



Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
Treasurer
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Via email: josh.frydenberg.mp@aph.gov.au

6 August 2020

Re: JobSeeker and JobKeeper payments

Dear Minister

Earlier this year I wrote to you about the inadequate rate of Newstart and related payments. Since that time, the Commonwealth Government has introduced JobSeeker and JobKeeper as vital measures to mitigate the financial impact of Covid-19. I am writing again to urge the Government to maintain an adequate permanent increase to JobSeeker beyond the current crisis, and to make both wage subsidies available to people on temporary visas.

Women's Health West (WHW) provides specialist family violence services to women and children across Melbourne's western metropolitan region. We also undertake advocacy and run programs that promote equity and justice for women and girls. As the largest women's health organisation in Victoria, receiving over 20,000 referrals every year, we see firsthand the consequences of insufficient wage subsidies on the lives of women and children.

WHW urges the government to maintain JobSeeker at an adequate permanent increased rate, and to extend it and JobKeeper to people on temporary visas for the six reasons outlined below.

Senate Committee recommendation

The rate of Newstart before Covid-19 (\$275 per week) pushed people into poverty, as reported by the Senate Committee for the Inquiry into Newstart and Related Payments. The committee recommended 'that once the Coronavirus Supplement is phased out, the Australian Government increase the JobSeeker Payment, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payment rates to ensure that all eligible recipients do not live in poverty'.

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Inadequate wage subsidies exacerbate gendered financial inequities

While Newstart was inadequate for all recipients, social inequities mean that some recipients are disproportionately affected by its inadequacy, particularly women. It is well-established that there is financial inequity across genders – for example women earn on average \$242.90 per week less than men and are more likely to live in poverty. Similarly, women over 50 are overrepresented as Newstart recipients, and women over 55 are the fastest growing group of people experiencing homelessness. Further, a report from NSW Council of Social Services shows that LGBTQI+ people are more likely to face disadvantages such as employment and health discrimination, which increases their likelihood of living in poverty.

Covid-19 has increased gendered financial inequity

Adequate wage subsidies are particularly important for women during Covid-19. Women have lost more jobs than men during the pandemic. The industries hardest hit by Covid-19 are accommodation and food services (54.9% women), retail trade (55% women), health care and social assistance (79% women) and education and training (73.2% women). While the research on the economic impact of Covid-19 on gender non-binary and transgender people in Australia is lacking, research from overseas shows that Covid-19 has also caused greater financial hardship for gender non-binary and transgender people compared with cis-gendered men.

Covid-19 has also exacerbated rigid gender roles and the unequal distribution of domestic labour in heterosexual relationships. Caring and domestic work has increased disproportionately for women during Covid-19, with more women than men stepping out of work to take up the extra demand for unpaid care and schooling in the home.

Covid-19 has increased the risk of family violence, including for people experiencing violence for the first time

There is substantial evidence that emergency and disaster situations increase the rates of family violence. It happened during the 2014-16 Ebola and 2015-16 Zika epidemics and, according to a new study by the Australian Institute of Criminology, family violence has increased during Covid-19 as well.

Evidence from past crises and natural disasters suggests that confinement measures often lead to increased or first-time violence against women and children. Under conditions of quarantine or stay-at-home measures, victim-survivors who live with people using controlling and other violent tactics are exposed to considerably greater danger.

Inadequate wage subsidies mean victim-survivors of family violence often have no choice but to stay with the person using violence

Financial abuse is a common form of family violence. This means many victim-survivors of family violence do not have the financial independence to flee violence, or if they do leave are often in financially precarious positions. Many victim-survivors rely on wage subsidies while seeking safety. Therefore, inadequate wage subsidies can push victim-survivors into poverty or force them to remain with a person using violence.

People on temporary visas have no financial support, posing a risk to their health and the community's health

People on temporary visas are also in a particularly precarious position because they do not qualify for JobSeeker or JobKeeper payments. This poses social, financial and health risks to these individuals, as well as a public health risk.

If people cannot afford to stay home when they are sick or suspect they might have been in contact with someone who has Covid-19, then the risk of spreading the virus increases. The government must broaden JobKeeper and JobSeeker to people on temporary visas, not only for their benefit but also for the health of society more broadly.

The rate increase of JobSeeker and the introduction of JobKeeper were bold, timely and necessary steps. With the economy largely on hold and nearly two million people out of work, people are relying on these wage subsidies more than ever.

For the health, safety and wellbeing of all people in Australia and for the economy, WHW recommends that JobSeeker is maintained at a permanent adequate rate (beyond the Covid-19 crisis), and that JobSeeker and JobKeeper are extended to people on temporary visas.

Please contact me if you have any questions for clarification. I look forward to your reply.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robyn Gregory', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

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