

MEDIA RELEASE

FRIDAY 7 JULY 2023

ROBODEBT ROYAL COMMISSION FINDINGS

Economic Justice Australia is very supportive of the recommendations made by the Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme in its comprehensive report, released today. The report unravels the many injustices involved in rollout of the Robodebt scheme, and defines areas in need of urgent reform. If implemented in full these recommendations will achieve real systemic change to Social Services policy development and Centrelink service delivery.

It is important for the Government, and for the Australian community, to recognise that many of the automation and service-delivery issues raised during the Royal Commission remain, resulting in unfair and non-transparent decision making. This leads to unnecessary confusion and distress for social security recipients every day. It is therefore imperative that the Government act quickly to implement all recommendations in full.

Quotes attributable to Kate Allingham, Acting CEO Economic Justice Australia:

“Automated decision-making and digitisation of Centrelink services remain endemic in our social security system, without necessary safeguards in place, or proper consideration for how this affects vulnerable social security recipients.”

“Right now, social security recipients are still receiving debt notices without any real explanation or transparency as to how or why these debts were raised. The appeal process is poorly explained, and the timeline for reviewing decisions is rarely met. The onus of proof to disprove a debt is still very much on the Centrelink recipient, often without the provision of written information detailing on what basis the debt was raised.”

“Australia’s social security system was designed as a safety net. It assists millions of Australians every year and it should be transparent and accessible to all who need it. It is essential that our social security system, and particularly any automation of the system, is not only technically legal but fair, humane, transparent and accountable. Economic Justice Australia is looking forward to working closely with Government to ensure that all Royal Commission recommendations are implemented in a way that achieves this.”

“If implemented in full, the Royal Commission’s report will herald a new chapter in social security policy development and Centrelink service delivery.”

In particular, we welcome recommendations that:

- Have regard to the importance of designing and administering systems with users in mind, especially for people in vulnerable cohorts – this is a key focus of the report
- Address the discourse around social security as stigmatised and shameful
- Recognise the importance of consulting with peak bodies, and of the role of community legal centres - including enabling advocates access to Centrelink decision-makers through a national advocates line
- A body be established to monitor automated decision-making; and consideration of legislative reform to introduce a consistent legal framework in which automation in government services can operate

- Reintroduce a time limitation on raising of debts
- Recognise the need to overhaul compliance and debt recovery practices
- Ensure responsiveness to AAT decisions indicating serious systemic issues in application of social security law
- Enhance the funding model for community legal centres and Legal Aid, having regard to public interest considerations.

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