recipients, and Australian society more broadly? If so, by how much?*

**ANSWER:** Yes

**COMMENT:** The Greens have long called for and support income support payments to be lifted above the poverty line. The increase in income support payments during COVID temporarily lifted hundreds of thousands of people out of poverty, and kept many more from falling into poverty. In a wealthy country like ours, everyone should be able to afford the basics.

2. Housing assistance is crucial to improving affordability for renters on the lowest incomes. *Do you agree the Federal Government should raise the rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance as a key approach to improving housing affordability?*

**ANSWER:** Maybe

**COMMENT:** At a time when so many people are doing it tough, struggling with skyrocketing rents, substandard living conditions, and the constant threat of

eviction, we need a system that actually supports renters. The Greens have supported increases to Commonwealth Rent Assistance in Parliament. The Greens have a plan to stop unlimited rent increases and build public and affordable homes. This would provide serious long-term relief for renters on the lowest incomes. Lifting the base rate of income support above the poverty line would also provide direct relief that benefits everyone, regardless of their housing tenure, and removes the conditionality that can come with the CRA.

**Protect the Centrelink public service against staffing cuts and privatisation, to ensure people get the support they need.**

3. Services Australia needs to be properly resourced and have sufficient well-trained staff to correctly answer people's questions and provide support when needed, and to process claims lawfully and efficiently. *Do you agree this is better achieved by the public service, or through private companies or labour-hire?*

**ANSWER:** Public service

**COMMENT:** The outsourcing of critical frontline work in Centrelink contributed to burnout and the deterioration of services. The Greens are focused on reversing the damage caused by privatisation and outsourcing, to rebuild a capable and well-resourced public service that operates in the public interest.

4. Following unprecedented claim delays and call wait times, in November 2023, the Federal Government committed \$228m for an additional 3000 staff to speed up claim payments and reduce call wait times. *Do you agree with this expenditure? Do you believe these 3000 extra positions should be retained on a permanent basis?*

**ANSWER:** Agree and should be retained on a permanent basis

**COMMENT:** Centrelink's current staffing levels are failing to meet the needs of people on income support, leaving claimants waiting months for approvals and hours on hold—if their calls are even answered. The Greens are taking a plan this election to bring down phone waiting times in Services Australia, and safeguard our services.

**A non-punitive approach to government employment services that helps people increase their participation in the workforce and community**

5. Mutual obligation requirements are tasks and activities that a person on JobSeeker payment is required to do to receive their payment. If people don't meet their mutual obligation requirements their payments may be suspended or cancelled. EJA believes this system should be abolished. It has been administered unfairly, and sometimes unlawfully. This has resulted in significant harm, particularly when people's payments have been cancelled or suspended, their mutual obligations are

too onerous or unsuitable as they only have a partial capacity to work, and when requirements have interfered with people's ability to search for work and participate in education and training. *Do you believe that mutual obligation requirements should continue?*

**ANSWER:** No

**COMMENT:** Mutual obligations force people on income support into ineffective and often harmful activities, risking payment suspensions if they fail to comply. The Greens are working to end these punitive measures so people can focus on finding work and improving their well-being while redirecting resources to more effective support services. The Greens have a plan to abolish mutual obligations.

6. *If you answered yes or maybe to the previous question, would you be willing to make them without financial penalty e.g. payment suspensions and cancellations?*

**ANSWER:** N/A

**COMMENT:** N/A

7. *If you would consider an alternative model, what would that look like?*

**COMMENT:** In addition to abolishing mutual obligations, the Greens are focused on ending the for-profit model and re-establishing the Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) to deliver tailored, accessible, and practical employment support that prioritises people's needs and aspirations over profit.

The private employment services system is outdated, ineffective, and punitive, failing to support unemployed people and entrenching inequality.

### **Ensuring Robodebt never happens again through meaningful reform.**

8. Some of the Robodebt Royal Commission recommendations requiring legislative reform have not been implemented. *Will you make this legislative reform a priority, particularly placing a time limit on debt recovery and regulating the use of automation to ensure a crisis on the scale of Robodebt never happens again?*

**ANSWER:** Yes

**COMMENT:** The Greens support the total implementation of the Robodebt Royal Commission, including the limitation on debt recovery and regulating the use of automation.

9. The Robodebt scandal and subsequent Royal Commission demonstrated that a robust legal safety net is a crucial part of a well-functioning social security system. Recommendation 12.4 highlighted the importance of adequately funding social security legal services. It has been estimated that to adequately fund community legal centres specialising in social security law would require an extra \$5 million per year of funding to these services to provide legal service to all Australians wherever they live. *Do you agree this funding is important? Will you publicly commit to this funding?*

**ANSWER:** Yes

**COMMENT:** The justice system is failing many of us, with underfunded legal services leaving hundreds of thousands without the help they need. The Greens will double federal funding for legal assistance services by increasing support under the National Access to Justice Partnership to \$490 million annually.

**Increase and index payment that helps people cover heightened costs of living in remote Australia.**

10. Remote Area Allowance, a payment to social security recipients who live in remote areas, has not increased in 20 years. It is currently an extra \$9.10 per week. *Given living costs have risen more in remote towns than in metropolitan areas, do you agree it is time to increase and index this allowance?*

**ANSWER:** Yes

**COMMENT:** It is clear our safety net is not fit for purpose, the Greens have long called for increases in income support that lift everyone up. The low rate of the Remote Area Allowance has failed to meet the high cost of living in remote communities. The Greens chaired the Senate Community Affairs inquiry into Poverty in Australia, which recommended an increase to the Remote Area Allowance - government has failed to act on that recommendation.

11. Will you publicly commit to increasing Remote Area Allowance as a priority?

**ANSWER:** Yes

**COMMENT:** The Greens will continue to advocate for a social security system that lifts everyone up. In this term of Parliament, the Greens fought and won an inquiry into poverty, and have championed its recommendations, including an increase to the Remote Area Allowance.

**Make the Disability Support Pension more accessible for people who are eligible.**

12. People with significant disability and little or no work capacity are excluded from DSP as a result of the Program of Support requirement. They are effectively consigned to serve an 18-month waiting period with mutual obligation requirements while on JobSeeker Payment. A full EJA brief on this can be found [here](#). *Do you support permanently abolishing the Program of Support?*

**ANSWER:** Yes

**COMMENT:** The Greens support abolishing mutual obligations and all other conditionalities, including the Program of Support.

13. The current cost of doctors' reports, particularly specialist reports required for Disability Support Pension (DSP) applications, are costly and create a barrier for those needing those reports to access their social security entitlements. *Do you agree to introducing a Medicare item number for required medical reports to make applying for a DSP less expensive?*

**ANSWER:** Yes

**COMMENT:** The Greens believe that healthcare should be affordable and accessible for everyone. The Greens chaired inquiry in to the adequacy of the Disability Support Pension made an explicit recommendation to this effect, and we will continue to advocate for changes that ensure the DSP is accessible.

END OF SURVEY