

MEDIA RELEASE

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Federal budget contains little support for those most vulnerable

The Federal Budget contains very little support for those most vulnerable. All of the positive coronavirus income support measures are being wound back when the economic conditions haven't improved enough for people to get back on their feet.

Economic Justice Australia's member community legal centres, that provide free legal help to people having issues with Centrelink, have seen first-hand how the temporary increase in the JobSeeker rate from \$40 a day has changed lives.

Harsh waiting periods have also been suspended, including the four-year waiting period for newly arrived migrants. However, all these supportive measures are due to wind up on 31 December 2020.

Economic Justice Australia Executive Officer, Leanne Ho, said: "We wanted to see the positive COVID-19 measures extended in the budget. Many unemployed people will wake up on new years' day to find they have no payment whatsoever, while others who remain on payment will face a significant reduction to \$40 a day."

While some job seekers aged 35 and under may benefit from the JobMaker hiring credit, this budget offers no optimism boost for job seekers who are over 35. These job seekers are now subject to the sudden reintroduction of mutual obligations and penalties, and face the prospect of surviving on \$40 a day from 1 January 2020.

"Rather than providing the peace of mind and certainty of a permanent increase to the JobSeeker Payment rate in the budget, job seekers have been told they must wait until later this year for a decision on whether there will be a permanent increase to JobSeeker and how much that might be.

"It is most concerning that there is nothing in this budget for the many temporary visa holders who haven't had any Commonwealth income support during the pandemic. In fact, there is a significant cut to support for people seeking asylum who have no option to return to their home country.

"We also wanted to see a boost to Centrelink staffing, especially to address the drastic shortage of social workers. Access to Centrelink social workers is crucial to achieving good outcomes for those most vulnerable in the social security system, like people experiencing domestic violence. These human services are needed now more than ever," said Ho.

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