

FOR A FAIR SOCIAL SECURITY SYSTEM

Federal budget
submission 2021

RECOMMENDATIONS

ABOUT ECONOMIC JUSTICE AUSTRALIA

Economic Justice Australia (EJA, formerly National Social Security Rights Network) is the peak organisation for community legal centres that provide specialist legal services for people about their social security issues and rights.

Our vision is a fair social security system in Australia.

Our purpose

We work to achieve a fair social security system in Australia by:

- Supporting member centres to deliver high quality legal services for people interacting with the social security system to ensure they can navigate the system and have access to their entitlements; and
- Driving changes to social security law, policy and administration to improve outcomes for people experiencing disadvantage.

EJA provides expert advice to government on social security reform to make it more effective and accessible. Our recommendations are informed by our members' decades of frontline experience.

Our law and policy reform work:

- Strengthens the effectiveness and integrity of our social security system;
- Educates the community; and
- Improves people's lives by reducing poverty and inequality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation A: Lock in permanent increases to Jobseeker Payment and Youth Allowance rates, and commensurate increases to pension rates.

Recommendation B: Extend the Coronavirus Supplement until the rate of JobSeeker Payment is permanently increased to an adequate level.

Recommendation C: Extend the suspension of the LAWP until the job market improves, at least until 31 December 2020, in line with the extension of the Coronavirus Supplement and waiver of the Ordinary Waiting Period and Newly Arrived Resident's Waiting Period.

Recommendation D: Exempt from LAWP any amounts withdrawn from superannuation (under the early release of super due to COVID19 measure, or emergency withdrawals) via Ministerial Determination exercising the Minister's powers under the Omnibus Act Schedule 11, Part 1, CI 40A.

Recommendation E: Waive the remainder of residential waiting periods for people still on payment when the suspension period finishes on 31 December 2020, at the very least for people on Special Benefit.

Recommendation F: Relax eligibility requirements for Special Benefit to ensure that the payment can be more readily accessed by those subject to the NARWP once the temporary suspension is lifted.

Recommendation G: Maintain the suspension of all mutual obligations compliance activity at least until the JobKeeper Payment ends.

Recommendation H: Provide that where a person is deemed not to have fulfilled an obligation, they have three working days to give an explanation to the provider before their payment is suspended.

Recommendation I: Extend to principal carers the temporary coronavirus measure to increase the income test free area to \$300 per fortnight from 25 September 2020 .

Recommendation J: Abolish the CDP and replace it with the comprehensive alternative model originally prepared by the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APONT), the Fair Work and Strong Communities: Remote Development and Employment Scheme (RDES).

Recommendation K: Provide all New Zealand citizens living in Australia with access to Special Benefit

Recommendation L: Extend the list of visa sub-classes which attract Special Benefit, with extended coverage including:

- i. Bridging Visas, all sub-classes
- ii. Student Visa
- iii. Temporary Resident (Skilled Employment) Visa
- iv. Pacific and Seasonal Worker Visa
- v. Temporary Graduate Visa

Recommendation M: Amend s737(1) of the Social Security Act to enable full-time students to access Special Benefit.

In the alternative, we propose that policy guidelines regarding administration of section 729 of the Social Security Act be amended by the Secretary of the Department of Social Services to enable full-time students holding a Safe Haven Enterprise Visa access to Special Benefit.

Recommendation N: Implement the recommendations made in EJA's report, 'How well does Australia's Social Security System support victims of family and domestic violence?', in full.

Recommendation O: Implement the recommendations made in EJA's report, 'Homeward Bound', in full.

Recommendation P: Allocate substantial additional funding to enable Services Australia to employ additional Centrelink social workers, particularly given the COVID-19 crisis and rise in risk and incidence of DFV and homelessness

Recommendation Q: Invest in adequate staffing to provide oversight of automated decision-making processes, and decisions made in the social security system.

Recommendation R: Provide funding to enable establishment of a nationwide specialist hotline for community legal centre advocates.

Recommendation S: Inject \$5 million per annum of ongoing core funding to the 15 specialist social security community legal centres and programs across Australia and to Economic Justice Australia as the peak organisation.



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