

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Support for Volunteering - Volunteer Management Activity, Volunteer Grants

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Government is committed to supporting the critical role of volunteers in communities across Australia.
- The development of the **National Strategy for Volunteering**, led by Volunteering Australia, and funded by my department, will provide a blueprint to support a reimagined and contemporary volunteering eco-system.
- The National Strategy will be inclusive of the interests of volunteers, Volunteer Support Services (VSSs) and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) across Australia.
- The National Strategy will ensure that Australia's volunteers, VSSs and VIOs are given the best opportunity to deliver vital services to Australian communities, both now and into the future.
- We have also partnered with Volunteering Australia on several projects seeking to overcome barriers to accessing volunteering opportunities and streamlining online volunteer management services.
- The Strategic Awareness Communication Campaign, Volunteering in Australia Report and the Volunteer Management Online Project, will provide a much needed foundation to support volunteering in Australia.

KEY POINTS – Volunteer Management Activity

- \$33.5 million over 5 years has been provided to state and territory volunteering peak bodies under the redesigned Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) to:
 - deliver online services to build the capacity of VIOs within their relevant jurisdictions; and
 - break down barriers to volunteering faced by identified priority groups, including People with Disabilities, First Nations People and Newly Arrived Migrants.
- Additional one-off funding of \$6.6 million was provided in 2021-22 to support a smooth transition to the new Activity.
- The redesigned VMA was based on the understanding that peak bodies know their state or territory's needs and are well placed to work closely with their local volunteer organisations. This new approach was designed to enable volunteering peak bodies to respond more efficiently to the current and emerging needs of local volunteer organisations and their volunteers.
- A review of the implementation of the reformed VMA is currently underway and will identify any gaps or early modifications that could be made to ensure the Activity is meeting the identified needs as outlined in the VMA policy guidelines.

KEY POINTS – Volunteer Grants

- In 2022-23, the Government will provide \$10 million in Volunteer Grants to assist volunteers and encourage volunteering.
- The 2022-23 Volunteer Grants round is currently in the design phase. Further information on timing of the round will be announced once finalised.
- Briefings for all federal Members of Parliament (MPs) are expected to be scheduled in August 2022 to provide information on MP's roles in the round.
- Funding of \$19.1 million for 5,521 grants over all 151 electorates was provided in the 2021-22 double round.
- Volunteer Grants provide funding of between \$1,000 and \$5,000 to help community organisations to support the efforts of volunteers in Australia and to encourage the inclusion of vulnerable people through volunteering.
- Grant funds, expended to benefit the volunteers, are often used for the purchase of small equipment or fuel, screening and training, to increase participation and promote awareness of volunteering opportunities and ensure volunteer safety.

Volunteer Management Activity

IF ASKED – Why did the VMA service model change?

- I know how important the volunteering sector across our communities.
- The vital work and support they provide to Australians is deeply valued by this government.
- It was the Morrison Government who undertook a review and commenced funding model changes.
- The review recommended funding a smaller number of organisations.
- It also identified the shift of the volunteer workforce to online platforms.
- From 1 July 2021, the redesigned VMA now focuses on:
 - providing support and resources to increase the capability of Volunteer Involving Organisations,
 - building a more inclusive and diverse volunteering sector; and
 - addressing the changing demands for capable and committed volunteers in local communities across Australia.
- Thankfully, those changes implemented by the Morrison Government won't mean all services will be online.
- Peak bodies will work with other organisations to build the capacity of the sector and:
 - greater engagement in volunteering among First Nation Peoples, People with Disability and Newly Arrived Migrants.
- There is a review currently under way looking at how these changes are impacting organisations.

IF ASKED – Can the Government ensure that rural and regional Australia will have representation in the VMA?

- The Government is committed to ensuring no one is left behind.
- The VMA will have a national footprint and those people in regional and rural communities need more equitable service delivery.

IF ASKED – Will the redesigned VMA be reviewed?

- A Post Implementation Review (PIR) is currently being conducted by an external company.
- The review will include an evaluation framework.
- That evaluation will inform performance and outcomes of the new VMA model.

Volunteer Grants

IF ASKED – How much funding will be available in each electorate for the 2022-23 Volunteer Grants round?

- The Volunteer Grant round will open next month.
- \$66,225 will be available to each electorate.
- MPs, in consultation with their community committee, will be asked to nominate eligible organisations up to the electorate cap. These organisations will then be invited to apply for a grant. All grant applications are assessed by the Department against the eligibility and assessment criteria.
- MPs will be asked to nominate up to an additional five organisations above the cap in the event additional funds become available.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

National Strategy for Volunteering

- Volunteering Australia (VA) announced the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering on 1 November 2021, which will provide a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia.
- An independent National Strategy for Volunteering Council was established to provide strategic oversight to the National Strategy project.
- Council representatives have been engaged from across the volunteering eco-system, as well as a departmental representative, and will continue to contribute their expertise to the project.
- VA called for Expressions of Interest to join two working groups which play a pivotal role in advancing the Strategy. These working groups meet regularly.
- Extensive stakeholder consultations are currently underway.
- The draft National Strategy for Volunteering is due to be released in October 2022, and the launch of the new National Strategy for Volunteering is expected in February 2023.

Volunteer Management Activity

- In July 2017, the then Minister for Social Services, the Hon Christian Porter MP, wrote to all funded organisations advising them that the VMA would not be a guaranteed source of ongoing funding.
- Whilst the volunteering landscape was rapidly changing, the VMA service model had remained unchanged for decades.
- As such, in late 2017, the Government commissioned a report into the VMA, conducted by Matthew Pegg consulting, to inform government consideration of the future direction of the program.
- The review of the VMA found the previous model lead to duplication and confusion amongst volunteer organisations, and there was varying support depending on location.
- The review found that, in its previous state, the VMA led to an inconsistent use of resources, IT infrastructure, and application of best practices.
- It was also established that the VMA did not align to a head of power under the Australian Constitution.
- This subsequently led to nationwide stakeholder consultations in early 2020 (March 2020). These consultations informed the VMA redesign.
- The Department undertook stakeholder workshops in early February 2021 on the implementation of the redesigned program.
- With the redesign of the VMA, all current and future volunteers will benefit from a fit for purpose program that has a national footprint.

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DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Liz Hefren-Webb, Deputy Secretary, Communities
Phone/Mobile:	s 47 F
Clearance Date:	20 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Restoring Respect for the Community Sector

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Government values the critical work undertaken by the community sector workforce and is committed to restoring respect for the sector.
- Unlike those opposite, we value the input our community services sector provide – their advocacy shouldn't be gagged and we're proud to say we will be ending the Coalition's gag clauses in government.
- Our government won't be afraid of our community sector partners putting a voice to the people they work with everyday.
- As outlined in our Government's pre-election commitment *Restoring Respect for the Community Sector*, we will support a stronger, more diverse and more independent community sector underpinned by meaningful consultation, better funding processes, and longer, more stable funding cycles.
- We know there are challenges facing this sector, not helped by the Coalition's gag clauses, stifling this sector's ability to share their concerns.
- I will work closely with my colleagues and the representatives from across the sector on implementing this commitment.

KEY POINTS

- My department is working with the Treasury and the Department of Finance to support the implementation of our commitment.
- My Department engages with the sector across a range of policy specific and grant administration matters.
- For example, the Government's response to emergency supports such as Emergency Relief for people in crisis is informed by a National Coordination Group made up of senior non-government sector representatives.

CONTACT NAME: Libby Cremen
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POSITION: Branch Manager – Community Cohesion

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- Some stakeholders, including the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and the Australian Services Union have been in contact with ministers to discuss community services sector challenges and offer ways of working together to deliver solutions under the restoring respect to the community sector election commitment.
- Indexation in grant funding arrangements has been raised, and the need to reflect cost increases over the life of an agreement.
- The Department is preparing advice on how indexation is applied to the Department's programs, and will coordinate advice with the Department of Finance.
- Since July 2015, the department has used CSAG as the key community sector stakeholder engagement group to discuss issues and opportunities relating to community policies and programs.
- CSAG members represent the following 25 organisations that includes a mix of peak bodies and service delivery organisations:

Anglicare Australia, Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), Australian Red Cross, BaptistCare, Carers Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA), COTA Australia (Council on the Ageing), Family & Relationship Services Australia (FRSA), Federation of Ethnic Communities, Councils of Australia (FECCA), Financial Counselling Australia, Meals on Wheels, Migration Council Australia (MCA), Mission Australia, National Disability Services, Relationships Australia, Save The Children Australia, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), Settlement Council of Australia, Southern Youth & Families Services Association, St Vincent de Paul Society, The Benevolent Society, The Salvation Army, The Smith Family, UnitingCare Australia, and Volunteering Australia.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Top Up Financial Wellbeing Funding (COVID and Floods)

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Government is committed to ensuring no one is left behind – particularly critical in times of emergencies like those devastating floods we have seen this year.
- My thoughts are with all of those affected as they continue on their journey of recovery.
- These communities also need the actions of a government to reach out and ensure they get the support they need for recovery.
- That's why an additional **\$194 million** has also been provided between April 2020 and June 2022 specifically for services to support people impacted by the **coronavirus pandemic and the New South Wales and Queensland floods in February and March 2022**.
- This additional funding was informed by the sector-led National Coordination Group (NCG), which I know is critical at these times which is why I announced it's extension to 30 June 2023.
- Financial Wellbeing and Capability (FWC) funding provides for services to directly assist individuals, families and communities experiencing financial crisis.
- Government support totals around **\$660 million** to over **200** community organisations across Australia to deliver FWC services, such as Emergency Relief (ER), Food Relief and Financial Counselling, from 1 June 2019 to 30 June 2025.

- The NCG will continue to monitor demand for these services, and provide advice to government on an appropriate response.
- The NCG will also deliver advice on improvements to FWC program arrangements, including building the evidence base for improved responses.

KEY POINTS

Additional funding allocated in response to COVID

- More than **\$174 million** in additional funding has been allocated for FWC services since April 2020, including:
 - **\$72.7 million** for 196 ER providers nationally;
 - This includes the allocation of **\$2.5 million** in funding in May 2022, to support **58** Commonwealth-funded ER providers across Queensland meet the demand for their services.
 - **\$24.3 million** for **Australian** Red Cross to deliver ER and counselling support to temporary migrants;
 - **\$10 million** for the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot, to support women on temporary visas affected by domestic and family violence access social services, legal assistance and migration support;
 - **\$27 million among** the **3** Food Relief providers, Foodbank Australia, SecondBite and OzHarvest, to support Commonwealth-funded Emergency Relief providers through increased food supplies;
 - **\$20 million** to increase the capacity of financial counselling providers, **including** the National Debt Helpline, and more readily build the capability of the sector; and
 - **\$20 million** to Good Shepherd Australia and New Zealand (GSANZ) to **increase** access to their No Interest Loan Scheme, as an alternative to high interest loan products.

Additional funding allocated in response to the February-March 2022**floods**

- More than **\$19.2 million** in additional funding has been allocated, including:
 - **\$9.6 million** for **73** Commonwealth-funded providers delivering ER in flood-**affected** communities;
 - **\$4 million** for the **3** Food Relief providers to support; Commonwealth-funded ER providers in flood-affected areas through increased food supplies;
 - **\$500,000** for **Australian** Red Cross to deliver ER to eligible temporary migrants affected by the floods; and
 - **\$5.2 million**, to boost Financial Counselling services across flood-affected **areas**.

National Coordination Group

- The NCG comprises senior executives from the ER, Food Relief Financial Counselling, and Volunteering sectors.
- The NCG is supported by state and territory sub-committees and a network of locally-focussed Government Area Coordinators (GACs).

IF ASKED – Why were 2-year grant extensions provided to Commonwealth-funded FWC providers?

- A 2-year grant extension to the current arrangements, from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2025, is being provided for seven FWC programs, including ER, Food Relief and Financial Counselling.
- Funding is being provided at current base funding levels, and adjusted for indexation, in line with current Budget allocations.
- The sector has navigated unprecedented circumstances in recent years, including the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires, coronavirus pandemic, and recent floods across the East Coast.
- These extensions provide stability and clarity to the sector and enable provider to focus on the continued provision of immediate support to people in financial crisis.

IF ASKED – Will the Government provide additional FWC funding in response to the July 2022 New South Wales floods?

- The Albanese Government is committed to supporting flood-affected communities, and is closely monitoring the impact of the latest flood situation for FWC services by working with providers to understand current demand for services.
- People affected by the recent floods are able to access the Disaster Recovery Allowance and the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment, available through Services Australia.
- I urge people affected by the floods to check their eligibility for these supports with Services Australia.

IF ASKED – What is the status of the Government’s election commitment to provide \$1.3 million in funding to Loaves and Fishes Tasmania?

- The Albanese Government is currently working to implement its election commitments in a timely manner. I am working closely with my ministerial colleagues to implement our election commitments.

IF ASKED – Will the Government increase funding for ER and Food Relief in Tasmania?

- Almost 5 per cent of ER funding is allocated to the 10 Commonwealth-funded ER providers in Tasmania.
- Tasmania comprises just over 2 per cent of the national population.
- In February 2022, \$55,000 in additional funding was provided to Foodbank Australia and SecondBite specifically to increase service delivery in Tasmania.
- This was part of more than \$27 million in additional coronavirus funding allocated for Food Relief services nationally since 2019-20.
- The sector-led NCG will continue to monitor the demand for ER and Food Relief services throughout Australia in 2022-23 and will provide advice to me on where further support is most needed.
- It is important to note that ER and Food Relief is a contribution to the sector, with state and territory governments also playing a key role in supporting local organisations.

IF ASKED – Why can Food Relief providers only support Commonwealth-funded ER providers?

- Government funding for ER and Food Relief is a contribution to the sector.
- Organisations also receive support from other sources, including state and territory governments, and donations to deliver services.
- ER providers are best placed to ensure clients seeking support receive both financial and material aid, as well as referrals to other essential services, such as Financial Counselling, which can help address the underlying causes of financial crisis.
- Food Relief directly supports the ER program by improving Commonwealth-funded ER providers' access to a cost effective supply of food items.
- Non-funded organisations should work with ER providers in their local area to ensure that those who need support can access it.

CONTACT NAME: Chris D'Souza
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POSITION: Branch Manager Financial Wellbeing

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

\$660 million in base funding for FWC programs over 6 and a half years to 30 June 2025 includes over \$300 million for ER, \$8.8 million for Food Relief and \$267 million for Financial Counselling services.

Emergency Relief (ER)

- ER services are delivered by 196 providers across Australia, with providers funded over 6 and half years to 30 June 2025.
- In addition, Australian Red Cross has been funded since 2019-20 to deliver ER and counselling support to temporary migrants impacted by the coronavirus, and later the flood crisis.
- Assistance offered by ER providers may include food, clothing, vouchers, budgeting assistance and referral to other services.
- ER is restricted to people unable to pay a bill or at imminent risk of being unable to do so.
- ER providers determine client eligibility via intake and assessment activities.
- Access to ER is free and there are no citizenship or residency requirements to access ER.

Food Relief

- The Food Relief program increases Commonwealth-funded ER providers' access to a cost effective supply of food items, on a national scale.
- Under current grant arrangements, the 3 Commonwealth-funded Food Relief providers achieve this by:
 - receiving donated foods from farmers, manufacturers, retailers or other food services, and redistributing this to Emergency Relief providers or other distribution centres where food is needed;
 - sourcing and transporting essential foods where food donations are insufficient; and/or
 - leading the development of local partnerships between food redistribution suppliers to improve access and food distribution.

Locational / place considerations

- On 15 May 2022, the Government made an election commitment of \$1.3 million to support Loaves and Fishes Tasmania, a state-based food relief organisation. This commitment is not related to the Food Relief program but public perception differs.
- There is currently significant demand for food assistance throughout Tasmania, including due to the rising cost of living.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Response to the Review of Financial Counselling****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- Financial counselling providers are a lifeline for vulnerable individuals in financial crisis, and the Albanese Government is committed to ensuring providers are able to meet demand for services.
- We are working in partnership with industry stakeholders and the financial counselling sector to introduce an ongoing industry funding model for financial counselling.
- This is part of our commitment to ensuring a strong future for Australian charities, including building capacity to ensure they can continue to be the first line of support for the most vulnerable in the community.

KEY POINTS

- The Albanese Government is working with industry representatives from the banking and finance; telecommunications; energy; insurance; online gambling; and financial counselling sectors on the design of:
 - ongoing and voluntary industry contributions for financial counselling, and
 - a new not-for-profit body, to collect and distribute industry contributions.
- My department has established an advisory group with the industry representatives to inform this design, with industry contributions and the new body expected to be agreed and operational during 2022-23.
- Industry contributions will be on top of Government funding of \$44 million per year for generalist financial counselling services.

IF ASKED - How is the Government implementing the recommendations of the Sylvan Review?

- We are introducing the industry funding model as a high priority to increase funding for financial counselling, and services for financially vulnerable Australians.
- An additional \$10.5 million from 2021-22 to 2024-25 is being invested to support the industry funding model and data, national coordination, and innovation activities, including \$1.5 million in seed funding to establish the new, not-for-profit distribution body.
- The Department continues to engage with states and territories and other Commonwealth agencies to strengthen coordination and data on financial counselling.

IF ASKED – Will the Government mandate industry contributions rather than introducing a voluntary industry funding model?

- Key industries such as the banking and finance; telecommunications; energy; insurance; online gambling have already taken steps in working with Government on the development and implementation of a voluntary contribution model.
- I will consider mandatory arrangements if a voluntary contribution model is unachievable with industries.

IF ASKED - Is the Government aware of concerns raised by sector stakeholders about buy now pay later products?

- Financial counsellors report an increase in the number of people presenting with debt relating to Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) products. BNPL products are being used to pay for everyday living expenses such as groceries, childcare, and electricity, as well as alcohol and food in hospitality venues and rent payments.
- A recent survey by the Department found the BNPL sector accounts for 3.2 percent of the time spent by financial counsellors assisting clients.
- My Department is continuing to work with the sector to monitor this situation and to better understand the drivers of demand for financial counselling services.

Regulation of Buy Now Pay Later (from Treasury QTB)

- The Australian Government is taking action to address the risks of consumer harm associated with buy now pay later lending. We are consulting with industry and consumer groups to develop tailored solutions while ensuring that consumers and merchants will continue to realise the benefits of responsible buy now pay later use.
- On 12 July 2022, Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services announced that the Government will consult on ways to improve the regulation of buy now pay later credit in Australia.
- The Government will also conduct a health check of the scope of consumer credit regulation in light of new technologies and business models.

IF ASKED – What is the Government doing following the collapse of the Aboriginal Community Benefits Fund (ACBF) Group, now known as Youpla?

- The Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services is leading the Government's response to ACBF's funeral funds entering liquidation in March 2022, in consultation with the Minister for Indigenous Australians and other Ministers.
- The Government is aware of ACBF's poor conduct over a long period. The Financial Services Royal Commission, Australian Securities and Investments Commission and Australian Financial Complaints Authority have all highlighted that ACBF has misrepresented themselves as an Aboriginal owned organisation, and targeting First Nations peoples, including young people and those in remote communities, to take up unsuitable funeral fund products.
- My Department is continuing to monitor the impact on financial counselling services from ACBF's collapse.

CONTACT NAME: Chris D'Souza
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POSITION: Branch Manager, Financial Wellbeing

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- 2019 – former Government commissioned Ms Louise Sylvan AM to undertake a review, the *Countervailing Power: Review of the coordination and funding for financial counselling services across Australia* (the Sylvan Review) in response to the Royal Commission into Misconduct in the Banking, Superannuation and Financial Services Industry.
- The Sylvan Review delivered important insights into the issues experienced in the financial counselling sector, such as insufficient funding, increasing demand for services, fragmented delivery, and people struggling with complex and varied financial products and services.
- November 2020 – in response to the Sylvan Review, the former Government committed to introduce an industry funding model, following consultation with industry, to provide increased funding for the financial counselling sector.
- The 2022-23 Budget included an additional \$10.5 million over four years from 2021-22 to support the voluntary industry funding model and the financial counselling sector. This includes:
 - \$1.5 million in seed funding to establish the new, not-for-profit distribution body.
 - \$9 million in complementary initiatives:
 - \$1.5 million for consultation and evaluation support for the industry funding model;
 - \$3.4 million for data capture and capability initiatives, including further demand modelling;
 - \$2 million investment for the expansion of the online chat function on the National Debt Helpline website;
 - \$1 million for further expansion of the pilot for an online appointment booking system, using the National Debt Helpline; and
 - \$1 million to extend a virtual learning program for financial counselling students to complete their placement hours.
- Commonwealth Financial Counselling (CFC) services are delivered by community and local government organisations to help people in personal financial difficulty address their financial problems, manage debt, and make informed choices about their money. Services are voluntary, free and confidential.
- The Government annually provides \$44 million for generalist services through Commonwealth Financial Counselling/Financial Capability (CFC/FC), the National Debt Helpline (NDH), CFC/FC Capability Building and Money Support Hubs (MSH). Specialist financial counselling services are also funded for problem gambling. These services are considered the largest financial counselling supports funded by the Commonwealth.

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MO Clearance Date:

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Abolishing the Cashless Debit Card and the future of Income Management****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government will abolish the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) program and last week I introduced legislation in this place to deliver on our election commitment.
- Pending the passage of legislation, this Bill will enable participants to move off the Cashless Debit Card, with the option of voluntary Income Management.
- It will also ensure the Family Responsibilities Commission can continue to support community members in the Cape York region by re-establishing Income Management.
- The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) report into the CDC delivered just last month found insufficient evidence that the CDC was meeting its objectives.
- Many CDC participants forced to use the card have reported feeling marginalised and embarrassed, and have reported a loss of freedom and choice.
- We are consulting with communities where the card operates, to work with them on what's next including consideration of voluntary Income Management for participants coming off the CDC. I have visited and spoken with communities in Ceduna and the East Kimberley region, and will be visiting Cairns and the Northern Territory in coming weeks. Assistant Minister Elliot has also visited Bundaberg and Hervey Bay and will also be visiting the Goldfields region.

- We are moving quickly and decisively in bringing this legislation forward to ensure there is adequate time to support participants to get off the card, including personalised supports where needed. This includes helping people set up automatic deductions to pay rent and utilities, or assistance with moving to voluntary Income Management if individuals still want more support in managing their money.
- The communities I and Assistant Minister Elliot have spoken to have indicated their strong preference for support services to remain in place following the abolishing of the CDC. I will continue to work with communities about what other key supports are needed— not only to support individuals as they transition off the card, but to put in place other programs and supports to help the community address issues of alcohol and other drug misuse, domestic violence and problem gambling.
- Our Government is committed to putting in place supports which are based on evidence – not ideology.

KEY POINTS

- The Albanese Government has committed to abolish the mandatory CDC and remove restrictions on how social security recipients spend their payments.
- Legislation for the CDC sunsets on 31 December 2022.
- We will support individuals and communities through a measured transition. This will include offering voluntary Income Management to those who choose it and co-designing strategies with communities to address long-term challenges including drug and alcohol misuse and problem gambling.
- We are consulting with CDC participants, community members and First Nations leaders in CDC regions around Australia.
- Consultation to date include stakeholders in Ceduna, East Kimberley, Bundaberg and Hervey Bay. The Government will continue to consult, with visits to Cape York, the Northern Territory and the Goldfields shortly.
- Discussions so far have centred on:
 - what services are needed to address social issues within communities and also are required to drive economic independence.
 - what supports people may need while transitioning off the card and beyond.
- We will tap into the established governance and decision-making structures in these communities to identify the priorities for community and ensure support funding is aligned to these priorities.

IF ASKED – When will people transition off the Cashless Debit Card?

- Subject to the passage of the legislation introduced last week, people will be able to opt out of the CDC and I expect this to be from 19 September 2022.
- We committed to getting people off the card as quickly as possible but ensuring the transition pathway for individuals is tailored to their circumstances.
- Additionally, from Monday 1 August 2022, people in all CDC sites (except Cape York) will no longer be placed onto the CDC.
- There will also be support available to those who need it, including opting in for voluntary Income Management, setting up Centrepay arrangements and referrals to local supports.
- Some people won't need any assistance, so my department is designing a process that allows them to come off the program quickly and smoothly. It is critical that those who do need some extra help with the changes to their financial arrangements are able to get it. This may include an option for individuals to transition to a voluntary Income Management program
- Our Government is talking with communities about what other supports communities may need — during the transition away from the CDC and in the longer term.

IF ASKED – Will the Government force people in the Northern Territory back onto the BasicsCard?

- The Government is abolishing the CDC. This means people across Australia will no longer be forced to be on this program.
- The Government will be offering choice to people. If some like the program and want to continue using a tool to help them budget, or to protect themselves from financial abuse, they will have the option to volunteer for Income Management.

IF ASKED – Will a voluntary income management card be like the BasicsCard? Will it have the same features as the Cashless Debit Card?

- Card options will be fully explored as part of consultations on voluntary Income Management.

IF ASKED – Why is the Government abolishing the card, especially when alcohol bans are being lifted in the NT and domestic violence continues?

- There is no evidence that supports that this card has made a difference. The card has not worked. It has not addressed the concerns some communities had about alcohol abuse and violence in the community, particularly against women and children.
- The ANAO report into the CDC found insufficient evidence that the CDC was meeting its objectives.
- The last evaluation of the CDC cost \$2.5 million. It found that evidence on the program was inconclusive.

- 74 per cent of surveyed CDC participants wanted to opt out of the card. Many participants felt stigmatised or discriminated against by being on the card.
- We will abolish the CDC and look at the other relevant policies and levers available to address the complex issues faced by people in these communities.
- We will continue support services that are making a difference, and will work with communities on local solutions moving forward. I recognise that the NT Government is well placed to regulate alcohol in its jurisdiction.

IF ASKED – Will the Government force people in Cape York back onto the BasicsCard?

- The Government is abolishing the CDC. This means people across Australia will no longer be forced to be on this program.
- We will be working with the Families Responsibilities Commission to re-establish Income Management for people in Cape York and to ensure the continuation of support services for people.
- In the coming weeks, Assistant Minister Elliot and I will be visiting Cape York communities to consult with them on what Income Management should look like, and what supports will be required to ensure communities are best placed to address the complex social issues they face.

IF ASKED - What is the Government doing to assist participants to transition off the card including those using Buy Now Pay Later services?

- There are around 14,000 people have used their CDC account as part of a Buy Now Pay Later arrangement. People can incur fees if they make a late payment for these purchases.
- We will continue to work with communities in CDC regions to ensure people coming off the CDC are supported, and to help them to gain skills and build their capacity to move to economic independence in the longer term.
- Services Australia will provide support to participants who request to transition off the CDC, and other support services will be available for people who need a little more assistance. This includes a discussion about setting up new direct debits for rent or other bills, and offering further budgeting support. This will include the need for them to change their Buy Now Pay Later arrangements to another account so they do not incur a late payment fee.
- My department is developing a comprehensive communication and engagement strategy to ensure participants are aware of their option to come off the CDC and the supports available in their communities.

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Engagement and Support Services

ANNOTATION: The figure of "14,000" in the version of the QTB as at 4 August 2022, was incorrect due to a reporting error. The figure was removed from the QTB on 5 August 2022.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- As at 1 July 2022, there are 17,795 participants on the Cashless Debit Card.

Cashless Debit Card region	Participant numbers
Ceduna region SA	1,085
East Kimberley region WA	2,028
Goldfields region WA	3,849
Bundaberg and Hervey Bay region Qld	6,552
Cape York region Qld	108
Northern Territory	4,173

- Note, CDC participants in the Northern Territory elected to move from Income Management to the CDC. Almost all of these people have ongoing eligibility for Income Management.

Income Management

- As at 1 July 2022, there are 24,681 participants on Income Management across Australia. Of these, 22,942 reside in the Northern Territory, and 2,639 are on Voluntary Income Management.

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DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Liz Hefren-Webb, Deputy Secretary, Families and Communities
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Clearance Date:	3 August 2022
MO Clearance Date:	

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Gambling Policy****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government is committed to reducing the harm from gambling activities and to implementing the National Consumer Protection Framework for online wagering (the National Framework).
- The Framework is a whole of government response to reducing gambling harm from online wagering. It does not apply to land-based gambling, such as casinos or electronic gaming machines.

KEY POINTS

- National Framework contains 10 measures to reduce harm caused by online wagering to consumers.
- The measures provide people with easy-to-use tools and information to better control their gambling.
- 7 of the 10 measures have been implemented since 2018:
 1. The most recent change is that from 31 July 2022, Activity statements – online wagering providers will be required to send consumers meaningful activity statements so they can easily track and monitor their online wagering spending and behaviour.
 2. Prohibition on lines of credit for online wagering,
 3. Discouraging the use of payday lenders for wagering,
 4. Reducing the customer verification period from 90 days to 72 hours.

5. Voluntary opt-out pre-commitment scheme, where wagering providers must offer all clients the option to voluntarily set deposit limits on their gambling activity.
 6. Restricting use of inducements to gamble, like bonus bets, and
 7. Ensuring people can easily cancel and close online wagering accounts.
- Remaining 3 measures are on track to be implemented by end of 2022:
 1. Consistent gambling messaging – involves wagering service providers to implement a suite of the consistent gambling messages, to replace the “gamble responsibly” tagline.
 2. Staff training - which provides a nationally consistent, training module for all staff involved in providing online wagering services.
 3. Establishment of a National Self-Exclusion Register (NSER).

The NSER will allow those experiencing gambling harm to immediately exclude from services offered by all interactive wagering providers with a single registration. The NSER, which will be known as BetStop, is being implemented by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) under the responsibility of the Minister for Communications, the Hon Michelle Rowland MP, and expected to be operational by September 2022.

IF ASKED: Is the Government doing anything else about gambling related harm?

- An extensive evaluation process is planned once the National Framework is fully implemented by early 2023.
- Online gambling providers must comply with the *Interactive Gambling Act 2001 (Cth)* as well as state/territory measures for gambling harm minimisation.
- The Government also provides funding for Financial Counselling for Problem Gambling.
 - In 2021-22, 4,492 clients were supported by 33 providers. In 2021-22, base funding for the program was **\$5.61 million**.
 - Total funding from 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2023 is **\$25.1 million**.
- This is in addition to more than **\$76 million** from 1 January 2019 to 30 June 2023 for general financial counselling services, which has supported 108,418 clients to date.
- The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) also conducts ongoing national research on gambling to inform implementation of the National Framework.

IF ASKED: Will the Government address the increase in gambling advertising?

- Reforms restricting gambling advertisements came into effect in May 2019, which complement the National Framework and include prohibiting gambling advertisements during live sporting events from five minutes before play, until five minutes after conclusion of play, between 5:00am and 8:30pm.
- ACMA continues to monitor compliance with these restrictions.

IF ASKED: Will the Government prohibit the use of credit cards for online gambling?

- The Australian Banking Association, some large online wagering providers and peak bodies support banning credit cards and digital wallets for online gambling in Australia.
- On 19 November 2021, the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services (the Joint Committee) tabled their report from the Inquiry into regulation of the use of financial services such as credit cards and digital wallets for online gambling in Australia.
- Joint Committee recommended Government develop and implement legislation to ban online wagering providers and other gambling services (excluding lotteries) from accepting payment by credit cards and digital wallets, and collect additional data on size and growth of the online wagering market and associated harms.
- The Albanese Government will consider this recommendation in due course.

IF ASKED: What is the Government doing about preventing gambling harm in children?

- I am aware gambling-like games, for example video games that include loot boxes and social gaming, are of concern to some community members and more work needs to be done to better understand this issue.
- The Office of the eSafety Commissioner has an online guide for parents about gaming, including those with gambling-like elements available at <https://www.esafety.gov.au>.
- The National Classification Scheme provides consumers with advice on the content in video games. Consumer advice may include ‘in-game purchases’, ‘simulated gambling’, ‘gambling themes’ or ‘gambling references.’
- An independent review of Australian classification regulation, led by Neville Stevens AO, was undertaken in 2020 which considered the National Classification Code and the *Guidelines for the Classification of Computer Games* with respect to classification of games with simulated gambling and loot boxes.
- Questions regarding the National Classification Scheme should be referred to the Minister for Communications.

IF ASKED: Will the Government establish a National Gambling Regulator?

- In 2013, the former Government made a decision to abolish the introduction of a National Gambling Regulator. The Albanese Government will consider all options to minimise harm from gambling.

IF ASKED: What is the Government doing about “grooming” and other predatory practices of online wagering companies?

- Through the National Framework, it is prohibited for online wagering companies to offer any credit, voucher, reward or other benefit as an incentive to open an account or to refer another person to open an account.
- This measure is designed to protect consumers from incentive-based marketing, and strengthen standards for direct marketing.
- The National Framework also provides tools to assist consumers to regulate their gambling activity:
 - Voluntary opt-out pre-commitment – allows consumers to set limits for their gambling activity (already implemented).
 - Activity statements – meaningful statements of consumer gambling activity provided monthly (implementation now in place from 31 July 2022).
 - NSER – consumers can centrally exclude from all advertising and wagering services (implementation in 2022).

BACKGROUND

- 7 September 2015 – former Government asked the Hon Barry O’Farrell to conduct a Review of Illegal Offshore Wagering (the Review). Review investigated size and scope of the illegal offshore wagering problem and advised on ways to strengthen regulatory enforcement and protect Australians from illegal offshore wagering operators.
- The National Framework was developed in response to the Review. Status of the 10 measures below:

National Framework Measure	Regulatory Responsibility	Status	Date of effect
1. Prohibition of lines of credit – except by certain oncourse bookmakers.	Cwlth (ACMA)	Implemented	17 February 2018
2. Payday lenders – Discourages small amount credit contracts.	Cwlth (ACMA)	Implemented	17 February 2018
3. Customer verification – 14-day period for verifying customer’s identity. Will further reduce to 72 hours in May 2022.	Cwlth (AUSTRAC)	Implemented	26 February 2019
4. Offering of inducements – Prohibits all specified inducements.	States/territories	Implemented	26 May 2019
5. Account closure – Available/accessible closing of wagering accounts.	States/territories	Implemented	26 May 2019
6. Voluntary opt-out pre-commitment scheme – Consumer tool to pre-commit to limits.	States/territories	Implemented	26 May 2019
7. Activity statements – Meaningful monthly statements for consumers.	States/territories	Implemented	31 July 2022
8. Consistent gambling messaging – evidence-based, consistent gambling messaging to replace ‘gamble responsibly’.	States/territories	In progress	Planned early-2023
9. Staff training – training of certain staff in delivery of responsible online wagering services.	States/territories	In progress	Planned early-2023
10. National Self-Exclusion Register – Self-exclusion from all online wagering.	Cwlth (ACMA)	In progress	Planned 2022

Authority

- Department is responsible for administering the *Gambling Measures Act 2012*, which commits the Commonwealth to work with states and territories, gaming industry, academics and community sector to research and implement gambling harm minimisation measures.
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications has policy responsibility for online gambling and advertising, and administers the *Interactive Gambling Act 2001*, and the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*.
State and territory governments use a range of mechanisms to implement gambling regulations such as legislation, ministerial directions, codes of practice, and licensing conditions.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Chris D'Souza Branch Manager Financial Wellbeing
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Clearance Date:	20 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Approach for the Indexation/Fair Work Commission ruling for Grants****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- Indexation is applied to eligible grants each year.
- This practice occurs consistently across all eligible Department of Social Services grant programs.

KEY POINTS

- Consistent with long-standing and previous government policy, indexation is paid to eligible Department of Social Services grant recipients once each financial year.
- All eligible grant recipients will receive indexation this financial year and I have asked my department to ensure indexation is passed on to these providers as a matter of urgency.
- In light of the recent Fair Work Commission decision on minimum wage increases, I have asked my Department to work with its Community Services Advisory Group that has membership from 25 peak bodies and community service delivery organisations to consider how this may impact their sector.
- We want to ensure grants reflect the real cost of providing services and doing business and will work with the sector on how best we support this change.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- Indexation is the process where the forward estimates are updated to reflect the forecast economic conditions of the year in which costs are expected to occur.
- The application of indexation to a grant program, and the chosen indexation parameter, is a decision of the Government. These parameters are not disclosed publically and are the responsibility of the Department of Finance.
- The Department passes on indexation to grant recipients where the Government has made a decision to apply indexation to the grant program.
- Multi-year grants do not receive indexation in the first year, as it is already factored into the base funding.
- CSAG is chaired by DSS and membership consists of representatives from 25 peak bodies and service delivery organisations as per below:
 - Anglicare Australia, Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), Australian Red Cross, BaptistCare, Carers Australia, Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA), COTA Australia (Council on the Ageing), Family & Relationship Services Australia (FRSA), Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA), Financial Counselling Australia, Department of Social Services (DSS), Meals on Wheels, Migration Council Australia (MCA), Mission Australia, National Disability Services, Relationships Australia, Save The Children Australia, Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), Settlement Council of Australia, Southern Youth & Families Services Association, St Vincent de Paul Society, The Benevolent Society, The Salvation Army, The Smith Family, UnitingCare Australia, Volunteering Australia.

Locational / place considerations

- NIL

Contact Officer's Name and Position: Eve Cordeiro, A/g Branch Manager

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DSS Input Cleared By (include position): Mark le Dieu, Group Manager, Community Grants Hub

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Clearance Date:

26 July 2022

MO Clearance Date:

To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Disability Royal Commission
HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Labor Government believes it is important that the experiences of people with disability in Australia are heard.
- That is why the Government supported the establishment of a Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (the Disability Royal Commission) in 2019.
- It is critical people with disability are able to participate in the Disability Royal Commission and are supported to tell their story safely.
- My department delivers a range of support services to achieve this.

KEY POINTS

- The Department of Social Services (the department) established free and independent supports for people engaging with or affected by the Disability Royal Commission including:
 - a trauma-informed national telephone counselling and referral service, delivered by Blue Knot Foundation
 - in-person counselling services for people who have more complex needs and require more in-depth support
 - Indigenous-specific counselling services, advocacy support and sector development
 - individual advocacy support for people with disability who need significant support to tell their story and assistance in drafting submissions
 - systemic advocacy support.
- The services provide people with disability, their families and carers:
 - support for their emotional wellbeing
 - support for making choices about telling their stories
 - information on other practical supports available to them.

IF ASKED: How can people share their story with the Disability Royal Commission?

- The Albanese Government encourages anyone to tell their story to the Disability Royal Commission, and encourages individuals to consider the timeframes the Disability Royal Commission has set.
- The Disability Royal Commission has requested that any submissions be sent to and received by the Disability Royal Commission by 31 December 2022 in order to be taken into account in the Final Report.
- Registrations for a private session are now closed as the Disability Royal Commission announced that anyone who would like to have a private session needed to register before 30 June 2022. Private sessions will be held after that date for those who have registered.

IF ASKED: What is the Government doing to support Indigenous and Australians with disability to engage with the Disability Royal Commission?

- It is important to ensure support services are appropriate to support all people with disability.
- My department has established culturally appropriate counselling supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability which has resulted in 28 per cent of all counselling clients identifying as Indigenous.
- My department is also working with First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) to deliver First Nations-specific advocacy support for the Royal Commission.
 - Funding was provided for FPDN to deliver a range of capacity and capability building activities to National Disability Advocacy Program providers, including the provision of cultural awareness training for providers who provide support services to First Nations people with disability.
- Funding was also provided for 11 Indigenous Community Advocates across Australia to provide culturally safe advocacy supports.
- These initiatives have resulted in 11 per cent of all advocacy clients identifying as Indigenous.

CONTACT NAME: Anita Davis
 PHONE: s 47F

POSITION: Branch Manager, Advocacy and Inclusion

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- The Disability Royal Commission was announced on 5 April 2019 and is due to release its final report by 29 September 2023.
- As at 6 July 2022, the Disability Royal Commission has held 24 public hearings with a further eight scheduled for the remainder of 2022.
- A total of **\$599.3 million over five years** (2018-19 and 2023-24) is allocated to fund the Disability Royal Commission and related support services.
 - The department received **\$165.4 million over five years**, which included **\$144.6 million** of administered funding for advocacy and counselling support services for people participating in, and affected by, the Disability Royal Commission. The remaining funding (**\$20.8 million**) being for departmental purposes in administering these support services and for engaging with and responding to the Disability Royal Commission.
 - Departmental funding was also provided to the National Disability Insurance Agency (**\$47.8 million**) and the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission (**\$7.1 million**) to support their engagement with and responses to the Disability Royal Commission.
 - The remaining funding (**\$379 million**) was provided to the Attorney-General's Department to establish and administer financial and legal support services, and the Disability Royal Commission itself.

Support services usage data

- As at 31 December 2021:
 - advocacy support was accessed by 2,403 individual clients across 44,474 sessions, and 7,862 group clients made 13,387 attendances at 2,039 group sessions.
 - in-person counselling services have been accessed by 2,309 individual clients across 32,791 sessions.
- As at 3 July 2022 (weekly reporting data), the National Counselling and Referral Service has received 18,554 calls, delivered 9,716 counselling sessions and made 4,441 referrals since it was established.

Contact Officer's Name and Position: Anita Davis Branch Manager, Advocacy and Inclusion

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Input Cleared By (include position): Karen Pickering, Group, Manager Disability Strategy

Phone/Mobile: s 47F

Clearance Date: 20 July 2022

MO Clearance Date:

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Labor Government is committed to driving progress under *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031* (the Strategy) to ensure that no Australian with disability is left behind.
- The Government will make the Strategy accountable by measuring its outcomes.
- We are working with state and territory governments, the community, businesses, and people with disability to see real progress made on the Strategy's important outcomes, including employment, education and health.
- Action under the Strategy will drive change over the next decade to uphold the rights, inclusion and participation of the 4.4 million people with disability in Australia.

KEY POINTS

- The Strategy recognises all levels of government are responsible for supporting people with disability to reach their full potential, as equal members of the community.
- Governments will work directly with people with disability to drive change and report regularly on progress of the Strategy's actions and outcome areas.
- This includes working with the Strategy's Advisory Council, who will provide direct advice to governments on the Strategy's implementation and progress.
- We have also committed to building up the evidence base with a total of \$15 million for a National Disability Research Partnership as set out in our election commitment to better support people with disability.
- As the Strategy is implemented over the next 10 years, everyone in Australia will be able to see real, tangible results being achieved.
- The Strategy's two yearly report will be presented to the Australian Parliament to show what progress has been made towards an inclusive Australian society that ensures people with disability can fulfil their potential, as equal members of the community.

If ASKED - What will the Government do to track the implementation of the Strategy?

- The Strategy is focused on driving action for people with disability and reporting on the progress made. This will be publicly done through:
 - an annual data report on the outcomes achieved against the Strategy's priorities, produced by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
 - an annual Targeted Action Plan Report which will track progress against individual actions that each government has committed to deliver
 - a two yearly implementation report, which will be tabled to the Australian Parliament, it will document what action has been taken and what progress has been made, and
 - State, territory and local government reports under jurisdictional disability inclusion plans.
- There will be two major independent reviews of the Strategy in 2025 and 2029, as well as a review following the final report of the Disability Royal Commission in September 2023.
- In election commitments the Government has announced it will provide a **total of \$15 million** to support research commissioned by the National Disability Research Partnership. This will support its national disability research agenda, which aligns with the Outcome Areas of the Strategy.
- We have also committed to the development of a National Disability Data Asset in partnership with state and territory governments.

If ASKED – How will you involve people with disability in implementation?

- The Albanese Government will draw on evidence and will work closely with people with disability, families, carers, representatives and service providers to inform and drive implementation of commitments in the Strategy.
- This includes working with the Strategy's Advisory Council, which is made up entirely of people who have lived experience of disability and is providing governments with direct advice on the Strategy's implementation and progress.
- A public forum or public consultation will be held every year of the life of the Strategy.
- This will make sure all people with disability have regular opportunities to provide their views in ways that influence the Strategy's direction and implementation.
- I will be hosting the inaugural national public forum later this year.

If ASKED – What are Targeted Action Plans (TAPs) and what will they do?

- Throughout the life of the Strategy, disability ministers will commission TAPs to drive and focus action of all governments on improving outcomes in specific areas.
- TAPs aim to deliver intensive action over a 1 to 3 year period.
- The first 5 TAPs for governments to focus on are employment, community attitudes, early childhood, safety, and emergency management.
- These are the areas people with disability told us need immediate action, and where achieving better outcomes will make the most difference to their lives.
- The 5 TAPs launched with the Strategy will be built on over time, as governments can add actions and investments during the term of the TAPs.
- There will be further TAPs over the life of the Strategy.

If ASKED - What is the Strategy's Outcome Framework?

- The Outcomes Framework is a key component of the Strategy as it measures, tracks, and reports on outcomes for people with disability.
- It is a central element of driving action through accountability, in particular for State and Territory Governments as they have primary responsibility for the performance of key service systems such as health, housing, education, transport and justice.
- The Outcomes Framework will measure progress against the individual policy priorities under the seven outcome areas of the Strategy:
 - Employment and Financial Security
 - Inclusive Homes and Communities
 - Safety, Rights and Justice
 - Personal and Community Support
 - Education and Learning
 - Health and Wellbeing
 - Community Attitudes
- The biennial reporting to Parliament will provide the Government with the opportunity to highlight where progress is being achieved and where further progress needs to be made.

If ASKED - Who is on the Advisory Council?

- The Strategy has an Engagement Plan to deliver on what people with disability told us. Its central feature is the Strategy Advisory Council, which gives people with disability a new, direct voice to ministers and governments.
- The Council currently consists of seven members including the Chair, and a special adviser.
- The Council is chaired by Dr Ben Gauntlett, Disability Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. Dr Gauntlett brings extensive experience to the role of Chair, having worked with governments, advocates and the disability sector for many years.
- The other members of the Council include:
 - Carolyn Frohmader (TAS)
 - Seriako Stephen (QLD)
 - Cindy Liu (VIC)
 - Liz Reid (NT)
 - Jane Spring (NSW), and
 - Natalie Wade (SA)
- Kathy Hough (WA) is the Council's special adviser. There is a second special adviser role to be filled.
- The Chair and the members all have lived experience of disability and bring a diverse range of skills and experiences to advise government on the Strategy's implementation and progress.
- The Council's membership also reflects geographical, gender and cultural diversity.

- Special advisers provide strategic advice to assist Council members. Special advisers are appointed based on their experience working on disability issues and government policy.

If ASKED – When will the progress report from the old Strategy be released?

- The final progress report for 2010-2020 will be released in late 2022, and will cover the progress made from 2017 to 2021 inclusive.
- The final report includes 2021, in recognition of disability ministers' decision to continue the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 until the launch of Australia's Disability Strategy.
- This recognised the launch of the Strategy was delayed due to COVID-19.

CONTACT NAME: Karen Pickering
PHONE: s 47F

POSITION: Group Manager, Disability Strategy

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- The original National Disability Strategy was in place from 2010-2020, and was extended by one year due to delays in developing the new Strategy as a result of the COVID pandemic.
- In April 2018 Disability Ministers agreed to a staged approach to develop a new National Disability Strategy, including:
 - Independent review of implementation of the current strategy
 - Development of a position paper
 - Public consultations
 - Setting up a stakeholder steering group
 - Finalisation and approval by first ministers
- In March 2020 and due to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments agreed with key disability community stakeholders to delay the second stage of consultations on developing a new Strategy.
- This meant the consultations were conducted in the second half of 2020 and the new Strategy was not released at the end of 2020 as originally intended.
- Disability ministers all agreed to a Statement of Continued Commitment to the original strategy until a new strategy could be released.
- The new Strategy - titled *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031* - was released in December 2021 after being endorsed by all first ministers.
- The new Strategy builds and expands on the original *National Disability Strategy 2010-2020*, adding new key features to drive more action and accountability.
- This Strategy retains a number of policy priorities from the 2010-2020 Strategy as people with disability told us these are still relevant.
- The new Strategy has a stronger focus on employment than its predecessor – which is why *Employ My Ability* was released as an associated plan alongside the Strategy.
- Community attitudes and safety are also seen as key issues for people with disability and have been given a stronger focus in this new Strategy.
- This Strategy has a much stronger focus on accountability and transparency. It also includes an Engagement Plan with features that ensure people with disability and their representatives will be closely involved in the Strategy's implementation, and will influence its direction and priorities.
- The Strategy was launched on 3 December 2021 with an initial investment of \$250 million to support implementation of the Strategy, this includes:
 - \$76.8 million over the life of the Strategy for Targeted Action Plans
 - \$21.7 million over 3 years for the first set of Targeted Action Plans:
 - \$7.6 million for employment;
 - \$3.3 million for community attitudes;
 - \$8.3 million for early childhood; and
 - \$2.5 million for Safety.

- Up to \$72 million in reporting, data and research
 - o \$12.5 million for National Disability Research Partnership;
 - o \$19.5 million reporting and measurement – includes Australia’s Disability Strategy Survey; and
 - o up to \$40 million for the National Disability Data Asset.
- \$81.2 million to continue the Disability Information Gateway.
- \$10.1 million for engaging people with disability in the implementation of the Strategy.
- \$9.9 million to improve individual advocacy

Contact Officer’s Name and Position:	Karen Pickering
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DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Debbie Mitchell Deputy Secretary
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
Clearance Date:	20 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	18 July 2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

National Autism Strategy

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Labor Government is committed to improving life outcomes for all people with disability, including people with autism.
- People with autism experience some of the poorest outcomes of any cohort across a range of life domains, and a 20-year age gap in life expectancy compared with the general population.
- That's why the Government has committed to the development of a National Autism Strategy that delivers a coordinated national approach between all levels of government and service areas so that no Australian with disability is left behind.
- Our strategy will be a whole-of-life plan for all Australians with autism – not just those eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – and importantly, will be shaped by the experiences of people with autism, their families and professionals.

KEY POINTS

- The benefits of a National Autism Strategy will likely include:
 - building on the understanding and recognition of autism within key professions and the wider community
 - improving service integration and coordination
 - improving education, employment and health services for autistic people
 - providing better support for parents and carers of children with autism, and
 - establishing a national autism research agenda.

- The National Autism Strategy will aim to:
 - Improve services and supports to achieve better outcomes for autistic children and adults.
 - Address whole-of-life needs for all autistic Australians, not just those eligible for the NDIS.
 - Develop a coordinated national approach between all levels of government and services areas supporting autistic people.

If ASKED - What progress is the Government making toward developing a National Autism Strategy?

- Approaches and activities to develop and implement the strategy are currently underway.
- Development of a National Autism Strategy will be led by the Department of Social Services (the department) in consultation with the autism community and sector, including professionals and researchers, to ensure it reflects the views of autistic people and their families.
- It will be informed by, and align with Australia's Disability Strategy and Government commitment of an Early Childhood Strategy.
- Findings and recommendations from the Senate Committee's final report will also be considered as part of the strategy.

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If ASKED – Why has the Government committed to providing \$2 million to AEIOU and not other providers?

- This funding will allow AEIOU to expand to engage staff and support additional children in its Townsville centre, with capacity to offer services for an additional 40 children in surrounding remote locations.
- This will ensure children with autism in Townsville and surrounding regional areas have access to early intervention programs to help their development, and for parents to have expert support and the ability to access childcare specific to their child's needs.
- We are also providing \$2 million to the Autism Cooperative Research Centre so it can continue to be Australia's leading organisation for autism research, coordination, collaboration and advice.
- This will support development and implementation of a National Autism Strategy, with a national research agenda and evidence-based practice platform underpinning it.

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CONTACT NAME: Sarah Guise

POSITION: Branch Manager, Disability Support Branch

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Autistic participants in the NDIS

- As at 31 March 2022, the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) was supporting 174,741 autistic participants – 34 per cent of all NDIS participants and the largest disability group in the NDIS.

Senate Select Committee on Autism

- The Senate Select Committee on Autism was established on 27 November 2019 to inquire into services, support and life outcomes for people with autism in Australia.
- The Department of Social Services (the department) provided a joint submission with the Departments of Health, and Education, Skills and Employment, with input from others including the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA); and attended a Committee hearing on 27 July 2020.
- The Committee delivered its final report on 25 March 2022. The report includes 81 recommendations, and 5 dissenting report recommendations.
- The department has been allocated lead agency for coordinating the Australian Government response to the report, which has been prepared in consultation with a range of departmental areas and external departments.
- Noting the impact of caretaker on progressing the government response, the department is working to a timeframe for the response to be agreed to be tabled by the Prime Minister by late September 2022.
- Key findings and recommendations include:
 - Life outcomes for autistic Australians are poor and this comes at a personal, social and economic cost.
 - Meaningful systemic changes would have an enormous impact.
 - Drivers of poor outcomes for autistic people are complex and interrelated.
 - Poor understanding of autism within the community and among service providers.
 - Workforce capacity constraints.
 - Delays in early identification and family education and support services.
 - Complex and poor integrated service environment.
 - Generic disability strategies have proven ineffective at improving life outcomes for autistic people.
 - A person and family-centred National Autism Strategy, co-designed by the community, should form the centrepiece of efforts to improve outcomes for autistic Australians.
- Key priorities include:
 - Building understanding of autism within key professions and the wider community
 - Improving access to early diagnosis and intervention
 - Improving service integration and coordination
 - Improving education, employment and health services for autistic people
 - Supporting parents and carers, and
 - Establishing a national autism research agenda.
- The report also recommends the effectiveness of the NDIS for autistic Australians should be a focus of a separate inquiry.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Sarah Guise, Branch Manager, Disability Support Branch
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DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Karen Pickering, Group Manager, Disability Strategy Group
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Clearance Date:	25 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	26 July 2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

INFORMATION, LINKAGES AND CAPACITY BUILDING (ILC) PROGRAM – OFFER TO EXTEND

KEY ISSUES

- The Australian Government is committed to supporting people with disability to fully participate in our community.
- Under the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program there are currently 498 grants with funding of **\$312.4 million**.

KEY FACTS

- **400** current ILC grant recipients who have grants due to expire between November 2022 and February 2023 have expressed interest in an extension of time and funding.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- The Department of Social Services is currently working through a process and providing advice to me to consider varying **400** suitable existing grant agreements with a total cost of up to \$168 million (GST exclusive) over 2022-23 and 2023-24.
- The proposed variations will support existing projects and ensure grant recipients have additional time to deliver outcomes and maintain continuity of service while the department consults on, develops and transitions to a new strategic policy and investment framework, due to be released in mid-2024.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED – Why is the government taking so long to approve the time and funding extensions?

- The Department of Social Services wrote to all grant recipients in March 2022 to seek interest in an extension of additional time and funding over 2022-23 and 2023-24. This would extend the grant activity period up to 30 June 2024 to take account of the impact of COVID-19 on many projects.
- When the Federal Election was called, no funding decisions could be made during the caretaker period.
- I understand the department has continued to provide updates to all stakeholders, where possible, to ensure they were kept informed.
- The department has recently briefed me on this previous commitment and I am currently reviewing the submission.
- The department have received a response from grant recipients, which is now being considered by the Minister for the NDIS.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- The Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program provides funding to organisations through one off competitive grants to deliver projects in the community that benefit all Australians with disability, their carers and families.
- It provides information and capacity building supports for all people with disability, regardless of whether they are eligible for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).
- It also helps people with disability who are not eligible for an individual NDIS plan benefit from a more inclusive, accessible and connected Australia.
- Information, Linkages and Capacity Building projects create connections between people with disability and the communities in which they live and aim to build the knowledge, skills and confidence of people with disability, and improve their access to community and mainstream services.

Locational / place considerations

- **56** of the 400 Information, Linkages and Capacity Building grants due to cease between now and February 2023 are located in regional and remote Australia.

History

- In December 2021, 309 grant recipients with an activity end date on or before 31 October 2022 were offered a time-only extension to 31 December 2021 (303 accepted), recognising the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on organisations to deliver their funded activities.
- In March 2022, the department wrote to all 498 grants recipients to seek interest in an extension of additional time and funding over 2022-23 and 2023-24. This would extend the grant activity period up to 30 June 2024.
 - 400 have expressed interest and 98 have declined.
- In June 2022, the Government approved interim extensions until 31 December 2022, at a cost of up to \$2.7 million in 2022-23, for 21 grant recipients whose grants were due to expire imminently. This prevented service gaps and ensured continuity of service for people with disability.
- Grant recipients are seeking a decision in order to renew staff contracts and put in place arrangements to extend projects and the services they deliver.
- COVID-19 delayed the delivery of many activities, meaning some funding recipients have not been able to establish their projects and achieve the scale of outcome/s that might otherwise have been realised.
- Extra time is required for organisations to undertake co-design with some cohorts and undertake staff recruitment. This has been a challenge for some of the current grants with shorter duration, especially through COVID-19 and impacts on the workforce.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Sarah Guise, Branch Manager
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DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Karen Pickering, Group Manager Disability Strategy
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Clearance Date:	25 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Boosting readiness for educational environments for children with disability or developmental concerns

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Labor Government is committed to a better future for young Australians, including those living with disability.
- We know that early and appropriate intervention for developmental concerns can:
 - positively change a child's developmental trajectory,
 - increase their readiness for school, and
 - reduce their need for more intensive supports later in life.
- This is why our Government has committed \$31 million over four years to support young children (aged 0-8 years) with newly identified disability or emerging developmental concerns, and their parents and carers to ensure access to appropriate supports when needed.
- This includes:
 - \$6.9 million over four years for support for children
 - \$6.9 million over four year for support for families
 - \$2.2 million to 2024-15 to the Raising Children Network to improve online resources and information for families and carers, and
 - \$15 million over four years for outreach to provide culturally sensitive information and supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Supports will be available nationally, including in regional and remote areas.

KEY POINTS

- In 2018, there were around 115,000 children aged 0-6 years living in Australia with some level of disability¹, and it is estimated Indigenous children are twice as likely to have a disability than non-Indigenous children.
- Consultations undertaken have identified areas of unmet need for children and families with emerging disability or developmental concerns in the early stages, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who have reported a lack of culturally appropriate services.
- The National Early Childhood Program (NECP) builds on the success of certain elements of the Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) and Better Start for Children with Disability (Better Start) programs that have provided online information, parent workshops and supported playgroups for the last decade.
- The numbers of children and families accessing the NECP is expected to be higher than that of the HCWA and Better Start programs that will cease later this year, and many more are expected to access the publically available online information and resources.
- These activities align with outcomes of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 and the development of the Whole of Government Early Years Strategy.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, 2018.

If ASKED – Why is the program supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families undergoing a separate process?

- Consultations undertaken have identified areas of unmet need for children and families with emerging disability or developmental concerns in the early stages, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who have reported a lack of culturally appropriate services.
- As a result of consultation, additional funding of \$15 million will be provided over four years from 2022-23 to 2025-26 for an outreach initiative to provide culturally sensitive information and supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- This approval of funding by our Government marks the commencement of consultation with key stakeholder to inform the design of the 'Outreach' component of the National Early Childhood Program (NECP) ahead of approaching the market.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focuses activities that will be available through NECP will also assist in meeting Target 4 of the Closing the Gap National Agreement, which focuses on helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years.
- This Government is committed to designing programs with the communities they affect and support. That is why a grant opportunity is not yet available for this component.
- It is expected this component will commence in the first half of next year.

If ASKED - How are these grant opportunities different from the work of National Disability Insurance Agency's Early Childhood Partners?

- Ensuring children with disability, developmental delay or developmental concerns are identified early, and have access to appropriate and early supports is critical for achieving best outcomes for these children.
- Informed by the Whereto consultation co-design process, the NECP will complement the National Disability Insurance Agency's Early Childhood Partners to ensure appropriate referrals, including to mainstream services and complementary supports.
- The co-design consultation highlighted high levels of unmet need for children and their parents and carers, particularly at the start of their journey.
- Findings from the Whereto report also found families wanted to connect with less formal information and support mechanisms.
- Given this, the NECP will help empower parents by focusing on informal support approaches to groups to help build capacity and confidence of parents to support their child's development.

If ASKED - Is there a reduced focus on support for children with autism in the NECP grant opportunities as opposed to the HCWA program?

- The NECP builds on the Helping Children with Autism (HCWA) and Better Start for Children with Disability (Better Start) programs.
- The main component of the HCWA and Better Start programs provided individualised funding for early intervention services. Funding for these types of services can now be accessed through an NDIS plan, if approved.
- As outlined in the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, the objectives of the Support for children and Support for families grant opportunities include delivering tailored supports for children with specific disabilities including autism or autism like characteristics.
- Specifically, 50 per cent of all services delivered for both grant opportunities must be provided to children with autism or autism-like characteristics. And their parents and carers.
- The grant opportunities will also complement other continuing components of the programs such as the HCWA Positive Partnerships Program (for school aged children), administered by the Department of Education, and the HCWA and Better Start Medicare Benefits Schedule items, administered by the Department of Health and Aged Care.

CONTACT NAME: Sarah Guise

POSITION: Branch Manager, Disability Support Branch

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Design of the NECP and Indigenous ILC activity

- The Department of Social Services (the department) commissioned Whereto Research Based Consulting (Whereto) in August 2021 to undertake a co-design consultation process to inform the design of the NECP.
- Whereto engaged around 600 stakeholders, including parents and carers of young children with disability or developmental concerns and the sector, such as academics, peak bodies and services providers during this process.
- Whereto finalised the co-design consultation process in late 2021 to inform the design of the NECP.
- The NECP aims to:
 - help parents and carers access information about their child's development and early capacity building supports;
 - help prepare children with disability or developmental concerns for school and other learning environments; and
 - develop the skills and confidence of parents and carers to support their child's learning and development and connect with services.
- The ILC Indigenous outreach activity will provide information and support tailored to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to build their capacity to support children with disability or developmental concerns (aged 0-8 years), in their community.

Data on children with disability

- According to 2018 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data, there are around 115,000 children aged 0 to 6 years living in Australia with some level of disability.
- Of these, 90,000 have some degree of impairment, activity limitation or participation restriction, as defined by the ABS.
- Forty one percent of participants in the NDIS are children aged 0-14 years. There are 80,239 children younger than 7 with an NDIS plan. A further 10,812 children younger than 7 are accessing early connections, including referrals to mainstream and community services.
- There are limitations with data, noting that children with developmental concerns or developmental delay are not included in ABS data.

Contact Officer's Name and Position: s 47F A/g Branch Manager, Disability Support Branch

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DSS Input Cleared By (include position): Karen Pickering, Group Manager, Disability Strategy Group

Phone/Mobile: s 47F

Clearance Date: 02 August 2022

MO Clearance Date: To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Supported Employment (Activ)****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Labor Government is committed to a better future for Australians with a disability of working age so they can benefit from the dignity of work.
- That is why the Government took swift action to ensure over 750 people with disability didn't suddenly lose their jobs as a result of Activ Foundation's (Activ) business decision to close its large scale industrial work sites.
- Our quick response protects these jobs for another 18 months.
- The grant funding of up to \$7.8 million to Activ will slow the closure of the work sites, guaranteeing these individuals jobs for another 18 months while they are supported to find alternative employment.
- The Albanese Government is pleased to be working with the Western Australian Government who is providing \$4 million to support other Western Australian based Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) to build contemporary service models and workforce capability.
- We are aware of the issues impacting the viability of the ADE sector and are closely monitoring all providers.

This Government is committed to working with stakeholders to evolve the supported employment sector into modern, commercially viable social enterprises that better meet community expectations and provide greater choice and control in employment for people with disability.

KEY POINTS

- In May 2022, an announcement was made by Western Australia's largest ADE, Activ, that it would close seven of its sites, making more than 750 supported employees redundant.
- The funding being provided to Activ is part of the Government's commitment to improve employment outcomes for people with disability.
- A joint taskforce of the Department of Social Services (DSS), the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and Western Australian Government's Office of Disability will work together with supported employees, their families and advocates, peak bodies and the supported employment sector in Western Australia to manage the significant transition.
- As part of its work, the taskforce will identify a range of opportunities for impacted supported employees to consider. This might include community-based work, or other supported employment depending on the employee's preference.
- The Government recognises the ADE sector is currently undergoing a period of transition.
- The Government want to encourage the fullest participation of all people with disability in society, including in employment.
- Over the coming months, the Government will be engaging with key stakeholders to monitor issues and understand key challenges and opportunities for the sector.

If ASKED – Is this a sign that ADEs are not sustainable?

- Of 161 ADEs operating nationally, all but Activ have successfully transitioned to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) funding model and continue to provide supported employment opportunities.
- DSS and the NDIA regularly engage with key stakeholders to monitor issues in the ADE sector, including any viability concerns.
- ADEs play an important role in providing supported employment opportunities to people who need substantial ongoing support to maintain their employment.

If ASKED – Why is the government providing money to Activ when there have been concerns over Activ's financial management?

- The Albanese Government's priority is to ensure employees affected by this decision are supported in their transition into new, suitable placements.

CONTACT NAME: Katrina Chatham

POSITION: Branch Manager – Disability Employment Reforms Branch

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

Issues facing the Australian Disability Enterprise (ADE) sector

- There are a number of issues impacting ADEs:
 - Community attitudes are changing, with growing calls from some parts of the sector to end segregated employment.
 - Anticipated wage rises as a result of the Fair Work Commission's current review of the *Supported Employment Services Award 2020*, expected to be finalised later this year.
 - The need for more stable, long term contracts around which to build viable, ongoing business models. Automation, off shoring and, more recently, COVID-19 has impacted the type and volume of contracts available.
 - ADEs have moved from block grant to case based funding, to more recently receiving funding through their participant's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) plans. While the NDIS funding model is providing more funding for supported employment overall, and is giving participants greater choice and control about where and how they work, some ADEs, mainly those with larger worksites, have found the changes difficult.

Future of Supported Employment

- Over coming months, the Government will convene a roundtable with people with disability, ADEs, unions and the broader disability sector to better understand issues and opportunities for the future of supported employment.
- Consultation will be used to inform a plan to evolve the supported employment sector into modern, commercially viable social enterprises that provide greater choice and control in employment for people with disability.

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DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Debbie Mitchell, Deputy Secretary, Disability and Carers
Phone:	s 47F
Clearance Date:	20 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	18 July 2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Disability Employment****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Labor Government is committed to supporting the fullest participation of all people with disability in society.
- Opportunity, security, equality and at the most basic of levels – human rights. That's what we will do as a government to enhance the lives of all people with a disability and those who support them.
- This includes through the dignity of work and the economic, social and psychological benefits that work brings.
- I want to make disability employment a key plank of the work I do this year. People with disability should have equal opportunities in employment.
- People with disability and employers need a system that meets their needs and provides the right supports to find and keep a job.

KEY POINTS

Jobs and Skills Summit

- In September 2022, a Jobs and Skills Summit led by the Prime Minister and Treasurer, will bring together Australians, including unions, employers, civil society and governments, to address our shared economic challenges.
- In the lead up to the Summit, I will be hosting two employment roundtables with representatives from the disability employment and social security sectors.
- The first roundtable discussion will cover the four priority areas of *Employ My Ability*. The focus of this roundtable will be seeking ideas and solutions from experts who regularly engage in the disability employment space.
- The second day will focus on the interaction between Government payments and employment. This roundtable will explore options that may improve outcomes for job seekers with barriers to work, drawing on professional and academic expertise of attendees.

Disability Employment Strategy - *Employ My Ability*

- *Employ My Ability* - the Disability Employment Strategy was launched on 3 December 2021 as an associated plan of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031.
- *Employ My Ability* is a guiding framework for governments, employers and the broader community towards an inclusive workforce that values diverse talent and supports people with disability to reach their full potential.

Reforming Disability Employment Services

- We know that the unemployment rate for people with disability is double that of working age people without disability.
- Just 53.4 per cent of people with disability are in the labour force, compared with 84.1 per cent of those without disability. This gap of over 30 per cent has remained largely unchanged since 2003.
- In an effort to improve systems and services for job seekers and employers, the Government is designing a new Disability Employment Support Model to ensure people with disability are not left behind and employers can utilise an untapped workforce.
- We want to create a system that emphasises the strengths of people with disability in the workplace and empowers employers to hire more people with disability.
- This Government knows it is crucial that we learn from the experiences of people with disability to inform the design process for the new model.
- We are committed to consulting with people with disability, employers, academics, disability representative organisations and providers on the design of the new model.
- While we work on designing the new model, the Government is continuing to work on improving the existing program to ensure it achieves outcomes for people with disability.

IF ASKED – What is the Government doing to maximise outcomes of current program?

- The Albanese Labor Government is committed to making sure people receive high quality services and is committed to regular performance reviews.
- The Government has a zero tolerance approach to fraud, demonstrated by the conviction and sentencing of a former employee of a DES provider in July 2022.
- We want to ensure that every dollar of taxpayer's money spent through DES is spent well.

IF ASKED – What is the Government doing to assist people with disability currently in supported employment?

- The Albanese Labor Government recognises the ADE sector is currently going through a period of transition.
- Over the coming months, the Government will engage with key stakeholders to monitor issues, and understand key challenges and opportunities for the sector.
- *Please refer to QB22-000063 for information on supported employment, including Activ.*

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- The Disability Employment Services (DES) program helps people with disability, injury or illness to find and keep a job.
- Since its introduction in 2010, DES has helped over 1 million people with disability in their search for a job.
- This year alone, the Government is investing nearly \$1.4 billion in DES.

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Katrina Chatham, Branch Manager,
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Clearance Date:

20 July 2022

MO Clearance Date:

18/07/2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Pause on Mutual Obligation requirements for Disability Employment Services (DES) participants****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Labor Government has put in place measures to ensure job seekers accessing Disability Employment Services (DES) were not disadvantaged by the introduction of Workforce Australia.
- We took swift action to ensure DES participants still received their income support payments by pausing mutual obligation requirements until 31 July 2022.
- Although DES participants are not directly impacted by the transition to Workforce Australia, the Government ensured no one was disadvantaged during this period of change.
- Consistent with other job seekers in Workforce Australia, DES job seekers with current penalties have been 'clean slated' from 1 July 2022.
- Job seekers affected by current flood events are exempted from their mutual obligation requirements for an additional month, until the end of August 2022.

KEY POINTS

- DES participants are not transitioning to Workforce Australia and are not subject to the new Points Based Activation System.
- DES participants have the same participation requirements they had before the introduction of Workforce Australia.
- DES participants will continue to satisfy their mutual obligation requirements in the same way they did before 1 July 2022 by attending appropriate activities and looking for work where required.

If ASKED – Why are mutual obligation requirements being paused for DES participants when their participation requirements are not changing?

- The Albanese Government cares about all Australians and is committed to ensuring no Australian with disability is left behind.
- Mutual obligation requirements are being paused for DES participants for the same reason they are being paused for Workforce Australia participants – to ensure they understand the program conditions and requirements that apply to them.

CONTACT NAME: Vanessa Beck
PHONE: s 47F

POSITION: Branch Manager

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- Almost 235,000 of 296,485 DES participants have mutual obligation requirements.
- Suspension of mutual obligation requirements and 'clean slating' of penalties for DES participants are consistent with similar measures adopted to support job seekers transitioning to Workforce Australia and the Points Based Activation System.

Locational / place considerations

- Suspension of mutual obligation requirements and 'clean slating' of penalties are in place across Australia.
- Longer mutual obligation suspensions, to 31 August 2022, are in place in areas affected by recent flooding, as detailed at

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Clearance Date:	21 / 07 / 2022
MO Clearance Date:	18/07/2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 (Four Corners/ABC Story)****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- I am deeply committed to improving outcomes for children, young people and their families, and to working with states and territories and non-government partners to on this important work.
- I have met with the Attorney-General and the National Children's Commissioner, Ms Anne Hollonds, to discuss how we can work together to deliver better outcomes for Australia's children.
- Alongside state and territory governments, we are committed to delivering on *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 (Safe and Supported)*.
- This is why I am convening a meeting with all Community Services Ministers in early August to progress this work with our state and territory counterparts as a matter of urgency.

KEY POINTS

- Safe and Supported's vision is for children in Australia to reach their full potential by growing up safe and supported, free from harm and neglect.
- Safe and Supported focuses on **priority groups** that are experiencing disadvantage or are vulnerable to abuse and neglect.
- This includes children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, including children in out-of-home care and young people leaving out-of-home care.
- Achieving safety and wellbeing outcomes for these priority groups will help Safe and Supported achieve its goal.
- Safe and Supported includes **4 focus areas**:
 - A national approach to early intervention and targeted support for children and families experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.
 - Addressing the over-representation of First Nations children in child protection systems.
 - Improved information sharing, data development and analysis.
 - Strengthening the child and family sector and workforce capability.
- Safe and Supported will include actions to address *Closing the Gap* **Target 12**: to reduce the rate of over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care by **45 per cent, by 2031**.
- All governments are now working in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group, and engaging with the non-government sector to develop the first 5-year general Action Plan and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan under Safe and Supported.

IF ASKED: In light of recent media coverage, what is the Australian Government doing to improve child protection systems?

- Tangible change is needed in our child protection systems.
- While state and territory governments are primarily responsible for child protection systems, the Australian Government has a key role to play in better supporting children and families.
- Safe and Supported has been agreed to by all Australian governments, and aims to **prevent children, young people and families from entering child protection systems**.
- The Action Plans will outline actions that will support making a significant and sustained reduction in child abuse and neglect and its intergenerational impacts.
- Following endorsement from governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group, the Safe and Supported **5-year Action Plans** will be **finalised in 2022**.

IF ASKED: What is the Government doing to address the over representation of First Nations children in child protection systems?

- Nationally in 2021, the rate of First Nations children in out-of-home care was **57.6 per 1000 children** in the population.
- The Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan will have a dedicated focus towards addressing this rate of over-representation, and will embed the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- \$30 million investment from the 2022-23 Budget includes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support and a National Advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.

CONTACT NAME: Tim Crosier

POSITION: Branch Manager – Children's Policy

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- Safe and Supported has a 10-year lifespan, with 2, 5-year Action Plans and 2, 5-year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plans.
 - Vision: Children in Australia reach their full potential by growing up safe and supported, free from harm and neglect.
 - Goal: To make significant and sustained progress in reducing the rates of child abuse and neglect and its intergenerational impacts.
 - Priority groups:
 - children and families with multiple and complex needs
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable
 - children and young people and/or parents/carers with disability experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable
 - children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, including those in out-of-home care or leaving care.
- The Department of Social Services undertook an online public consultation process in 2021 to seek feedback on what activities should be prioritised in the Action Plans.
- The National Children's Commissioner also conducted consultations in 2021 with children, young people and families to inform the Action Plans.
- The \$30 million package of initiatives for Safe and Supported announced in the 2022-23 Budget includes the following:
 - *Establish a Virtual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support (\$8 million over 5 years (2022-23 to 2026-27))*
 - *Develop a National Child and Family Investment Strategy with an Innovation fund (\$10 million over 5 years (2022-23 to 2026-27))*
 - *Establish a National Advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (\$2 million over 4 years (2022-23 to 2025-26))*
 - *Target Communication and Support to Improve Parenting Practices (\$3 million over 5 years (2022-23 to 2026-27))*
 - *Improve Support for Non-parent Carers (\$7 million over 5 years (2022-23 to 2026-27))*
- In June 2022, the ABC published an article detailing cases of abuse and neglect in the child protection and foster care system. It suggests the system is broken and requires a complete overhaul from the top down.
 - The article states that First Nations children and families are targeted and profiled by child protection at a systemic level, resulting in removals and placements into homes that are a detriment to the child. The article also details instances of warning signs of sexual abuse being reported to senior staff and ignored due to the "cultural" differences of First Nations families.
 - Group homes are raised as a harmful form of out-of-home-care, in particular for younger children.
 - Current and former case workers mention the case load of workers being too high for thorough investigations to take place. They mention that additional funding and resources could go a long way in improving outcomes for children and families.
 - The article mentions instances of falsifying court documents, and results in decisions being made about children based on incorrect information. Cases are also often opened in order to remove them from publicly released lists of "unallocated cases".
 - There are repeated calls for an external review or Royal Commission into the child protection system.

OFFICIAL

Contact Officer's Name and Position:

Tim Crosier, Branch Manager

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DSS Input Cleared By:

Liz Hefren-Webb, Deputy Secretary

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Clearance Date:

21 July 2022

MO Clearance Date:

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**National Memorial for Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- A national memorial to victims and survivors of institutional child sexual abuse will recognise the courage of all people with lived experience, and those who spoke up to fight for justice and to be believed.
- The testimonies of victims and survivors to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse were confronting and showed the lifelong impacts that child sexual abuse can have on individuals and their families.
- The Australian Government thanks victims and survivors for coming forward, despite their pain, to help our country learn the truth.
- The Australian Government is committed to preventing past failures from happening again to other children.

KEY POINTS

- Funding of **\$6.7 million** over **4 years** was committed as part of the 2020-21 Budget for the Australian Government to establish a national memorial in Canberra.
- The National Memorial for Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (the Memorial) will provide a place of reflection, contribute to healing, and educate future generations about this dark period in Australia's history.
- The Department of Social Services has engaged the National Capital Authority (NCA) to oversee the design and construction of the Memorial.
- A competition was held in 2021 for Australian design professionals (architects, landscape architects or engineers) to submit a design proposal that reflected the commemorative intent of the Memorial.
- The design competition is now complete and a public announcement of the selected design occurred on 16 February 2022.
- The design was selected by a panel of people with lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse and design industry experts.
- The Memorial will be located on Acton Peninsula in Canberra, within walking distance of the National Museum of Australia (NMA), and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).
- Relevant site stakeholders were consulted on the Memorial's location, including Traditional Owners and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, the NMA, and AIATSIS.
- The NCA is currently undertaking a design refinement and development process prior to construction commencing.

If ASKED - When will construction of the National Memorial commence?

- It is expected that off-site fabrication of some Memorial design elements will commence in 2022, following a detailed design development process.
- The design is currently only a concept and will undergo further refinements in preparation for construction.

If ASKED - How are voices of victims and survivors reflected in the final design of the National Memorial?

- My department undertook initial consultation with members of the National Apology Reference Group, established to inform the National Apology to Victims and Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse.
- An Advisory Group was appointed to ensure stakeholder views were represented throughout the design process.
- A national online survey was conducted in November 2020 to enable victims, survivors and others impacted by institutional child sexual abuse to have their say on the Memorial's development.
- Over 60 per cent of survey respondents identified as a person with lived experience, noting respondents were not required to self-identify.
- Engagement with First Nations representatives has been undertaken, and will continue throughout the project.
- People with lived experience were also represented on the selection panel for the design competition.

If ASKED - How will the Memorial be protected from vandalism and public safety issues? Is the site safe?

- A formal architectural design refinement process will consider, and seek to address, any potential risks to the public, structure and site.
- Following rain in April 2022, a small amount of asbestos fibre (not airborne) was found on Acton Peninsula.
- The NCA enacted their asbestos management plan and treatment activities, including air monitoring and fencing the contaminated areas.
- Soil samples have indicated that no asbestos has been found on the Memorial site.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- Establishing a national memorial responds to Recommendation 17.6 of the Final Report by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission).
- National Memorial Advisory Group (Advisory Group) ensures lived experience advocates and experts assist department and NCA to establish the Memorial, including ensuring the selected design and site reflected what was important for survivors.
- The department is currently developing a website to complement the physical monument, in response to stakeholder consultations identifying importance of awareness of the issue in both historical and contemporary contexts and accessibility of the Memorial. Website is being developed concurrently with the establishment of the Memorial and expected to launch ahead of the Memorial's dedication event.
- Total funding for the Memorial construction in the competition design brief is \$3.7 million (GST exclusive).
- Remaining \$3.0 million in administered and departmental funding over 4 years contributes to administration expenses including design documentation, project management, website development, a dedication event, and ongoing memorial and website maintenance.
- Selected design for the Memorial was 'Transparency and Truth' by architects Jessica Spresser and Peter Besley. The design was approved by the Canberra National Memorials Committee on 20 January 2022.
- In recognition of this project's significance, the professional efforts of entrants and the outstanding design proposals, the jury allocated the selected design team a total of \$65,000 and two additional commended designs teams with \$15,000 each (GST inclusive).
- The design features pathways framed by a series of glass archways that signify strength, fragility and great resilience in recognition of people with lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse and will be surrounded by a field of wildflowers.
- The nine-person design competition selection panel was chaired by the Hon Peter McClellan AM QC, former chair of the Royal Commission.
- NCA will undertake a procurement process to construct the Memorial, with its unveiling and dedication event expected to occur in 2023.

Locational / place considerations

- March 2022 – Canberra Times announced a permanent Museum of Australian Policing to be located on Acton Peninsula near the National Museum of Australia.
- People with lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse are likely to be sensitive to this due to perceived past failures by police to protect children. Department is working with the NCA to manage potential sensitivities for people with lived experience of institutional child sexual abuse who may visit the Memorial.
- The museum will be located on opposite side of the peninsula with a separate entrance road and limited visual presence from the Memorial site. The Memorial will be located on the grounds of the former Royal Canberra Hospital but it will not be located on any of the former building structures.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:

Phone/Mobile:

DSS Input Cleared By (include position):

Phone/Mobile:

Clearance Date:

MO Clearance Date:

Veronica Westacott, Acting Branch Manager

(s 47F [REDACTED])

Liz Hefren-Webb, Deputy Secretary

(s 47F [REDACTED])

21 July 2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Productivity Commission's Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report July 2022

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The over-representation of First Nations children and young people in out-of-home care is of particular concern to the Australian Government – we want a better future for all Australians.
- The latest data released by the Productivity Commission shows the challenge all governments around Australia face in reducing the over-representation of First Nations Children in out-of-home-care.
- I understand this is the second of the Productivity Commission's annual reports.
- The reasons for the over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care are multifaceted and complex and include:
 - past government policies
 - discrimination
 - entrenched disadvantage and intergenerational trauma
- I intend to work closely with state and territory governments, First Nation leaders and the NGO sector to progress work on the Safe and Supported initiative – the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children.
- Safe and Supported has a key focus on reducing the over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home-care and will set out actions to achieve this in a First Nations specific action plan in mid-2022, developed in genuine partnership with a First Nations Leadership Group.

- The co-design and engagement with First Nations stakeholders underpins this work and its success.
- For the first time, First Nations people will have their own specific Action Plan across all aspects of Safe and Supported initiative.
- The First Nations-specific Action Plan is being developed in partnership with SNAICC – National Voice for our Children and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group who I met with last week (28/7).
- I've called and convened a meeting with all State and Territory Community Service Ministers for this Friday (5 August 2022). This will be first Ministerial Council for the group since becoming Minister – and the first for a few years. I look forward to working with my colleagues to progress better outcomes for First Nations Children.

If ASKED: What funding has the Government committed to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (Target 12)?

- The Australian Government has invested \$98.5 million in four measures to address Target 12, which includes:
 - \$49.0 million over 5 years to work with jurisdictions to redesign multidisciplinary responses to better support Indigenous families with multiple and complex needs;
 - \$7.7 million over 3 years to develop the cultural competency of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous child and family sector workforce funded by the department;

- \$3.2 million over 2 years to assess the needs and increase the involvement of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) in the child and family sector; and
 - \$38.6 million over 3 years to support innovative proposals initiated by ACCOs and other service delivery partners that address Targets 12 and 13.
- *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* (Safe and Supported) has been agreed by the state, territory and Australian governments as the vehicle for driving collaborative effort to respond to Target 12.
 - Partnerships with First Nations stakeholders underpins the Action Plans of Safe and Supported, and will be the key national initiative to reducing the rate of overrepresentation of First Nations children in out-of-home care.
 - For the first time, First Nations people will have their own specific Action Plan across all aspects of Safe and Supported.
 - This work is critical to closing the gap in the over-representation of First Nations children and young people in child protection systems.
 - The First Nations-specific Action Plan is being developed in partnership with SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group.
 - The First Nations Action Plan and a General Action Plan are expected to be agreed and launched before the end of 2022.

If ASKED: What is the Minister for Social Services doing to address the Closing the Gap targets for which she is responsible?

- The Australian Government complements state and territory efforts through key initiatives to address:
 - Target 12 on the over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care through *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031*
 - Actions set out in the First Nations Action Plan will build on the \$98.5 million investment in four measures that address Target 12 (and one measure that also addresses Target 13), that were announced in the 2021 Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan
 - Target 13 on reducing family violence through *the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-32*
 - The development of a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan under the new National Plan is being led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence
 - Target 9 on reducing overcrowded housing through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA).
 - The Productivity Commission Review of the NHHA, which is due to report by 31 August 2022, is an opportunity to consider how the NHHA can support Target 9.

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DSS Input Cleared By:

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Clearance Date:

1 August 2022

MO Clearance Date:

To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

NDIS LEGISLATION – TIMING OF RULES TO GIVE EFFECT TO THE PARTICIPANT SERVICE GUARANTEE (PSG)

KEY ISSUES

- The Government is committed to putting people with disability at the centre of the NDIS and any changes to the legislation.
- There are a number of changes proposed to be made to the NDIS Rules, building on the intent of the changes made to the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* earlier this year.
- The proposed changes include setting out the requirements of the Participant Service Guarantee (PSG) in law, and delivering on recommendations of the 2019 Independent Review of the NDIS Act (the Tune Review).

KEY FACT

- The changes will help improve the participant experience and reduce the administrative burden felt by participants and their families and carers.
- The Government is committed to further consultation to ensure their final form reflects what matters most to people with disability.
- The Government will bring forward these legislative changes once engagement with the sector on them has been completed.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- The Bill that amended the NDIS Act earlier this year had bipartisan support.
- As the Opposition at the time, we were instrumental in negotiating amendments to the Bill before it was passed to ensure it would improve the experience of participants in the NDIS.
- The Government is committed to putting people with disability at the centre of the NDIS and any changes to the legislation.
- That's why we will be undertaking further consultation to ensure the final form of Rules reflects what matters most to people with disability.

PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT

- The previous Government did pass the enabling legislation on the Participant Service Guarantee (PSG) on 30 March 2022 but took too long to bring the reforms before the Parliament.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED – When does the government propose to bring forward the outstanding changes to the NDIS Rules?

- As soon as possible.
- While there has already been significant consultation on the proposed changes, the Government will undertake additional consultation with the disability community, and with states and territories.
- Additional consultation will demonstrate how feedback provided to date has been reflected, and reinforces the Government's commitment to keeping people with disability at the centre of any changes to the scheme.

If ASKED – Is it premature to bring forward legislative changes ahead of the forthcoming review of NDIS design, operation and sustainability?

- There is no reason why improvements to the participant experience should be delayed.
- If the forthcoming Review recommends any further legislative changes, that will be considered and addressed through co-design with people with disability.

If ASKED – What are the main legislative changes that still need to be made?

- The cornerstone of the outstanding legislative changes is putting the timeframes and standards of the Participant Service Guarantee in law.
- While the NDIA is already reporting against the timeframes, and the Ombudsman is reporting on the NDIA's performance in meeting the requirements of the PSG, enshrining the PSG in law puts beyond doubt the requirement for the NDIA to meet the timeframes and adhere to the engagement standards to make it easier for people with disability to navigate the NDIS.
- Other changes build on the recommendations of the 2019 Independent Review of the NDIS Act by Mr David Tune AO PSM, and ensure the Rules reflect best practice drafting standards.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Overview of Amending Act

The *National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Participant Service Guarantee and Other Measures) Act 2022* amended the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013* to deliver on key recommendations of the Tune Review including:

- Enabling legislating the Participant Service Guarantee (PSG)
- Consistent with the recommendations of the 2019 Review of the NDIS Act by Mr David Tune:
 - Enabling participant plans to be varied in limited circumstances, rather than a full re-assessment being required.
 - Simplifying administrative processes in relation to making changes
 - Clarifying people with episodic or fluctuating impairments (including people with psychosocial disability) can be eligible
 - Providing for the NDIA to make direct payments on behalf of participants who wish to use this approach,
 - Providing clarity for decisions about plan management requests and extending risk assessment used for self-management of funding to those using registered plan management providers.
- Removing references to the trial and transition phases of the NDIS
- Giving effect to recommendations from the 2015 Review of the NDIS.

Consultation on reforms

In September 2021, the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Amendment (Participant Service Guarantee and Other Measures) Bill 2021* (the Bill) together with a suite of NDIS rules were released for public consultation. The Department for Social Services (DSS) provided 16 information sessions to key stakeholders, and conducted 4 public information sessions. Over 860 individuals, providers, peak disability organisations and advocates, educational institutions and government organisations were involved in these consultation activities. The Department also received over 300 submission on the proposed reforms.

The response to the proposed reforms was generally positive, particularly in respect of the PSG. It was generally agreed the reforms would improve the participant experience and create greater certainty for participants.

Passage of the Bill:

The Bill was introduced to the House of Representatives on 28 October 2021. It was passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate on 30 March 2022 with government amendments and received Royal Assent on 1 April 2022.

The Bill had two separate commencement dates. Key provisions relating to the PSG commenced on 8 April 2022 and the other provisions including relating to plan variations, reassessments, and the removal of references to the trial and transition phases of the NDIS commenced on 1 July 2022.

NDIS Rules

Fully implementing the NDIS reforms requires the Minister to make or amend a number of NDIS Rules. New rules are required to set out the legislated form of the PSG, including service standards for the NDIA when working with people with disability, timeframes for key decisions, and requirements for reporting on its performance. Existing NDIS rules relating to the management of plan funding, becoming an NDIS participant and specialist disability accommodation need to be amended to reflect the provisions of the Amending Act.

NDIS Rules relating to children, their representatives and participant nominees will be updated to reflect best practice drafting.

The Participant Service charter (PSC) and own-motion Ombudsman Report

In anticipation of a legislated PSG, the NDIA released the Participant Service Charter, which contains most of the proposed PSG timeframes and service standards. The NDIA agreed to report publicly on its performance against the PSC to the extent possible from 1 July 2020.

In late 2021, the Commonwealth Ombudsman initiated an own motion inquiry into the NDIA's performance in implementing the PSC and released its report on 23 June 2022. The Ombudsman's report made 5 recommendations which were all accepted by the NDIA.

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DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Debbie Mitchell, Deputy Secretary, Disability and Carers
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
Clearance Date:	25 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

NDIS PERFORMANCE (PEOPLE SUPPORTED, OUTCOMES ACHIEVED AND ACCESS IN REMOTE AREAS)

KEY ISSUES

- At 30 June 2022, there were 534,655 people with disability being supported by the Scheme, almost 70,000 people more than the same time 12 months ago.
- There are twice as many people with disability, with more than three times the level of expenditure on supports, than was the case before the NDIS.
- Participants continue to report improved outcomes in choice and control, daily living, learning and relationships, health and wellbeing, and social and community participation the longer they remain in the scheme.
- More can be done to improve the effectiveness of the NDIS including, for example, housing and employment outcomes for participants. Also, in the quarter to 30 June 2022, only 70 per cent of participants rated their experience of their plan review as good or very good - down from 72 per cent in the quarter to 31 March 2022.

KEY FACTS

The NDIS is improving outcomes for people with disabilities

- In its latest NDIS Quarterly Report to 30 June 2022, outcomes data for those who have been supported for five years in the scheme compared to when they commenced (at Scheme entry or first plan review) indicate:
 - the percentage of participants aged 15 and over participating in a social or community activity increased from 35 per cent to 49 per cent;
 - the percentage of participants aged 25 and over with who reported the NDIS helping with their daily living increased from 70 per cent to 87 per cent.
 - the percentage of participants aged 25 and over with who reported having more choice and control in their life increased from 66 per cent to 81 per cent.

The NDIS is accessible for regional and remote communities.

- The NDIA monitors the number of participants entering the NDIS who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, and living in remote and very remote areas.
 - Of the 19,291 participants who entered the NDIS in the quarter ending June 2022:
 - 9.1 per cent were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, (compared to 7 per cent of the Australian population who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and report having a need for assistance [ABS 2016 Census]); and
 - 1.7 per cent were from remote and very remote areas (compared to 2 per cent of the Australian population living in remote or very remote areas [ABS 2016 Census]).
- The Government has committed to tackling the barriers to service delivery in remote areas of Australia, including enhancing the role of a senior officer within the NDIA to strengthen responses to access and service delivery issues in remote Australia.

A review to improve the effectiveness of the Scheme

- The Australian Government has committed to review the design, operation and sustainability of the Scheme.
- The Australian Government will consult on the review's proposed terms of reference that will consider all available evidence, and look at benefits as well as problems inside and outside the NDIS.
- Findings from this review will guide the Government on priority areas for reform, including effectiveness and sustainability.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- The NDIS is an outstanding public policy accomplishment.
- Yet there is more work to be done to put people back at the centre of the NDIS, to make it work better for those it supports in all parts of the country and for all who are eligible.
- An NDIS that is effective for those it supports will generate a significant return on our investment in years to come – firstly for those it supports, and also for the wider community and economically.
- This return means stronger social and economic connections for people with disabilities, and an economic dividend for the country.
- Our election commitments of a Review into the NDIS and co-designing improvements with people with disability will be a foundation to improve the effectiveness of the NDIS and rebuild trust.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED - What is the Government doing about the employment outcomes for NDIS participants, which have not improved in the NDIS?

- The Government maintains a strong focus on employment outcomes for people with disability.
- We recognise the proportion of participants aged 15 to 64 in paid work has only increased by 1 per cent after five years in the Scheme.
- More can be done to improve these outcomes. We need employers to embrace employing people with disability.
- The Government has committed to review the design, operation and sustainability of the Scheme. Findings from this review will guide the Government on priority areas for reform, including effectiveness and sustainability.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- Key performance statistics are provided below from the June 2022 quarterly report:

Participant Profile	31 Dec 21	%	31 Mar 22	%	30 Jun 22	%
NDIS Participants	502,413		518,668		534,655	
Receiving support for first time	280,992	56%	297,639	57%	313,971	59%
Gender						
NDIS Participants – Male	309,368	62%	319,145	62%	328,781	61%
NDIS Participants – Female	187,419	37%	193,578	37%	199,613	37%
Vulnerable Cohorts						
NDIS Participants – ATSI	35,773	7%	37,313	7%	38,846	7%
NDIS Participants – CALD	46,191	9%	47,731	9%	49,201	9%
NDIS Participants – Remote/Very Remote	7,693	2%	8,007	2%	8,234	2%
Age Groups						
NDIS Participants – Children 0-6	77,287	15%	80,239	15%	82,863	15%
NDIS Participants – Children 7-18	170,368	34%	176,666	34%	183,030	34%
NDIS Participants – Adults 19-64	235,418	47%	241,134	46%	246,766	46%
NDIS Participants – Adults 65+	19,340	4%	20,629	4%	21,996	4%
Primary Disabilities						
NDIS Participants – Autism	167,111	33%	174,741	34%	182,494	34%
NDIS Participants – Intellectual Disability	94,154	19%	95,320	18%	96,469	18%
NDIS Participants – Psychosocial	53,123	11%	54,910	11%	56,559	11%
NDIS Participants – Developmental Delay	42,125	8%	44,713	9%	47,012	9%
NDIS Participants – Other	145,900	29%	148,984	29%	152,121	28%

Participant Plan Utilisation	31 Dec 21	31 Mar 22	30 Jun 22
National Average	74%	74%	75%
Participant Plan Utilisation – Year 1	57%	56%	55%
Participant Plan Utilisation – Year 2	67%	67%	66%
Participants Plan Utilisation – Year 3	73%	72%	71%
Participants Plan Utilisation – Year 4	74%	75%	75%
Participants Plan Utilisation – Year 5+	80%	80%	80%
Participant Utilisation – SIL	88%	89%	90%
Participant Utilisation – Non-SIL	69%	69%	69%

Participant Satisfaction (% Good/Very Good)	31 Dec 21	31 Mar 22	30 Jun 22
Access	77%	81%	81%
Pre-planning	76%	78%	79%
Planning	83%	86%	85%
Plan Review	70%	72%	70%

- Key **positive outcomes** from the NDIS are provided below:

Participant Outcomes	Baseline	Latest Result	Change (Δ%)
Social Participation (% in Community and Social Activities) – Participants aged 15 and over			
Two years in the Scheme	35%	40%	+5%
Three years in the Scheme	37%	44%	+7%
Four years in the Scheme	36%	47%	+11%
Five years in the Scheme	35%	49%	+14%
Daily Living (% Yes to “NDIS helped you with daily living activities?”) – Participants aged 25 and over			
Two years in the Scheme	73%	81%	+8%
Three years in the Scheme	72%	84%	+12%
Four years in the Scheme	70%	85%	+15%
Five years in the Scheme	70%	87%	+17%
Choice and Control (%Yes to “NDIS helped with choice and control in your life?”) – Participants aged 25 and over			
Two years in the Scheme	70%	77%	+7%
Three years in the Scheme	69%	80%	+11%
Four years in the Scheme	66%	80%	+14%

Participant Outcomes	Baseline	Latest Result	Change (Δ%)
Five years in the Scheme	66%	81%	+15%
Health and Wellbeing (% Yes to "NDIS improved health and wellbeing") – Participants aged 25 and over			
Two years in the Scheme	52%	59%	+7%
Three years in the Scheme	51%	61%	+10%
Four years in the Scheme	48%	61%	+13%
Five years in the Scheme	50%	64%	+14%
Learning (% Yes to "NDIS improved your child's access to education") – Participants aged school age to 14			
Two years in the Scheme	45%	52%	+7%
Three years in the Scheme	40%	50%	+10%
Four years in the Scheme	36%	47%	+11%
Five years in the Scheme	35%	44%	+9%

Families/Carer Outcomes	Baseline	Result	Change (Δ%)
Support (% Yes to "NDIS improved the level of support for your family") – Participants aged 0 to 14			
Two years in the Scheme	71%	76%	+6%
Three years in the Scheme	67%	75%	+8%
Four years in the Scheme	61%	74%	+13%
Five years in the Scheme	59%	71%	+12%
Health and Wellbeing (% Yes to "NDIS improved your health and wellbeing") – Participants aged 0 to 14			
Two years in the Scheme	46%	50%	+4%
Three years in the Scheme	42%	47%	+5%
Four years in the Scheme	38%	43%	+5%
Five years in the Scheme	35%	40%	+5%

- Key outcomes requiring potential improvement are provided below:

Participant Outcomes	Baseline	Result	Change (Δ%)
Housing (% Yes to "NDIS helped choose a home that's right for you") – Participants aged 15 to 24			
Two years in the Scheme	23%	22%	-1%
Three years in the Scheme	22%	21%	-1%
Four years in the Scheme	20%	18%	-2%
Five years in the Scheme	23%	19%	-4%
Participation in Work (% Yes to "In a paid job") – Participants aged 15 and over			
Two years in the Scheme	19%	20%	-1%
Three years in the Scheme	21%	22%	-1%
Four years in the Scheme	24%	25%	+1%
Five years in the Scheme	25%	25%	0%
Type of Work (% Yes to "NDIS helped find a job that's right for you") – Participants aged 15 to 24			
Two years in the Scheme	18%	18%	0%
Three years in the Scheme	18%	17%	-1%
Four years in the Scheme	17%	16%	-1%
Five years in the Scheme	19%	15%	-4%

- Note, the observed outcomes for participation in work for age groups over time are affected by life stage effects as younger participants attain working age and leave school and older age groups retiring from the workforce.
- Baseline refers to the participant's, or their carer's, assessment of their outcome when they first join the scheme or in the first year of joining the scheme, depending on the nature of the measure.

Participant Service Guarantee (PSG) and Participant Service Improvement Plan

- Of the 20 PSG targets, 12 have been met (scoring 95 per cent and above), 3 are almost met (scoring 85 per cent to 95 per cent), 2 are well below target (less than 85 per cent) and 3 are not yet reported on.
- The 2 well below target were related to the review process:

- Commence facilitating a scheduled plan review within 56 days (56 per cent). This does however, represent an increase from the 27 per cent reported in the March 2022 report.
- Complete a participant requested review, after the decision to accept the request is made, within 28 days (60 per cent). This represents an increase from the 54 per cent reported in the March 2022 report.
- Of the 3 PSG metrics not yet reported on, the June 2022 report advises that the start date for reporting these metrics will commence when the new ICT system is in place.
- By comparison, in the previous report (March 2022), 9 targets were met, 5 were almost met, 3 were well below the target and 3 were not reported on. This means there has been an improvement in the number of targets met between the March and June reports.

Locational / place considerations

- Nil.

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Clearance Date: 1 August 2022

MO Clearance Date: To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

OVER 65 YEAR'S ELIGIBILITY FOR THE NDIS

KEY ISSUES

- To become an NDIS participant, a person must meet age and residency as well as the disability or early intervention requirements set out in the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013*.
- The design of the NDIS reflects the original Productivity Commission recommendation that a person seeking access to the NDIS needs to have acquired their disability and requested access to the scheme before age 65.
- This recommendation was carried through in the NDIS Act, except that people already in the NDIS could choose to remain in the NDIS after they turned 65. The Act was passed with bipartisan support.
- Consequently, over time the NDIS will cover an increasing number of people aged 65 and over with significant and permanent disability.
- The NDIS was not intended to replace services provided through the health or aged care systems.
- Limiting NDIS access to people under 65 supports the broader intent of an integrated system of disability and aged care supports so that people with disability receive the supports they need over the course of their life.
- Alongside the NDIS, the Productivity Commission recommended the establishment of a National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS) to cover people, regardless of age, who suffer catastrophic injuries.
- However, states and territories have only implemented two of the four streams of the NIIS – for motor vehicle accidents and workplace accidents.

KEY FACT

- At 30 June 2022, there were **21,996** active participants (not exited) aged 65 or over in the NDIS, which is 4 per cent of the total population of active NDIS participants.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- When the NDIS was established, there were insufficient supports available for Australians with disability through the state-run disability system.
- Those 65 or older could be supported through aged care.
- With the introduction of the NDIS, there was also to be a National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS) established by states and territories to provide cover for catastrophic injuries extending beyond existing motor vehicle accident and workplace accident schemes.
- The NIIS has not been extended beyond motor vehicle and workplace accidents as originally envisaged.
- The review of the NDIS will address the design of the scheme and the Government is also committed to fixing the aged care crisis, including investing an additional \$2.5 billion to ensure older Australians receive the aged care they deserve.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED – Why are people excluded from entering the NDIS if they are over age 65?

- I acknowledge the concerns of older Australians with disability, and their families, who are seeking access to care and support.
- When the NDIS was set up, the focus was addressing care and supports for people with disability under 65 that prior to the NDIS were inadequate.
- The Productivity Commission recommended in 2011 people should be under the age of 65 to apply for the NDIS as those 65 or older could be supported through aged care, or the National Injury Insurance Scheme that was to be established by states and territories.
- As a result, *the National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013*, passed in 2013, limits the NDIS to otherwise eligible persons who apply before they turn 65.
- States and territories have not established the National Injury Insurance Scheme as was proposed.

If ASKED - Does the Government intend to change NDIS eligibility to allow those who acquire their disability after age 65 to access the scheme?

- The Government has committed to review the NDIS design, operation and sustainability, bringing forward a planned review of the scheme.
- The Government will consult on terms of reference that will consider all available evidence, and look at benefits as well as problems inside and outside the NDIS.
- The Government is committed to fixing the aged care crisis, including investing an additional \$2.5 billion to ensure older Australians receive the aged care they deserve.
- The Government is reviewing approaches to implementing the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.
- The Department of Health has been consulting extensively with aged care stakeholders, including those with disability who are ineligible for the NDIS, on possible reforms for in-home aged care.

If ASKED – What is the National Injury Insurance Scheme and why isn't it fully implemented?

- Alongside the NDIS, the Productivity Commission recommended the establishment of a National Injury Insurance Scheme (NIIS) to cover people, regardless of age, who suffer catastrophic injuries.
- The NIIS is intended to be implemented and funded by the states through either new or existing accident insurance or compensation schemes in their jurisdiction.
- The Productivity Commission recommended the NIIS be comprised of four 'streams' of coverage: workplace, motor vehicle, general and medical accidents.
- Only two of the four streams of the NIIS have been implemented by the states – motor vehicle accidents and workplace accidents.
- On 9 June 2017, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed not to proceed with the medical stream of the NIIS at that time.
- States are responsible for implementing and funding the NIIS, including its extension to general accidents for people of all ages.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

STAKEHOLDER REACTIONS

- People who acquire a disability when they are age 65 or over that is not age-related, for example through catastrophic injury, do not currently receive the same levels of support in the aged care system as they would under the NDIS.
- People with disability who had reached age 65 before the NDIS was available also do not receive the same levels of support through aged care as they would in the NDIS.
- People in these cohorts, and their carers and advocates, believe this to constitute age-based discrimination and are calling for the legislation to be changed to enable people in this cohort to access NDIS supports.
- Ministerial correspondence is regularly received from the public and peak bodies calling for removal of the NDIS age criteria, citing age discrimination and differences in support between the two systems. Recently this correspondence often refers to the Royal Commission's recommendations for aged care.

MEDIA

- On 16 February 2022, the *West Australian* reported that the Centre Alliance member for Mayo, Rebekha Sharkie MP, would move a motion in the House of Representatives on the issue of 65 and over eligibility for the NDIS. The planned motion calls for the Government to identify how they would ensure that people ineligible for the NDIS due to their age would receive equivalent supports to NDIS participants – whether this be through the development of the new Support at Home Program or the removal of age eligibility criteria for the NDIS. Notice of the motion was given 8 February 2022. The motion was not moved on 16 February 2022 as reported.
- On 31 May 2022, SpinalCure Australia published a joint media statement advocating for three straightforward reforms to support people with disabilities aged over 65:
 - A short-term funding solution for people with high intensity support needs so they can receive the same standard care and support as other Australians with disabilities, regardless of when they were acquired.
 - A fair and transparent consultation process that prioritises the needs, choices and goals of people with disabilities aged over 65.
 - A streamlined solution that works for older people with severe disabilities as well as aged care and disability service providers.

Locational / place considerations

- Nil.

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MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

HOSPITAL DISCHARGE DELAYS FOR NDIS PARTICIPANTS

KEY ISSUES

- Safe and timely hospital discharge is essential to achieving positive outcomes for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants.
- There is a range of reasons why NDIS participants experience discharge delays.
- Some state and territory governments are looking at options to move NDIS participants into other settings given increasing pressure on hospital beds.

KEY FACTS

- At any given time, over 50 per cent of NDIS participants in hospital who are medically ready for discharge experience barriers which delay their return to the community.
- At 30 June 2022, more than 1,400 NDIS participants were reported as medically ready for discharge.
- On 29 July 2022, Disability Ministers discussed a strategy to improve this situation and agreed next steps.
- Improvements to NDIS processes are needed to ensure no one is in hospital longer than they need to be, and the NDIA is already working to implement a range of operational improvements.
- There are many causes of delays in hospital discharge, not all of which are due to the NDIS. Others include state and territory services, such as access to post-acute rehabilitation and palliative care services, to public and social housing and homelessness services, and availability of public mental health services and justice support.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- At the 17 June 2022 Disability Reform Ministers' Meeting, ministers agreed to work together as a priority to develop a strategy to address safe and timely discharge of NDIS participants from hospital.
- The Commonwealth returned to Disability Reform Ministers' on 29 July 2022 with:
 - A plan for how the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) will achieve targets to engage with each NDIS participant in hospital within four days of admission; and have a participant's plan in place within a month.
 - An outline of what is needed from state health systems, building on what is working right now, to support the NDIA to deliver against these targets.
- Ministers also agreed to a statement of policy intent to support hospital discharge for people with disability. Indicative of the many factors that can contribute to a delayed stay in hospital, ministers agreed to work with their colleagues across several federal and state portfolios to ensure a joined up, systems approach is taken.
- I am a guest at the next Health Ministers Meeting on 5 August 2022 where I will discuss this matter further.

PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT

- The previous Government left us the mess of hospital discharge delays for NDIS participants and hence the need for a NDIS Review.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED – Will you commit to getting people with disability who are ready for discharge out of public hospitals?

- Disability Reform Ministers met on 29 July 2022 and discussed a strategy to improve the safe and timely discharge of NDIS participants.
- This strategy is focused on operational improvement within the NDIA, as well as actions required from states and territories to support delivery.
- I will continue to work with my colleagues across several federal and state portfolios to ensure a joined up, systems approach is taken to addressing this issue.
- It is essential states, territories and the Commonwealth work together on this.

If ASKED – Do you agree with the South Australian Opposition which is suggesting settings including the closed Julia Farr Centre (Highgate Park) and decommissioned facilities at the Hampstead Rehabilitation Centre should be used to relocate people with disability who are ready for discharge?

- NDIS participants, like anyone else in our community, are entitled to be safely discharged from hospital, and preferably to where they will be living long term.
- I understand South Australian officials are seeking to discharge people who are medically ready to alternate settings and I support this where these settings are appropriate.
- I understand the Julia Farr Centre (Highgate Park) has been closed for some time as people with disability no longer consider this an appropriate setting in which to live.
- I remain committed to finding appropriate solutions to support timely hospital discharge for NDIS participants.

IF ASKED – Should NDIS participants be moved into Victoria's Mickelham quarantine facility as an interim solution?

- NDIS participants, like anyone else in our community, are entitled to be safely discharged from hospital, and preferably to where they will be living long term.
- As the operations of Mickelham are the responsibility of the Victorian Government, I do not have any information at the moment to indicate that the facility is or is not appropriate for NDIS participants who require transitional accommodation for a limited period.

- The Australian Government remains committed to finding appropriate solutions to support the safe and timely discharge of NDIS participants from hospital, in collaboration with states and territories.

IF ASKED – Should NDIS participants be moved into residential aged care as an interim solution?

- No. Residential aged care is not an appropriate setting for anyone under the age of 65, including NDIS participants.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- According to data gathered by the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), as at 30 June 2022, **2,375** NDIS participants were in hospital.
- Of these, **942** (40 per cent) were reported as **not** yet medically ready for discharge.
- **1,433** (60 per cent) were reported as medically ready for discharge, of these:
 - **631** participants had an NDIS approved plan in place and yet were unable to discharge;
 - **539** participants had planning currently underway or planning booked and assigned to a planner; and
 - **263** participants had their planning awaiting action from either the NDIA or another service system.
- For those **where planning was awaiting action** the most common reasons include:
 - 31 per cent were awaiting functional assessments and allied health reports;
 - 31 per cent were long stay mental health patients requiring additional support from agencies to safely discharge; and
 - 17 per cent were awaiting a plan review due to change of circumstance or the participant requesting a review of a decision.
- Of those with a **plan in place** but still unable to discharge, the most common reasons for delay include:
 - 216 (34 per cent) awaiting a provider of supports to be secured;
 - 191 (30 per cent) are awaiting a housing solution (either mainstream/community housing or an NDIA housing solution);
 - 147 (23 per cent) are long stay mental health patients and a step down approach to clinical support is not yet in place (this is a state responsibility); and
- Since July 2022, the NDIA has **33 Health Liaison Officers (HLOs)** operating across Australia, with an **expansion to 40** planned in coming months.
- HLOs have an ongoing role in supporting the safe discharge of NDIS participants from hospital.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Funding for NDIS Participant Plans (Claims of Cuts)

KEY ISSUES

- The Government is committed to addressing any unfair cuts to participant plans.
- The Government would like to assure all people in the NDIS that their plans will not be arbitrarily cut.
- The Government is making improvements to the planning pathway and appeal processes to provide quicker and better outcomes for participants.

KEY FACT

NDIS Plan Budgets can go up and down when plans are reassessed

- The NDIS is designed to support individual needs. As a result, a participant's plan can go up or down when their personal needs and circumstances change.
- For example, plans may go *down* when:
 - a one-off payment for an individual is funded in one year to purchase a piece of assistive technology, which does not need to be purchased again the following year.
 - a person moving from the family home to independent living may need additional capacity building supports for a period to make this transition smoothly, but may not require the same level of support again in subsequent plans.
- Across the scheme, on average plan budgets *increase* when reassessed. For plans reassessed in the quarter to 30 June 2022:
 - The annual value of plans increased on average by 12.7 per cent.
 - In the previous quarter to 30 March 2021, the increase on average in plans on review was 8.3 per cent.

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- Within these averages, for plans reassessed in the 12 months from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2022, more than a third of plans (39 per cent) increased by more than 5 per cent, a quarter of plans (25 per cent) decreased by more than 5 per cent and the rest (36 per cent) changed by 5 per cent or less.

Overall the average annual value of NDIS Plan Budgets including first time plans for new participants decreased because new arrivals in the last year had less severe disability on average than existing participants.

- In the years of fastest growth in participant numbers from 2017-18 to 2020-21, people supported by state disability services transitioned into the scheme.
- These people generally have higher support needs than those who were not previously supported by state services.
- People entering the scheme more recently (particularly since 2021) are mostly not those who had been previously supported by states. These newer participants include more people under the age of 18 (children have lower plan budgets on average than adults) and people with lower support needs on average than those already in the scheme.
- The effect of this change in mix as new entrants arrive is a slight decrease in the average value of plans.
 - In the same way that a few shorter people joining a group will lower the average height of the group, this does not mean that the people who were already in the group have shrunk – average plan values for earlier participants have not decreased, indeed they continue to grow.

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NDIS expenditure projections are significantly higher than were anticipated at the commencement of the scheme or in the 2017 Productivity Commission study of NDIS costs

- In its 2017 Study Report into NDIS costs, the Productivity Commission estimated total expenditure on NDIS participant plans for 2024-25 at **\$28.5 billion**. **532,000** participants were projected by June 2025, at an average cost of **\$54,000** per participant.
- The 2022-23 Budget estimates completed in March 2022 instead contemplate:
 - total costs in 2024-25 of **\$41.4 billion** - nearly 50 per cent more than the projections in the Productivity Commission's (PC) 2017 study;
 - **670,400** participants are now projected by June 2025, 138,400 more than in the PC 2017 study, and
 - The average cost per participant is now projected to be nearly **\$63,000** in 2024-25 or \$9,000 more than in the PC 2017 study.
- The actual cost of the NDIS is dependent on the number of participants in the Scheme; the level of supports funded in participant plans based on their individual needs and circumstances, and the expenditure of those funds by participants.
- Estimates of the cost of the NDIS are based on the data available at the time. As the scheme evolves and improves to better meet the support needs of people with disability, actual figures can differ from the predicted figures. To the extent this occurs, the estimates will be revised.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- The Government is committed to a better NDIS that puts people with disability at the centre of the Scheme and includes families, carers, service providers and workers.
- The Government wants to ensure plan values reflect the reasonable and necessary supports people with disability require.
- I am working with my colleagues from states and territories, through the Disability Reform Ministers' Meetings, to build trust, and support better outcomes for people with disability, including by improving the effectiveness of the NDIS.
- The Government is exploring ways to provide a better and earlier outcome for participants and their plans, reducing the need for them to apply to the AAT.

PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT

- The previous Government did not properly fund the NDIS Participant plans and that is why a NDIS Review is needed.
- Many NDIS participants were left frustrated that their plans had been cut leading to carers not being paid and thus they did not get the care they required.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

IF ASKED: What is the status of Commonwealth compared to state contributions

- Full scheme agreements are in place with every state and territory except Western Australia (which has a transition agreement to mid-2023).
- Under full scheme agreements, states make set contributions for participant support costs which increase 4 per cent each year.
The Commonwealth meets the balance of participant support costs and all of the National Disability Insurance Agency's operating costs.
- The scheme is now growing faster than the escalation rate in state contributions, and so the Commonwealth funding as a proportion of total NDIS costs is increasing. In 2020-21 the Commonwealth funded around 55 per cent of participant support costs nationally. Based on the March 2022-23 Budget estimates, the Commonwealth will fund 62 per cent in 2021-22, increasing each year to reach 71 per cent in 2025-26.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Participant plan payments (last published quarterly report on the NDIS, for the period ended 30 June 2022)

- The average annualised payment per participant increased by 9.2 per cent per annum on average over the three years to 30 June 2022 (the median increased by 13.7 per cent per annum over the same period).
 - This compares to an average 10.8 per cent increase reported in the three years to March 2022 (median 16.4 per cent increase).
- Across the NDIS, the average payment is higher than the median payment because a small number of participants receive high cost supports. The average annualised payment per participant in the year to June 2022 is \$55,200, compared with the median annualised payment of \$18,500.

NDIS participant plan estimates – comparison of projections

Comparison of projections	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	4 year total 2022-23 to 2025-26
Current projections – 2022-23 Budget (March 2022)						
Expenses (\$b)	29.3	33.9	38.0	41.4	44.6	157.8
Participant Numbers	530,457	586,433	630,327	670,400	Not published	
Average annualised Cost per Participant (\$)	57,800	59,900	61,600	62,800	Not published	
Previous Projections – MYEFO 2022-23 (aligned to 2020-21 Annual Financial Sustainability Report*)						
Expenses (\$b)	29.2	33.9	38.0	41.4	N/A	N/A
Participant Numbers	530,457	586,433	630,327	670,400	N/A	N/A
Average annualised Cost per Participant (\$)	57,800	59,900	61,600	62,800	N/A	N/A
Budget 2021-22						
Expenses (\$b)	26.5	28.3	29.4	31.9	N/A	N/A
Participant Numbers	531,000	565,300	583,100	590,700	N/A	N/A
Average annualised Cost per Participant (\$)	53,000	52,000	51,000	54,000	N/A	N/A
Productivity Commission (2017)						
Expenses (\$b)	23.7	25.2	26.8	28.5	N/A	N/A
Participant Numbers	497,700	509,300	520,800	532,000	N/A	N/A
Average annualised Cost per Participant (\$)	48,000	50,000	52,000	54,000	N/A	N/A

* The NDIS Scheme Actuary's 2020-21 Annual Financial Sustainability Report (AFSR), publicly released on 8 October 2021 and available on the NDIS website. The AFSR is described further below.

Annualised costs means cost for participants over 12 months, correcting for part year costs of those who enter or leave during the year.

NDIS participant plan estimates - Commonwealth and state/territory contributions

\$b	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	4 year total 2022-23 to 2025-26
Expenses	23.3	29.3	33.9	38.0	41.4	44.6	157.8
State/Territory Contributions (including in-kind)	10.5	11.1	11.5	12.1	12.6	13.1	49.3
Commonwealth Contribution (balance of scheme costs)	12.8	18.3	22.3	25.9	28.8	31.5	108.5
Commonwealth Share	55%	62%	66%	68%	70%	71%	69%

Note: minor differences due to rounding. Sources: 2020-21 figure - NDIA Annual Report 2020-21; 2021-22 and beyond figures - NDIA Portfolio Budget Statements 2022-23.

Other projections of NDIS costs completed in the last 12 months

Projection	Expenses (\$ billion)	2021-22	2024-25	Later years
NDIS Annual Financial Sustainability Report Released by the NDIS Scheme Actuary on 8 October 2021	Participant Plan expense only (does not include agency costs)	Baseline projection: 29.2 Low scenario: 28.3 High scenario: 30.5	Baseline projection: 41.4 Low scenario: 39.0 High scenario: 47.8	Baseline projection: 59.3 Low scenario: 53.2 High scenario: 74.2 in 2029-30
Intergenerational Report (IGR) Released by the former Treasurer on 28 June 2021	Total (including agency costs)	Page 107: "...increase from 1.2 per cent of GDP in 2020-21 to 1.5 per cent in the medium term... levelling out at 1.4 per cent of GDP in the long term..." Page 107: "...The Australian Government's share of spending will grow from 0.7 per cent of GDP in 2020-21 to around 1 per cent by 2031-32..."		
<i>Beyond the Budget</i> Released by the Parliamentary Budget Officer on 21 September 2021	Total (including agency costs)	–	–	\$59 to \$72 billion in 2031-32

NDIS Annual Financial Sustainability Report (AFSR)

- The AFSR is produced annually as required under section 180B of the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act (2013)* (NDIS Act), and provides an assessment of the financial sustainability of the NDIS. The most recent AFSR, being the 2020-21 AFSR, used data to 30 June 2021 to project the future cost of the scheme. This AFSR was publicly released on the NDIS website on 8 October 2021.
- The AFSR includes analysis and discussion on recent scheme experience, best estimate projections of future participant numbers and average payments, scenarios relating to plausible variances in the projections, and recommended strategies to address risks to financial sustainability.
- The 2021-22 MYEFO, and 2022-23 Budget estimates, were constructed with reference to the baseline estimates in the 2020-21 AFSR.
- Consistent with the NDIS Act, an updated AFSR is currently under development. This updated AFSR will reference data to 30 June 2022 to project the future cost of the scheme. It is anticipated that the new AFSR will be publically released in quarter 4, 2022.

Independent Review of NDIA actuarial forecast model and drivers of scheme costs (Taylor Fry Review)

- In August 2021 Disability Reform Ministers directed work be undertaken to understand cost drivers and underpinning assumptions in the Scheme Actuary's 2020-21 AFSR.
- The independent actuarial firm, Taylor Fry, was commissioned and found that:
 - The AFSR provides a plausible range based on scenario testing of various assumptions.
 - That the baseline estimates contained within the AFSR may represent a moderate underestimate of the expected value of future costs.
- The Taylor Fry report was publicly released on 8 January 2022.
- The 2022-23 Budget estimates reflect the projections in the 2020-21 AFSR.

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MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL DISABILITY INSURANCE SCHEME DESIGN, OPERATIONS AND SUSTAINABILITY

KEY ISSUES

- The Government has committed to review the design, operation and sustainability of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, bringing forward the planned 2023 independent review of the Scheme in bilateral agreements.
- The review will consider all available evidence, and look at benefits as well as problems inside and outside the Scheme.
- The review is an opportunity for a much stronger focus on improving the operation of the Scheme and building a collective understanding of how to maximise its effectiveness for those it supports.
- People with disability will be involved in developing the scope and terms of reference for the review, and will be engaged in the conduct of the review.
- The review findings will guide the Australian Government and state and territory Disability Ministers on priority areas for improving the Scheme.

KEY FACT

- Bilateral agreements with states and territories set out some of the issues to be examined in the 2023 review that is being brought forward.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- We have election commitments to review the NDIS design, operation and sustainability as well as pricing, markets and compliance.
- The Review must participants' experience of the Scheme – it is not about cuts, it's about identifying essential changes so the Scheme is able to deliver on its promise using the additional expenditure provided for in the forward estimates.
- Terms of Reference for the review are to be developed with the disability community – this will be key to rebuilding disability community trust.

PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT

- The previous Government was satisfied with the NDIS and was still planning to undertake a 10 year review in 2023 rather than address all the systemic issues now.
- 9 years of neglect by the previous Government has led to a NDIS that is not fit for purpose.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED – Why are you sending the Terms of Reference (ToR) to states without co-designing with community, as you committed to before the election?

- The Government has sent draft ToRs to the states to be discussed at the Disability Reform Ministers' Meeting on 29 July 2022, as the basis for then engaging with the sector. Disability Reform Ministers is the body that sets policy for the NDIS.
- We will engage with the disability community on the draft ToRs.
- The disability community will also be engaged extensively in the conduct of the review.

If ASKED – Who will undertake the review?

- The Government is currently considering who will undertake the review and will seek views from states and territories.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- The National Disability Insurance Scheme has been operating for 10 years, and has transformed many lives. The first three of those years were trials, and the next four were the transition from trials to national availability.
- Only recently has the Scheme reached the number of participants and the level of expenditure that was originally envisaged. It is now projected to continue to grow to significantly exceed the numbers of participants and support costs previously envisaged.
- There are two election commitments relating to reviews of the NDIS – one is a review of the design, operation and sustainability of the NDIS which is to bring forward a scheduled review of the NDIS to be commissioned in 2023. The second review commitment relates to pricing, markets and compliance. The NDIS review will address both elements.
- The full-scheme bilateral agreements with all jurisdictions (except Western Australia which has a transition agreement until mid-2023) include that governments agree to the Ministerial Council commissioning an independent review of NDIS costs in 2023 and 2028 (and thereafter as commissioned), which will examine NDIS financial arrangements.
- Full scheme agreements provide that the review of costs (to commence in 2023):
 - “Should examine the following issues:
 - sustainability of the NDIS, including costs and achievement of participant outcomes and the effectiveness of ILC;
 - cost pressures, including wages pressures;
 - the NDIA’s operational costs;
 - efficiencies within the Scheme;
 - whether there has been any service and financial impact, positive or negative, on other service systems; and
 - the most appropriate levers to manage financial risks and any cost pressures.”

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MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

AAT APPEALS & ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION (ADR)

KEY ISSUES

- The Government is committed to finding ways to address the rising number of Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) appeals and reduce the use of external lawyers by the NDIA.
- Recent efforts by the NDIA to improve internal review decisions have seen around a 50 per cent reduction in new applications to the AAT.
- There has also been an increased focus on early resolution of matters.
- The Government is currently undertaking targeted consultation with the states and territories, advocates, legal aid and provider representatives to develop an Alternative Dispute Mechanism.

KEY FACT

- The Government is aware that appeals to the AAT have increased by approximately 400 per cent over the past 12-18 months, with 4,325 before the AAT as of 17 July 2022.
- 2,639 matters were closed in the year to date. Of these, 2,528 were resolved without a substantive hearing.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- To improve the effectiveness of the NDIS, it's important that first we rebuild trust.
- I am looking for ways to reduce this pain-point for participants, improve transparency and find alternative, less costly way to resolve disputes.
- The Government is looking to develop an alternative dispute resolution mechanism that's voluntary for participants ahead of going to the AAT.
- 4,300 cases is a clumsy, expensive way to allocate resources in a Government safety net.
- This will help re-build the trust of participants, their families, and the community.
- Our election commitments give us the foundation to improve the effectiveness of the NDIS and rebuild trust.

PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT

- Lamentably, we've seen an erosion of trust over the past few years.
- Participants have lost trust as a result of the former Government's sponsorship of the NDIA's Operation Green Light and push for Independent Assessments.
- Participants feel that these tactics were to squeeze costs to fit Government forecasts, and question rather than staying true to NDIS's original intent of a demand-driven investment approach.
- Fairly or not, many participants also feel that the Agency has been cutting plans arbitrarily and is not transparent about access or plan-value decisions.
- This has culminated in the significant number of cases before the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, especially in the financial year starting July 2021.
- Nine years of neglect by the previous Government has led to a huge caseload in the AAT leaving NDIS participants feeling frustrated and in many cases without the much-needed supports, they require.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED - What is the Government doing to reduce the number of cases currently before the AAT?

- The Government has asked the NDIA to reduce the caseload in the AAT.
- The NDIA is working with stakeholders, including the AAT, to improve the NDIS planning pathway and appeal process to resolve appeal cases early.
- These efforts have seen a significant reduction in new applications, with more cases being closed than the number of new matters received.
- This will prevent a build up of new appeals to the AAT– the previous government presided over a 400 per cent increase in AAT cases to 4,325.

IF ASKED – Why is the Government considering introducing another ADR process?

- The Government's focus is improving fairness for participants.
 - The Government is exploring ways to provide a better and earlier outcome for participants, reducing the need for them to apply to the AAT.
 - This will reduce the burden on participants as well as the AAT, and reduce spending by NDIA on lawyers fighting participants.
 - Any new ADR process would be voluntary, confidential and free to participants and designed to provide a quick, low stress and well supported environment for the participant to seek resolution of their matter.
 - Consultations will ensure any new model is fit for purpose and provides a better and fairer experience for participants.
-

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- The next Disability Reform Ministers' Meeting on 29 July 2022 will discuss options to introduce an additional process in the form of an ADR pilot that can be quickly implemented under the current administrative and legislative framework.
- The current preferred model is for an independent externally facilitated mediation or conciliation process, after an NDIA internal review decision has been made but prior to making an AAT application.
- A group of advocacy, legal aid and provider representatives were provided with a briefing on proposed options on 12 July 2022.
- The NDIA will formalise a future consultation process through the existing Dispute Resolution Working Group (DRWG) that includes key personnel from the NDIA, DSS, the AAT, Legal Aid, and peak Advocacy bodies. A project control group will also be created to implement the ADR pilot through the DRWG.

AAT statistics

- There are approximately 4,325 current active AAT matters and the Agency continues to receive 80-85 new AAT applications per week (as at 3 July 2022).
- Various factors have driven the increased caseload. From 1 February 2014 to 1 July 2021, the number of applications for review by the AAT increased approximately in line with increases in the number of Scheme participants (at approximately 4 – 4.4 per thousand total participants). In financial year 2021-2022 internal review requests increased and efforts to reduce backlogs in those have led to a greater number of matters proceeding to external AAT review, with the overall caseload ratio peaking at approximately 12 per thousand participants in Q3.
- With new applications to the AAT now slowing and more matters being resolved, the overall caseload in the AAT is reducing. The NDIA anticipates further reduction in the caseload over coming months.
- Approximately 81 per cent of matters currently before the AAT are planning related (i.e. more and/or different supports) and 17 per cent relate to people seeking to gain Access into the Scheme.
- The data shows, with Planning related matters, the main support types in dispute relate to Capacity Building Supports (disputed in 55 per cent of matters), Core Supports (52 per cent) and General Supports (27 per cent), noting multiple support types can be disputed in any one AAT Application.
- The median time to finalise NDIS AAT matters is 22 weeks, with 89 per cent of matters finalised within 12 months.
- 2,639 matters were closed in the year to date. Of these, 2,528 were resolved without a substantive hearing.
- The NDIA is mindful of its obligation to act as a model litigant and is working through a number of complaints. Most relate to delays and consistency in the management of matters. Not all of these have been substantiated as breaches. The NDIA is strengthening its model litigant complaint processes and engaging with the Office of Legal Services Coordination on these matters.

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MO Clearance Date: 23 July 2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**NDIS ELIGIBILITY FOR CHILDREN BORN IN AUSTRALIA TO TWO NEW ZEALAND PARENTS****KEY ISSUES**

- Children born in Australia to two New Zealand parents are eligible for individually funded supports under the NDIS from age 10, if they have been ordinarily a resident in Australia since birth and meet either the disability or early intervention access requirements.

KEY FACT

- The Australian Government provides some support to children ineligible for the NDIS through the NDIS Early Childhood Early Intervention (ECEI) Gateway.
- The ECEI Gateway allows any family with a child with developmental delay or other possible disability to seek assistance and assessment from an ECEI Partner and they may be eligible for supports. This support may include the provision of information, emotional support, referral to mainstream services or short-term intervention supports.
- Notwithstanding the support provided by the Government to these children through the ECEI Gateway, states and territories have primary responsibility for providing supports to these children.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- The Government is continuing to explore opportunities to improve outcomes for all children with disability living in Australia.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED – Implications for the NDIS arising from the Australia New Zealand Leaders Meeting (ANZLM)

- The ANZLM of 8 July 2022 reaffirmed the unique relationship between Australia and New Zealand and affirmed a shared commitment to provide citizens of both countries with better access to social and economic outcomes.
- Any further questions about the ANZLM and next steps for the Australian Government should be directed to the Minister for Home Affairs, the Hon Claire O’Neil.

If ASKED – NDIS access for NZ living in Australia

- The Government acknowledges the important contribution New Zealand citizens make to Australia’s economic, social and community life.
- However, at this time the Government is not considering changes to NDIS eligibility requirements for New Zealand citizens living in Australia.
- New Zealand citizens with disability living in Australia can claim the Disability Support Pension under the Social Security Agreement between Australia and New Zealand. The Agreement also allows New Zealand citizens to claim the Australian Age Pension and Carer Payment.
- New Zealand citizens living in Australia who hold a non-protected Special Category Visa, a temporary visa class, can also claim a range of other social security payments, including the Family Tax Benefit, Child Care Subsidy and Health Care Card.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- Under the *National Disability Insurance Scheme Act 2013*, New Zealand citizens residing in Australia do not meet the eligibility requirements for access to the NDIS unless they hold a Permanent Visa or a protected Special Category Visa (issued prior to 26 February 2001).
- Children born in Australia to two New Zealand citizens who do not do not hold a Permanent Visa or a protected Special Category Visa do not automatically gain Australian citizenship at birth. Rather, a child of New Zealand parents where the child is ordinarily resident in Australia from birth gains Australian citizenship from age 10. It is from age 10 that they may apply to access individually funded supports under the NDIS as an Australian citizen.
- The New Zealand Government, and its citizens in Australia, have lobbied the Australian Government over a number of years for access to the NDIS on the basis that New Zealand citizens working in Australia pay tax and contribute to the cost of the NDIS via the 2014 increase in the Medicare levy that helped fund the NDIS.
- The New Zealand Government is particularly concerned that children born in Australia to two New Zealand citizens do not have access to early intervention supports, and argue that the severity and cost of providing disability supports will be higher once citizenship is granted from age 10. While children in this circumstance can access limited supports through the National Disability Insurance Agency's (NDIA) early childhood approach, the closure of state and territory disability systems in favour of the NDIS has created a service delivery gap for this cohort.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Julie Yeend, Branch Manager, NDIS Policy, Legislation and Governance, DSS
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Peter Broadhead, Group Manager, NDIS Participants and Performance, DSS
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
Clearance Date:	26 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

**QUESTION TIME BRIEF
ENHANCED PAID PARENTAL LEAVE FOR FAMILIES**

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Government is committed to a Paid Parental Leave scheme that offers choice and flexibility for working parents.
- Parenting is an equal partnership and families should be able to choose how they balance work and care.
- It is important that we have a Paid Parental Leave scheme that supports modern Australian families and that complements other parental leave schemes offered by a growing number of employers.
- The Government is currently considering the specific enhancements to be made to the Paid Parental Leave scheme to ensure it is working in the best way for families.

CONTACT NAME: Agnieszka Nelson

POSITION: Branch Manager, Families and Payment Support

PHONE: s 47F

IF ASKED: What do you say to the families who are expecting a new child next year and want to plan their leave?

- The Government is focused on making sure the enhancements to the scheme work in the best way for families.
- This means ensuring that families are supported to choose how they balance work and care.
- The Government also wants to make sure there are no unintended consequences from these changes, and is carefully considering the detail of the proposed enhancements.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- The former government announced changes in the March Budget to the Paid Parental Leave scheme:
 - Combining Dad and Partner Pay and Parental Leave Pay to create a single 20-week entitlement, to be taken as families choose.
 - Broadening the income test to allow those who do not meet the individual income threshold (currently \$156,647 per annum) to still qualify for payment if they meet a family income threshold of \$350,000 per annum.
 - Increasing the flexibility of Parental Leave Pay by allowing:
 - the leave to be used by parents one day at a time, with periods of work in between, making it easier for parents to share the entitlement.
 - parents to take the entitlement on the same day.
- Around 180,000 parents would receive an additional two weeks of Parental Leave Pay.
- Around 2,200 parents who would not have qualified under the current policy settings (mostly higher income women) would now also be eligible.
- Many fathers and partners would be better off under the proposed arrangements, which would allow them to access payment under the Paid Parental Leave scheme at the same time as any available employer-funded leave.

Current Paid Parental Leave entitlements

- Currently, the Paid Parental Leave scheme is comprised of two payments:
 - **Parental Leave Pay** provides up to 18 weeks' pay at a rate based on the national minimum wage (currently \$812.45 per week) to eligible working primary carers of a newborn or recently adopted child, and
 - **Dad and Partner Pay** provides up to two weeks' pay at a rate based on the national minimum wage to eligible working fathers or partners caring for a newborn or recently adopted child

DaPP Sensitivities

Currently, around 90,000 fathers and partners receive Dad and Partner Pay under the Paid Parental Leave scheme.

- Under the changes announced by the former Government, around 76,500 dads and partners would be eligible to access the Paid Parental Leave scheme and share in the 20 week entitlement.
- Around 23,500 dads and partners will not be eligible for Parental Leave Pay under the new Paid Parental Leave scheme.
- The current claim hierarchy remains, meaning that eligible primary claimants (mainly mothers) will need to decide what amount a secondary claimant (fathers/partner) can claim. Families may decide that a higher income father is better off working than receiving all or some of the family's Parental Leave Pay entitlement.
- In its 2009 report, the Productivity Commission proposed two weeks of paid paternity leave, which Dad and Partner Pay has been based on as a 'use it or lose it' basis.

Statistics

- In 2021-22, as at 28 February 2022, **121,056** people started receiving Parental Leave Pay and 64,443 people received Dad and Partner Pay.
- In 2020-21, 169,029 parents commenced receiving Parental Leave Pay.
 - 13,351 Parental Leave Pay claimants used one or more days flexibly.
 - This equates to around 10 per cent of claimants with a child born on or after 1 July 2020 eligible for flexible Paid Parental Leave (135,812).
- For 2021-22, the Paid Parental Leave scheme is estimated to cost taxpayers around **\$2.58 billion**.

Payment rates

	1 July 2022 – 30 June 2023
Daily rate	\$162.49
Weekly rate	\$812.45
2 weeks	\$1,624.90
18 weeks	\$14,624.10

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Agnieszka Nelson, Branch Manager Families and Payment Support
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
DSS Input Cleared By:	Jo Evans, Group Manager Participation and Family Payments
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
Clearance Date:	20 July/ 2022
MO Clearance Date:	16/7/22

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

ROBODEBT ROYAL COMMISSION

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- A Royal Commission into the 'Robodebt' scheme will be established before the end of 2022.

KEY POINTS

- Robodebt was a shameful policy from a shameless government.
- The Royal Commission into Robodebt is a matter of priority for the Albanese Government and will be established before the end of 2022.
- We need to learn the truth of Robodebt's origins so that something like this can never happen again.
- The Royal Commission will inquire into who was responsible for the scheme and what advice or processes informed its design and implementation.
- The Royal Commission will investigate the impact on individuals, as well as how complaints and concerns about the schemes legality were handled.
- The Government has committed **\$30 million** to conducting this Royal Commission.

If ASKED - about the Robodebt Class Action Settlement:

- On 11 June 2021, the Federal Court approved the settlement in the matter of *Prygodicz and Others versus the Commonwealth of Australia*, known as the Robodebt class action.
- The government will make a settlement payment of \$112 million in lieu of interest, inclusive of court-approved costs for Gordon Legal.
- Services Australia is leading the distribution of these settlement amounts.
- Over 99 per cent of the Robodebt Scheme refunds have now been made. If anyone believes they are still owed a refund under the Robodebt Scheme they can contact Services Australia.

CONTACT: Alexander Abel
PHONE: s 47F

POSITION: Branch Manager, Study and Compliance

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- A Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme was an election commitment.
- On 6 June 2019, a former Austudy recipient, Ms Amato who had her ATO refund garnisheed to pay an alleged debt raised under the Robodebt Scheme, applied to the Court for review of her debt (*Amato v the Commonwealth of Australia*).
 - In November 2019, the Court found that there was insufficient evidence to support the determination that a debt existed under s 1222A of the Social Securities Act 1991 (Cth) – effectively finding the approach used by the Robodebt scheme to be unlawful.
- On 19 November 2019, the then Minister for Government Services announced Services Australia would cease raising debts based solely on averaged ATO income data.
- On 29 May 2020, the then Minister for Social Services announced Services Australia would refund all repayments made on debts based wholly or partially on averaged ATO income data.
- Over 99 per cent of the Robodebt Scheme refunds have now been made.
 - The remainder that are outstanding includes former customers who have not responded to Services Australia's request for information to enable the refund to occur (such as provision of bank account information), and those with complex circumstances who require tailored servicing, such as incarcerated customers, and deceased estates.
- On 16 November 2020, the Commonwealth and Gordon Legal agreed to settle the *Prygodicz & Ors v Commonwealth of Australia* class action on the Robodebt Scheme and on 11 June 2021, the Federal Court of Australia approved the class action settlement and the proposed Settlement Distribution Scheme.
- The settlement distribution scheme has commenced, although payments are yet to be made.
- Nine News reported on 26 July 2022 that Robodebt victims are still waiting for \$112 million in settlement payments (**Attachment A**).

Locational / place considerations

- NA

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Alexander Abel, Branch Manager
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	
Phone/Mobile:	
Clearance Date:	27 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	16/7/2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF
DOUGLAS DECISION - IMPACT ON CHILD SUPPORT, FTB AND SOCIAL SECURITY

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- I acknowledge the Full Federal Court's decision in the case *Commissioner of Taxation v Douglas* which has tax impacts for some military veterans.
- The Assistant Treasurer is leading the Australian Government's response to the Court's decision.
- This Government is introducing legislation to ensure that no veteran pays higher income tax because of the Federal Court decision.

KEY POINTS

- The Albanese Government is introducing legislation to ensure veterans do not pay more tax, because of the Federal Court decision in the *Commissioner of Taxation v Douglas* case.
- While most veterans are better off under the Court's decision, a small number may be adversely affected.
- The Australian Government is developing a whole-of-government response, which is led by the Assistant Treasurer.
- The Government's response is supported by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel and myself.

CONTACT NAME: Agnieszka Nelson

POSITION:

Branch Manager,
Families and Payment Support

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Current status of Australian Government response:

- On 25 July 2022, the Assistant Treasurer, and the Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Defence Personnel announced a consultation process had commenced, and invited submissions for exposure draft legislation related to the *Douglas* decision.
- The draft bill:
 - retains the *Douglas* decision for affected military schemes (retrospectively back to September 2007 and prospectively, and
 - introduces a tax offset for veterans who would pay more tax as a result of their pensions being taxed as a lump sum rather than as an income stream, and
 - reverses the *Douglas* decision for all other affected superannuation schemes.
- Submissions can be submitted up until 5 August 2022.

What is the *Douglas* decision?

- The Full Federal Court decision in *Commissioner of Taxation v Douglas* [2020] FCAFC 220 (the *Douglas* decision) has had major implications for the tax treatment of superannuation invalidity benefits paid to veterans.
- The *Douglas* decision considered invalidity pension payments from two schemes where the benefit commenced on or after 20 September 2007:
 - the income tax treatment of pension payments changed to be superannuation lump sums (formerly they were treated as a superannuation income streams).
 - Affected military schemes: the Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits ((DFRDB) and the Military Superannuation Benefits (MSB) schemes)), and non-military schemes.
- The Court determined these pensions did not meet the legislative definitions of a superannuation lifetime pension and income stream, as these payments are subject to review and re-classification (often based on changing health outcomes for veterans), resulting in payments being paid either temporarily or permanently.
- This also applies to other schemes that are reviewable or cancellable, such as State and Territory schemes, and presents challenges to the taxation of superannuation benefits, which are designed to treat such benefits as an income stream, not as a superannuation lump sum.
- The *Douglas* decision primarily affects the amount of tax veterans pay, but it can also have some non-tax implications.
- Some veterans have Disability Superannuation Benefit (DSB) status, which can also result in the veteran having a lower taxable income under the *Douglas* decision.
- Lower taxable income has financial implications for Australian Government payments and programs which rely on taxable income to calculate adjusted taxable income.
- Affected payments include: Child Support, Family Tax Benefits, Youth Allowance, Child Care Assistance payments, Stillborn Baby Payment, Single Income Family Supplement, Double Orphan Pension, Health Care and other concession cards, HECS (HELP) repayments, Private Health Rebates, and certain tax offsets.
- The Assistant Treasurer, the Hon Stephen Jones MP, is leading the Government's response to the *Douglas* decision.

Contact Officer's Name: Agnieszka Nelson, Branch Manager, Families and Payment Support
Phone/Mobile: s 47F
DSS Input Cleared By: Jo Evans, Group Manager, Participation and Family Payments
Phone/Mobile: s 47F
Clearance Date: 26 July 2022
MO Clearance Date: 16/7/22

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Reinstatement of NHE Crisis Payment****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The National Health Emergency Crisis Payment has been reinstated to people who are income support recipients and who are required to quarantine or self-isolate, or care for someone who is quarantining or self-isolating, due to COVID-19.
- Eligibility for the payment has been backdated to 1 July 2022 so that anyone who met the requirements from that date can make a claim from Wednesday 20 July 2022.

KEY POINTS

- The National Health Emergency Crisis Payment was introduced on 25 March 2020 as a temporary measure for income support recipients who are either required to quarantine or self-isolate or care for someone required to quarantine or self-isolate, due to COVID-19.
- The payment is available to recipients of: age pension, Austudy, carer payment, disability support pension, JobSeeker, parenting payment, youth allowance and farm household allowance.
- The payment is paid in addition to a person's regular income support payment. The amount paid is equivalent to one week of a person's maximum basic rate of their payment, and so will vary depending on which payment the person receives.
- The Australian Government has provided over \$546 million in National Health Emergency Crisis Payments, as at 15 July 2022.

If ASKED - why did the Government previously cease the National Health Emergency Crisis Payment?

- Ceasing the payment was in line with states and territories' easing of COVID-19 restrictions and the decision was made prior to the updated health outlook.
- The decision to cease the National Health Emergency Crisis Payment was made with the knowledge that the payment could be quickly reinstated if required.
- Beyond the National Health Emergency Crisis Payment, the Government remains committed to providing support to states and territories during the COVID-19 pandemic, including extending the National Partnership on COVID-19 Response for a further three months to 31 December 2022 at a cost of around \$760 million.

If ASKED - why is the Government reinstating the National Health Emergency Crisis Payment?

- The decision to reinstate the National Health Emergency Crisis Payment was made in view of the updated health outlook and recognition of the risks associated with the rise of new, more infectious, COVID-19 variants during winter.
- This will ensure people affected by COVID-19 isolation requirements who receive an income support payment or ABSTUDY Living Allowance, and who are in severe financial hardship, can receive additional support through the winter period.
- The Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment, which provides one-off payments to eligible non-income support recipients required to

self-isolate or quarantine, has also been reinstated to 1 October 2022.

If ASKED: when is the last day a person can claim the National Health Emergency Crisis Payment?

- People who start their isolation or caring period prior to 1 October 2022 will have 14 days to submit a claim.
- For example, a person whose isolation period commenced on 30 September 2022 will be able to submit a claim for the payment until 14 October 2022 inclusive.
- The claim period can be extended by a further 14 days for people who contact Services Australia about a claim within the initial 14 day period.

If ASKED: would the Government consider extending the payment beyond October 2022?

- The Government will continue to respond to public health advice and act according to the changing circumstances of the pandemic.
- Based on advice from the Chief Medical Officer and the Department of Health the Government decided to reinstate both the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment and the National Health Emergency Crisis Payment until 1 October 2022.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

National Health Emergency (NHE) Crisis Payment

- From 25 March 2020, a new category of Crisis Payment for a NHE was introduced by the Coronavirus Economic Response Package Omnibus Act 2020 (Schedule 11). This schedule did not limit the NHE to COVID-19, rather, it provided that the Minister may determine eligibility requirements for this payment by legislative instrument.
- The Social Security (Coronavirus Economic Response - 2020 Measures No. 2) Determination 2020 provided the requirements for eligibility for a NHE Crisis Payment in respect of COVID-19. To be eligible, a person must be in financial hardship and required to self-isolate or quarantine, or care for another person who is required to self-isolate or quarantine, because of advice from, or a requirement made, by the Commonwealth, a state or territory or a health professional regarding COVID-19.
- Claims can be made online through myGov, over the phone or by submitting a 'Claim for Crisis Payment – National Health Emergency (COVID-19)' form.
- From 12 September 2021, a person was required to submit evidence of a recent COVID 19 test with their claim.
- From 13 January 2022, a positive Rapid Antigen Test result could be provided as evidence that a person, or the person they were caring for, were required to self-isolate or quarantine.

Crisis Payment (all categories) overview

- Crisis Payment is a one-off payment available to income support recipients who are in severe financial hardship and have experienced a specific event, such as domestic violence, arrival in Australia as a humanitarian entrant, or release from prison.
- A single person is in severe financial hardship if the value of their liquid assets is less than their maximum fortnightly payment rate (includes maximum basic rate, Energy Supplement and, if applicable, Rent Assistance, Pharmaceutical Allowance and Pension Supplement).
- A member of a couple is in severe financial hardship if the value of their liquid assets is less than twice their maximum fortnightly payment rate.
- The amount of Crisis Payment is equal to half of the person's fortnightly maximum basic rate of payment. For example, as at 15 July 2022, a single JobSeeker Payment recipient without dependent children would receive \$321.35.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:

Alfred Opoku, A/g Branch Manager

Phone/Mobile: s 47F

DSS Input Cleared By (include position):

Phone/Mobile: s 47F

Clearance Date:

20 July 2022

MO Clearance Date:

25 July 2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Jobseeker Payment

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Labor Government is deeply committed to building a welfare and social security system that is a strong safety net and supports vulnerable Australians when they need it, and that doesn't judge anyone for needing a support payment.
- Nobody pretends that living on JobSeeker is easy.
- JobSeeker is designed to support Australians who are unable to support themselves whilst they look for a job or have a temporary injury or incapacity.
- JobSeeker is not designed to replace lost salary or wages.
- We know many Australians are doing it tough. They need and rely on the government supporting them.
- That's why we made a number of commitments to help with the cost of living – such as by cutting the cost of PBS co-payments, and making child care cheaper.
- As the Prime Minister has made clear, the Government will consider the rate of JobSeeker when we sit down to do the Budget each year.
- We face many competing calls on the Budget, which is groaning under a trillion dollars of Liberal debt.
- Our decisions will always be based on our commitment to leave no one behind and hold no one back.

KEY POINTS

- JobSeeker is designed to support Australians who are unable to support themselves whilst they look for a job or have a temporary injury or incapacity.
- The current basic rate of JobSeeker for a single person with no children is **\$642.70** per fortnight before supplements.
- The Government is holding a **Jobs and Skills Summit** on 1 and 2 September 2022. The Summit will bring together Australians, including employers, unions and civil society to start a national conversation about a shared vision for Australia's labour market.
- The Summit will be followed by a Government White Paper on Employment which will focus on opportunities to build a better trained more productive workforce, boosting incomes and living standards and creating opportunities for more Australians to prosper.
- The Summit and subsequent Employment White Paper will focus on expanding the employment opportunities for all Australians including the most disadvantaged and those that face barriers to employment.

IF ASKED - Do you think that a payment of \$45.91 per day is an adequate amount for JobSeeker Payment recipients? ACOSS is calling for an increase of JobSeeker Payment rate to \$70 a day.

- JobSeeker is designed to support Australians who are unable to support themselves whilst they look for a job or have a temporary injury or incapacity.
- JobSeeker is not designed to replace lost salary or wages.
- It is funded by taxpayers and this means we have an obligation to manage it in a sustainable and responsible way.
- Income support recipients may also be able to access other benefits and concessions to assist them with the cost of living.
- Where recipients have additional costs, such as those associated with renting in the private market and raising children, supplementary payments such as Rent Assistance and Family Tax Benefit are available.

If ASKED – With the unemployment rate falling, why has the number of JobSeeker Payment recipients increased?

- The unemployment rate as at June 2022 is 3.5 per cent.
- Generally, the number of JobSeeker Payment recipients has been trending downwards since the height of the pandemic.
 - The number of JobSeeker Payment recipients has steadily declined from a high point of 1,486,676 in May 2020 to 831,601 in June 2022, a decline of around 44 per cent.
- As at 24 June 2022 there were 831,601 JobSeeker Payment recipients. This is an increase of 3.3 per cent compared to 27 May 2022.
- We can attribute this increase in recipient numbers to reinstating suspended recipients into the JobSeeker recipient numbers as part of the transition to Workforce Australia which occurred on 4 July 2022. It is anticipated that the reported recipients data will return to usual levels as mutual obligations are reactivated (on 1 August).

If ASKED – Points Based Activation System – when will mutual obligations re-commence?

- To support the transition of Workforce Australia participants, mutual obligations were temporarily suspended, including meeting the required 'points', between 1 July and 31 July 2022. There were no payment suspensions during this period.
- Mutual obligation requirements resume from Monday, 1 August 2022 for participants in Workforce Australia Services, Workforce Australia Online and ParentsNext.
- To further support Workforce Australia participants in transitioning into the Points Based Activation System, they will have a further reporting period where no compliance action will be raised. This means that compliance action for not meeting points targets will start from September 2022.
- In addition, mutual obligation requirements are temporarily suspended until 31 August 2022 in those 37 New South Wales local government areas affected by the recent rain event and flooding.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- The basic rate of JobSeeker Payment for a single person with no children is **\$642.70** per fortnight. Higher rates may be payable to individuals with children, primary caring responsibilities or who are over 60 and have been on payment for more than 9 months.
- Along with the basic rate of payment, everyone who receives JobSeeker Payment is eligible for at least one additional form of support such as:
 - Rent Assistance: up to **\$193.62** a fortnight for families with three or more children.
 - FTB Part A per child: up to **\$257.46** a fortnight for children aged 13 to 19 years.
 - FTB Part B per family: up to **\$168.28** a fortnight for children under 5 years.
 - Pharmaceutical Allowance: up to **\$6.20** a fortnight.
 - Telephone Allowance: up to **\$185.60** a year.
 - Energy Supplement: up to **\$12** a fortnight.
- There are also a range of other supplements based on an individual's particular circumstances such as remote area allowance, language, literacy and numeracy supplement and the approved program of work supplement.
- As at 24 June 2022 there were 831,601 JobSeeker Payment recipients.

- This is an increase of 3.3 per cent compared to 27 May 2022. We can attribute this increase in recipient numbers to reinstating suspended recipients as part of the transition to Workforce Australia which occurred on 4 July 2022.
- Compared to June 2021 (1,001,253), the number of JobSeeker Payment recipients in June 2022 (831,601) has decreased by 169,652 recipients or 16.9 per cent.

Points Based Activation System (Workforce Australia)

- On 4 July 2022 the Points Based Activation System was introduced to provide recipients of JobSeeker Payment with more flexibility when meeting their mutual obligation requirements.
- Recipients will have a target of up to 100 points per month that they can meet in a variety of ways such as through job searches, undertaking study or attending a job interview.
- Recipients can work with their provider or the Digital Services Contact Centre to tailor their points requirements based on their personal circumstances.

Stakeholder Comments

- ACOSS has called for the basic rates of all income support to be raised to \$70 per day, indexed to wages. This is expected to cost tens of billions of dollars over the forward estimates.
- The table below summarises proposed increases to the basic rate of JobSeeker Payment by various organisations.

	Per fortnight	Per day	Percentage increase
Current rate	\$642.70	\$45.91	N/A
Grattan Institute	\$792.70	\$56.62	23.3 per cent
BankWest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC)	\$922.70	\$65.91	43.6 per cent
ACOSS	\$980.00	\$70	52.5 per cent
The Greens	\$1,232.00	\$88.00	91.7 per cent
Independents	\$792.70	\$52.62	23.3 per cent

Locational / place considerations

- N/A

Contact Officer's Name and Position: Alfred Opoku
A/g Branch Manager, Participation and Supplementary Payments

Phone/Mobile: s 47F

Input Cleared By (include position): Jo Evans, Group Manager, Participation and Family Payments

Phone/Mobile: s 47F

Clearance Date: 1 August 2022

MO Clearance Date: 27/7/22

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

SOCIAL SECURITY PAYMENT ACCURACY, DEBT AND COMPLIANCE

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Government takes its responsibility for upholding the integrity of Australia's social security system seriously and seeks to ensure it is sustainable into the future.

KEY POINTS

- The Government needs to have safeguards in place which ensure payments are made to people who are eligible for them under the law, and that they are paid correctly, so that individuals receive the amount of assistance to which they are entitled.
- Not only can individuals be over paid, they can also be under paid if the information received is not correct.
- The Government is concerned many people are not aware they have incurred a debt, and that payment accuracy has declined over the last couple of years.
- Safeguards to assist with payment accuracy include data matching with third parties, reviews with customers and tip-off lines.
- A strong focus on payment accuracy, recovery of debts and reviews is supported through improved education about mutual obligations and use of technology.
- The Government has a responsibility to take steps to recover debts that are owed.

- Services Australia provides flexible debt repayment options based on the person's circumstances. This includes situations where the person is experiencing family or domestic violence, are in financial hardship, or where there are other indicators of vulnerability.
- Anyone who owes a debt and is experiencing difficulty with repayments is encouraged to contact Services Australia to discuss their circumstances. They can do this on the dedicated debt phone line (1800 076 072).

If ASKED – about how the Government is preventing payment inaccuracy and debt

- Services Australia makes use of technologies such as SMS text reminders, pop-ups with information on customers' MyGov accounts, and data matching to alert a customer to information discrepancies so they have an opportunity to correct the information before changes are made which could lead to a debt.
- Services Australia uses data matching with third parties, such as Births Deaths and Marriages, allowing them to verify information which could affect payment accuracy, including residency, identity, income and assets.
- Expanded Single Touch Payroll (STP) data is being progressively provided to Centrelink by the Australian Taxation Office and is being used to prefill employment and income details to make reporting easier.
 - The process of reporting income will generally involve the recipient confirming the pre-filled amount is correct.

- I will be working closely with my department and the Minister for Government Services, the Hon Bill Shorten MP to improve services for citizens including to improve payment accuracy and better use of technology and digital servicing.

If ASKED – what is the government doing in relation to debt raising and recovery in flood affected areas?

- The Government is committed to helping those who have been affected by the recent flood events across New South Wales.
- Services Australia have put in place a debt pause for people in affected local government areas to ease the financial burden during this tough time.

CONTACT NAME: Alexander Abel
PHONE: s 47F

POSITION: Branch Manager, Study and Compliance

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- Following the recent natural disasters and COVID-19 lockdowns the previous Government implemented a number of debt pauses across impacted areas.
- Some areas have been under a debt pause for the last 2 years.
- These widespread debt pauses have led to an increase in unprocessed potential overpayments, known as debt shells.
- Social security payment accuracy has fallen in the last two years, with overall payment accuracy dropping from 96 to 94 per cent, and the accuracy of JobSeeker Payment dropping from 93 to 83 per cent.
 - Payment accuracy measures the dollar value, in percentage terms, of inaccurate payment. For example, a \$100 payment that was being overpaid by \$5 is measured as having a payment accuracy of 95 per cent (or 5 per cent inaccuracy).
 - Random Sample Survey reviews for over 20,000 recipients annually are conducted by Services Australia to measure payment accuracy, using a random sample of the population for 13 different payment types.
- Services Australia is focusing on the most effective actions to address key payment risks such as JobSeeker Payment, and is examining the impact of Single Touch Payroll as a key driver for improving the accuracy of recipient reporting of employment income.
- The Canberra Times reported on 25 July 2022 that the Department provided briefing that stated “robodebt remained contentious and conflated with government debt policy, and admitted public faith in the handling of debts needed repair.” (**Attachment A**).

Locational / place considerations

- LGAs which have been affected by recent flooding will remain under a debt pause.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Alexander Abel – Branch Manager
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	
Phone/Mobile:	
Clearance Date:	27 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	16/7/22

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Single Parent Payments

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Labor Government is committed to ensuring Australia has a strong social security safety net so that no one is left behind.
- We acknowledge the challenges parents can experience in the care of their children and so we maintain a range of programs and payments to provide support where it is needed.

KEY POINTS

- The Government is committed to helping parents balance their work and family responsibilities through a range of programs and payments.
- At the same time, the Government has a responsibility to ensure family assistance and social security payments are well targeted and sustainable into the future.
- While the support of children is primarily the responsibility of parents, financial assistance is available to help with some of the costs of raising children, recognising that costs vary at different stages and that parents' ability to participate in the workforce will generally increase as children get older.

If ASKED – What is the current rate of Parenting Payment***Single?***

- Parenting Payment Single is paid at a basic rate of \$855.00 per fortnight. Typically, when other supplementary payments are included, the total rate is \$898.40 (includes Energy Supplement, basic Pension Supplement and Pharmaceutical Allowance).
 - Depending on the number and ages of children in their care, a single Parenting Payment recipient receiving Family Tax Benefit may receive an additional \$537.74 per fortnight in payments to assist with raising their children. This could include per fortnight:
 - FTB Part A, one child aged 0 to 12 \$197.96
 - FTB Part B, youngest child under 5 years \$168.28
 - Commonwealth Rent Assistance up to a maximum fortnightly rate of \$171.50.

If ASKED – How is the Government supporting single parents with cost of living pressures?

- To address the effects of inflation on cost of living for those on a payment, such as Parenting Payment and JobSeeker Payment, payments are increased each year in March and September in line with the Consumer Price Index.
- The Government is also taking action to reduce the cost of childcare.

If ASKED - Is the role of the welfare system being contemplated as part of the new national plan to end violence against women?

- The social security system needs to be considered in the broader context of supports available to women to not only to leave a violent relationship, but also to establish a life free from violence, and start the journey towards recovery and healing.
 - In the first instance, this can include options such as Crisis Payment, and/or the Escaping Violence Payment (EVP).
 - Crisis Payment is a one-off payment available to income support recipients who have experienced an extreme circumstance, such as family or domestic violence. The amount paid is equal to one week of the maximum basic rate of the person's income support payment.
 - The EVP provides financial assistance of up to \$5,000 (with a cash component of \$1,500 and the remaining funds provided in goods, services and supports) to people who have experienced partner violence. Individuals do not need to be on a social security payment to access the EVP.
 - There are longer-term options available such as technology upgrades to stay safe, accommodation assistance, and counselling and support.
- Refer to **QB22-000038** for additional information on the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032.

If ASKED - Will you increase the rate of Parenting Payment Single to the Age Pension rate?

- While it historically shared some features with pension payments, Parenting Payment Single is a working age income support payment, sharing features with other income support payments for parents, including Parenting Payment Partnered and JobSeeker Payment.
- It would not be appropriate to align rates and indexation settings with pensions, which are designed to support people who are not expected to work due to age, disability or caring responsibilities.
- Parenting Payment is part of a wider system of support for families with children, which includes supplementary payments such as Family Tax Benefit, Child Care Subsidy and Rent Assistance.

If ASKED – Why should single parents have to move to JobSeeker payment when their youngest child turns 8?

- As children get older and attend school, most parents find they can increase their level of employment and reduce their need to rely on income support. It is important that payment arrangements for parents recognise this increased capacity and provide the best incentives for parents to participate in the workforce.
- JobSeeker Payment is the most appropriate payment for parents with older children as it is specifically designed to provide the right balance of financial support and incentives for recipients to find and maintain employment to support themselves.

- Nobody pretends that living on JobSeeker is easy.
- JobSeeker is designed to support Australians who are unable to support themselves whilst they look for a job or have a temporary injury or incapacity.
- JobSeeker is not designed to replace lost salary or wages.
- We know many Australians are doing it tough. They need and rely on the government supporting them.
- That's why we made a number of commitments to help with the cost of living – such as by cutting the cost of PBS co-payments, and making child care cheaper.
- As the Prime Minister has made clear, the Government will consider the rate of JobSeeker when we sit down to do the Budget each year.

CONTACT NAME: Alfred Opoku

POSITION: A/g Branch Manager, Participation and Supplementary Payments

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- Parenting Payment Single is designed to provide a safety net for single people who require financial assistance while they are unemployed and supporting their young children.
 - Payment ceases when a recipient's youngest child turns eight because the key eligibility criteria is based on a parent's reduced capacity to support themselves through employment due to their caring responsibilities.
 - Single principal carers on JobSeeker Payment are paid at the higher 'with child' rate of payment and also benefit from a single income test taper rate of 40 cents in the dollar.
 - : This allows single principal carers to keep more of their payment each fortnight, providing families with greater financial security.
 - : They also continue to have access to the existing range of supplementary benefits, including rent assistance, childcare fee assistance and family assistance payments.
- Parents receiving Parenting Payment or JobSeeker Payment usually have part-time mutual obligation requirements of 30 hours per fortnight once their youngest child turns six.
 - Parents can meet their mutual obligation requirements in several ways, including by looking for part-time work of at least 30 hours per fortnight or by undertaking part-time employment, study or voluntary work (in limited circumstances) for 30 hours per fortnight.
 - Parents are also able to undertake a combination of activities, for example part-time work and study, to meet their mutual obligation requirements.
- ParentsNext is a pre-employment program that aims to help parents to plan and prepare for employment before their youngest child reaches school age.
 - ParentNext aims to improve the labour market attachment of participating parents with young children, especially mothers. Improving work and study outcomes for parents benefits their children by reducing intergenerational disadvantage.
 - Usually, Parenting Payment recipients with a youngest child under the age of 6 do not have mutual obligation requirements. However, they may be required to participate in the ParentsNext program.
- The ABS Labour Force survey for June 2022 shows that the female seasonally adjusted participation rate has increased 0.9 per cent between June 2021 and June 2022 to 62.5 per cent, compared to a participation rate of 66.8 per cent for all Australians.

- Single parents make up around 28 per cent of working age payment recipients across Parenting Payment, JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (other).

	Receive Single with dependent child rate	All recipients	Proportion receiving Single with dependent child rate
JobSeeker Payment	112,024	831,601	13.5
Youth Allowance (other)	285	77,237	0.4
Parenting Payment (Partnered and Single)	231,999*	302,294	76.7
Total	344,308	1,211,132	28.4

Based on 24 June 2022 recipients by payment rate data – number of recipients receiving a single with dependent child rate of payment.

* For Parenting Payment, this is the number of recipients in receipt of Parenting Payment Single.

Changes to Parenting Payment eligibility since 2006

- In 2006, the Howard Government changed eligibility criteria and participation requirements for Parenting Payment as part of a broader set of Welfare to Work reforms, eligibility for new applicants for Parenting Payment was restricted to those with a youngest child aged less than eight years of age if single or six years of age if partnered.
- Those people who had been receiving PP since before 1 July 2006 remained on payment until their youngest child turned 16, subject to continued eligibility and meeting participation requirements from when their youngest child turned 7.
- From 1 January 2013, transitional arrangements were abolished meaning that, regardless of when they claimed payment, all parents could only receive PP until their youngest child turned 8 (for single recipients) or 6 (for partnered parents).
- Advocates including Anne Summers and the National Council for Single Mothers and their Children have called for the former arrangements to be reinstated, that is, for single parents to be able to receive PP until their youngest child turns 16.

Locational / place considerations

- Not applicable

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Family and Domestic Violence Housing

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- Keeping Australians safe and secure is a key priority for the Australian Government. Family and domestic violence disrupts housing security and is one of the leading causes of homelessness for women and children.

KEY POINTS

- **\$100 million** has been committed for crisis and transitional housing options for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence, and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness.
- This additional investment will supplement the **\$72.6 million** commitment already made to the Emergency Accommodation program (Safe Places program) to deliver emergency accommodation in regional, remote and metropolitan areas.

SAFE PLACES EMERGENCY ACCOMMODATION PROGRAM

- All 41 agreements are in place to deliver projects to renovate, build or purchase dwellings for women and children leaving family and domestic violence.
- Eight projects (Toora Women Inc, Centacare Housing Services, Normanton Hope, St Vincent De Paul Society (WA), Jireh House Anglicare NSW (Goulburn), the Salvation Army (SA) and Coast2Bay Housing Group have commenced delivering services.
- More than half of the total projects under the Safe Places program will be delivered in remote and regional Australia.
- The Safe Places program is for capital works only, and providers commit to providing wrap-around services as part of the funding agreement.

If required:

- The Safe Places program was initially established under the \$340 million investment to support the Fourth Action Plan to the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children 2010-2022.
- The initial Safe Places program grant funding will provide about 780 new safe places assisting up to 6,340 women and children experiencing family and domestic violence each year.

NATIONAL HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS AGREEMENT

- Under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) the Australian Government provides around \$1.6 billion a year to states and territory governments (states) to support housing and homelessness outcomes. States determine their priorities and the type and location of housing and homelessness services funded.
- Under the NHHA, **\$135 million** is set aside for homelessness services in **2022-23**. States are required to match this funding, with women and children affected by family and domestic violence one of the priority homelessness cohorts under the NHHA.
- States are responsible for the provision of day-to-day housing and homelessness services, and delivering frontline domestic and family violence services.

BACKGROUND

- The former Government announced the original Safe Places program funding of \$60 million on 11 February 2019.
- 131 applications were received for the Safe Places program.
- On 28 September 2020, the Australian Government announced funding for 40 projects.
- On 21 May 2021, the Australian Government announced funding of \$12.6 million for the program to support a further five safe places projects to assist women and children experiencing family and domestic violence in regional and remote areas of Queensland and Western Australia.
- As at 7 July 2022, 4 applicants¹ have withdrawn their projects, citing business reasons to not proceed with the project.

States and territories funding outcomes

- Funding will be provided to organisations across remote, regional and metropolitan locations to support projects across the nation.

Outcomes by state for original Safe Places program package (as at 7 July 2022)

State	Number of Projects	Total funding – \$ million *	Percentage of funding
ACT	2	2.00	3%
NSW	15	22.51	34%
NT	1	4.32	6%
QLD	8	13.90	21%
SA	2	5.10	8%
TAS	3	3.95	6%
VIC	5	2.14	3%
WA	5	12.90	19%
TOTAL	41	\$66.82[^]	100%

* Figures have been rounded and may not equal total.

[^] Excluding the \$1.8 million in departmental funding supporting the second tranche of funding.

¹ In January 2021, the Brisbane Sikh Temple withdrew its project from the Safe Places program. In July 2021, CatholicCare Sydney withdrew its project. In November 2021, Uniting Victoria Tasmania withdrew its project. In May 2022 Asteria Services withdrew its project in May 2022.

If ASKED - What is the expected commencement date for the \$100 million commitment for women fleeing violence and older women at risk of homelessness?

- The Government is committed to delivering crisis accommodation for women and children escaping family and domestic violence. Implementation planning is underway now and will be subject to Government decision-making processes. When further specific detail is available, it will be communicated to relevant stakeholders.

IF ASKED: Why is there no funding for FDV service delivery for Safe Places projects?

- The Safe Places program is a capital works grant program providing funding for organisations to build, renovate or acquire suitable accommodation to support women and children escaping family and domestic violence.
- All grantees are responsible for securing funding to support the dwellings operations, FDV support services, and ongoing maintenance of the facility.
- The Safe Places program is intended to complement state and philanthropic investment in specialist services.
- States are responsible for the provision of day-to-day housing and homelessness services, and delivering frontline domestic and family violence services.
- As part of around \$1.1 billion in funding for women's safety announced in the 2021-22 Budget, the Government is investing up to \$260 million for a two year National Partnership with state and territory governments, to support frontline family domestic and sexual violence services to trial new initiatives to support women and children experiencing violence.
- The Government has also committed \$157.8 million to generate 500 new jobs for community organisations, by providing funding for new frontline and community sector workers who can provide support to women and children experiencing violence.

IF ASKED: How many estimated additional safe places will be available in each state as a result of the first round of Safe Places program?

- The number of additional places available for women and children through the Safe Places program per year when the first round of grants is complete (by state) is expected to be:

State	Number of women and children who can be housed in safe places per year
ACT	92
NSW	3,204
NT	196
QLD	745
SA	204
TAS	786
VIC	271
WA	886
TOTAL	6,384

Note: The estimated number people assisted is based on the applicant claims of average numbers of people supported and is subject to all funding agreements being executed and delivered.

IF ASKED: Have any successful applicants withdrawn their projects? What is happening to the unallocated funding?

- Four applicants, Brisbane Sikh Temple, CatholicCare Sydney and Uniting Victoria/Tasmania, Asteria Services have withdrawn their projects from the grant opportunity.
- The list of successful applicants was always subject to change pending the outcomes of funding agreement negotiations.
- The funding allocated to the withdrawn projects will be used in the Safe Places program.

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POSITION: Branch Manager, Housing and Homelessness Program Delivery

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<i>Contact Officer's Name and Position:</i>	<i>Rob Stedman, Branch Manager, Housing and Homelessness Program Delivery</i>
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<i>Clearance Date:</i>	<i>1 August 2022</i>
<i>MO Clearance Date:</i>	<i>1/8/22</i>

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Housing and homelessness reforms****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government understands access to secure and affordable housing has significant social, economic and personal benefits.
- The former Liberal Government has left a legacy of inaction to support Australians to have access to secure housing.
- For too long the Commonwealth Government has not shown leadership in addressing these challenges. Because of this more Australians are struggling to rent or buy a home.
- One of Anthony Albanese first acts as Prime Minister was to put Housing and Homelessness in Cabinet.
- The Albanese Government acknowledges the housing challenges faced by many Australians and has committed to a housing reform agenda to improve housing and homelessness outcomes. This includes establishing:
 - a \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund;
 - a national Help to Buy shared equity scheme; and
 - a Regional First Home Buyer Support Scheme.
- In addition, the Albanese Government has committed to a number of strategic initiatives to improve housing supply and affordability in the short, medium and longer term, including
 - the establishment of the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council; and
 - the creation of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan.
- These initiatives are in addition to:

- the expected \$5 billion in Commonwealth Rent Assistance in 2022-23, which helps eligible Australians on income support payments pay their rent;
 - around \$1.6 billion through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) to support states deliver housing and homelessness services and programs; and
 - the initiatives delivered by the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation which provides affordable lending to grow the community housing sector and the Home Guarantee Scheme which supports more Australians to purchase their own home with a low deposit.
- The Albanese Government is committed to working collaboratively with the states to design and implement the new system.
- Acknowledging this will take time, the Albanese Government has offered states an additional 12 months of NHHA funding (to 30 June 2024) to provide certainty and minimise disruption while the initiatives are put in place.

KEY FACTS

Housing Australia Future Fund

- The Albanese Government has committed to investing \$10 billion in a Housing Australia Future Fund.
- The returns from the Housing Australia Future Fund will build around 30,000 new social and affordable housing properties in its first 5 years. This includes:
 - 20,000 social housing properties – 4,000 of which will be allocated for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness
 - 10,000 affordable homes for frontline workers like police, nurses and cleaners.

- Each year, investment returns from the Fund will be used to fund social and affordable housing projects.
- In addition to this, a portion of the investment returns will be made available to fund acute housing needs on an ongoing basis. In the first 5 years, this includes:
 - \$200 million for the repair, maintenance and improvements of housing in remote Indigenous communities
 - \$100 million for crisis and transitional housing options for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness
 - \$30 million to build more housing and fund specialist services for veterans who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness.
- The Albanese Government is working closely with states and consulting stakeholders on the design of the Fund.

Help to Buy

- Help to Buy is a shared equity scheme which will allow 10,000 eligible home buyers a year with a minimum deposit of 2 per cent to purchase a new or existing home with an equity contribution from the Government.
- The Albanese Government has committed to providing an equity contribution of up to a maximum of 40 per cent of the purchase price of a new home and up to a maximum of 30 per cent of the purchase price for an existing home.
- This will mean Australians can buy a home with a smaller deposit, smaller mortgage and smaller mortgage payments.

Establishing this new program is a key priority of the Albanese Government.

Regional First Home Buyer Support Scheme

- The Regional First Home Buyer Support Scheme will help 10,000 first home buyers a year in regional Australia to buy a home. The Scheme will provide a government guarantee of up to 15 per cent of the purchase price of a home for eligible first home buyers. This will enable eligible applicants with a 5 per cent deposit to avoid paying Lenders Mortgage Insurance.
- The Government will announce further details on the Scheme in due course. Establishing the Scheme is a key priority for the Albanese Government.

National Housing Supply and Affordability Council

- The Albanese Government will establish a National Housing Supply and Affordability Council (the Council). The Council will help ensure the Commonwealth plays a leadership role in increasing housing supply and improving housing affordability.
- The Council will be advised by experts from a diverse range of relevant fields including finance, economics, urban development, residential construction, urban planning and social housing sectors.

National Housing and Homelessness Plan

- The National Housing and Homelessness Plan will be developed in collaboration with key stakeholders including state and territory governments, local government, not for profit and civil

society organisations, industry bodies, superannuation funds and other experts in housing, finance and urban development.

- It will be informed by advice provided by the newly established National Housing Supply and Affordability Council and will set out the key short, medium and longer term reforms needed improve housing and homelessness outcomes across the spectrum, including to make it easier for Australians to buy a home, easier to rent, and put a roof over the heads of more homeless Australians.

If ASKED – when will the Government start building the new social and affordable homes? / how long will it take for individuals to benefit from the Government’s new housing commitments?

- The Government is in the early stages of designing the specifics of these new initiatives, and many of these initiatives require legislative amendment. For example, legislation will be required to establish the Housing Australia Future Fund and will need to start producing a return on the \$10 billion invested before these returns can be used to build social and affordable housing.
- The Government is working to implement its initiatives quickly, in consultation with stakeholders and states. The housing agenda is a priority for the Albanese Government.

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PHONE: s 47F

POSITION: Branch Manager

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Julia Chandra, Branch Manager
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Clearance Date:	22/07/2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Housing and rental affordability, including Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government understands access to secure and affordable housing has social, economic and personal benefits for all Australians.
- The former Liberal Government has left a legacy of inaction to support Australians to have access to secure housing.
- For too long the Commonwealth Government has not shown leadership in addressing these challenges. Because of this more Australians are struggling to rent or buy a home.
- The rental market is tight across the country, with low vacancy rates in capital cities and regional areas. High demand in the private rental market has resulted in rising rents, with affordability declining in almost all markets.
- The Albanese Government is committed to building more social housing, upgrading existing housing and making sure the promise of home ownership is extended to all Australians.
- The Albanese has a comprehensive housing agenda aimed at making it easier for all Australians to own or rent a house. We want every Australian to have the security of having a roof over their head and have hit the ground running on these important housing reforms.

KEY FACTS

- In 2022-23, the Government expects to spend around \$5.0 billion in Commonwealth Rent Assistance to around 1.4 million households receiving income support with the cost of private rental or community housing.
- In addition, the Albanese Government has committed to a comprehensive housing agenda which includes:
 - The \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund, the returns of which will be used build around 30,000 social and affordable houses over the next 5 years;
 - establishing a National Housing Supply and Affordability Council;
 - the development of a comprehensive National Housing and Homelessness Plan;
 - the Help to Buy scheme and, for regional homebuyers, the Regional First Home Buyer Support Scheme.
- Combined, these policies will support access to housing, align the efforts of the Commonwealth and state and territory Governments to deliver better housing outcomes and increase housing supply and affordability for renters and buyers across Australia.
- To date, the National Housing and Finance Investment Corporation's (NHFIC) Board has approved more than \$2.9 billion of loans to Community Housing Providers (CHPs) under the Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator (AHBA). This has supported the delivery of more than 15,000 new and existing social and affordable dwellings.
- The Home Guarantee Scheme has supported more than 61,000 Australians to buy their own home.
- The Government has expanded the Home Guarantee Scheme to include: 35,000 places each financial year to support first home buyers to purchase a home with a deposit of as little as five per cent (the First Home Guarantee); and 5,000 places each financial year to support single parents with dependents to purchase a home

with a deposit of as little as two per cent (the Family Home Guarantee).

General housing affordability facts refer to QB22-000071 Key Facts (Housing, Homelessness and social and affordable housing)

Rental affordability

- Rental market conditions have continued to tighten in most cities and regions, reflected by rising advertised rents and falling vacancy rates.
- Advertised rents (i.e. rents on newly signed contracts) increased in the year to July 2022 by 9.8 per cent nationally (Core Logic July Home Value Index, released 1 August 2022).
- ABS CPI rents (i.e. household out of pocket rental costs for existing rental contracts in capital cities) rose in the March quarter 2022 by 0.6 per cent.
 - Rents in Sydney and Melbourne recorded small rises in the March quarter. Rents across the remaining capital cities continue to record relatively stronger rises, reflecting low vacancy rates.

Low Vacancy rates

- Core Logic data shows vacancy rates in July 2022 fell to a record low of around 1 per cent or lower across many parts of Australia.

Rate of CRA

- The Albanese Government is committed to ensuring Australia has a strong social safety net as we navigate increases to the cost of living.
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) is an important component of the income support and family payment systems. It contributes to the improvement of housing affordability and complements broader income support objectives by assisting individuals and families with rental costs.
- The Government expects to spend \$5 billion on CRA in 2022-23 to support around 1.4 million households receiving income support.

- Further, the Government provides around \$1.6 billion per year to states and territories under the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. Under the NHHA, states are responsible for the day to day provision of housing and homelessness services.
- States have introduced a range of measures and new investment to support improved housing and homelessness outcomes in their jurisdictions. The Albanese Government will work collaboratively with states to boost and leverage States recent investments.
- The Albanese Government's commitments reflect an ambitious reform agenda aimed at improving housing affordability, including but not limited to increasing the level of social and affordable housing through the \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund, which will build 30,000 social and affordable homes within its first five years:
 - 20,000 social housing properties of which 4,000 will be allocated for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness.
 - 10,000 affordable homes for frontline workers like police, nurses and cleaners.

CONTACT NAME: Julia Chandra
 PHONE: s 47F

POSITION: Branch Manager

BACKGROUND

Rental Market Data

- Advertised rents are an indicator of rents on newly signed contracts and are a leading indicator of ABS CPI rents.
- ABS CPI rents measures household out-of-pocket rental costs for existing rental contracts in capital cities. ABS CPI rents measures average rental costs across all capital cities (differs from rent data drawn from advertised rents) and is slower to respond to tight conditions in the rental market.

ABS CPI data reflect two-speed rental market across capital cities

- The positive growth (in the quarter to March 2022) for Sydney and Melbourne was mainly driven by rising rents for houses, while other dwellings recorded a relatively smaller rise in Sydney and a small fall in Melbourne. Rental conditions for other dwellings remained subdued in Melbourne reflecting higher vacancy rates.
- Rents for both houses and other dwellings increased at a similar rate in the remaining capital cities.

Consumer Price Index (Rents) - Annual change from June quarter

Capital City	June 2018	June 2019	June 2020	June 2021
Sydney	2.2%	0.3%	-3.0%	-1.5%
Melbourne	1.9%	1.7%	0.1%	-0.8%
Brisbane	-0.5%	0.3%	-0.4%	1.7%
Adelaide	0.7%	0.8%	1.2%	1.8%
Perth	-6.6%	-3.7%	-1.0%	3.3%
Hobart	3.5%	5.9%	5.0%	2.8%
Darwin	-5.8%	-4.5%	-6.2%	1.4%
Canberra	2.7%	3.2%	1.7%	2.4%
Australia	0.6%	0.4%	-1.2%	0.0%

Source: ABS 2021, Consumer Price Index

Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)

- The current legislative design of CRA was introduced in March 1993 under reforms to the Social Security Act 1991.
- The amount of CRA received is based on the amount of rent paid and the person's family situation (single, couple, how many children, if any).
- The 'rent threshold' (minimum amount of rent that a tenant needs to pay) to receive CRA is set at a level that is considered to be a reasonable.
- CRA is paid at 75 cents in the dollar from the rent threshold up to the maximum payment applicable to the person's family situation.
- CRA payments are adjusted each year in March and September, in line with Consumer Price Index increases.

CRA settings, as at March 2022

Family situation	Rent Threshold	Rent Ceiling	Maximum payment
Single, no children	\$130.20	\$324.60	\$145.80
Single, sharer, no children	\$130.20	\$259.80	\$97.20
Couple, no children	\$210.80	\$394.00	\$137.40
Single 1 or 2 children	\$170.94	\$399.61	\$171.50
Single 3 or more children	\$170.94	\$429.10	\$193.62
Couple 1 or 2 children	\$252.70	\$481.37	\$171.50
Couple 3 or more children	\$252.70	\$510.86	\$193.62
Couple, illness separated	\$130.20	\$324.60	\$145.80
Couple, temporarily separated	\$130.20	\$313.40	\$137.40

Source: Services Australia

CRA Reform

- On 22 December 2021, the Productivity Commission released an Issues paper to guide submissions for the Review of the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). The Issues paper refers to findings from previous reports examining CRA's adequacy and effectiveness, noting:
 - While CRA reduced housing stress among private renters, the maximum rate of assistance and indexation has not kept pace with increases in rents over time.
 - CRA could be better targeted: some people who receive the payment appear to be unlikely to experience rental stress, while other low-income renters with high rates of rental stress are not eligible for the payment.
- States have requested a review of CRA in their submissions to the PC's review of the NHHA.
- A number of stakeholders have advocated for increasing CRA maximum payment rates to address adequacy of payments (i.e. Grattan Institute (2022) by 40 per cent, ACOSS (2020) by 50 per cent, AHURI (2020) by 30 per cent).

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF**National Housing and Homelessness Agreement****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government understands access to secure and affordable housing has social, economic and personal benefits for all Australians.
- The former Liberal Government failed to show leadership in this space, I am proud to be a part of the Albanese Government committed to a large housing reform agenda.
- I am pleased to say the Albanese Government has offered states and territories (states) a one year extension to the National Housing and Homelessness Agreements, to 30 June 2024, to provide certainty while we work with states and key stakeholders across the housing spectrum to implement our housing agenda.
- As a first step in working together, I met with Housing Ministers (July 15 2022) to discuss how we can work together to address the significant housing and homelessness challenges facing Australia.
 - This included discussion on States priorities and challenges and how the Albanese Government's initiatives will boost and leverage States recent investments to increase social and affordable housing.
- The Albanese Government's early focus will be on working with stakeholders across the housing spectrum to implement its housing agenda. States are key partners and the Government is committed to working with States to design and implement these reforms.
- The Government is working with States to consider the future role of the NHHA, in the context of its housing agenda.

- The Productivity Commission is expected to deliver its final report on its review of the NHHA by the end of August 2022.

KEY FACTS

- The NHHA is the overarching agreement through which the Australian Government funds States to deliver housing and homelessness services and programs.
- The NHHA will provide around \$1.6 billion to States in 2022-23, including \$135.0 million for homelessness services which States are required to at least match.
- This is in addition to around \$5 billion in Commonwealth Rent Assistance (2022-23), initiatives under the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation to finance the community housing sector, and the Home Guarantee Scheme.
- The Government will deliver a comprehensive and ambitious Housing agenda, to respond to pressures and gaps in the current housing arrangements.
- Addressing housing affordability is complex, with no short-term solutions. Establishing the Housing Australia Future Fund, the National Supply and Affordability Council, and developing the National Housing and Homelessness Plan will take time to implement.

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POSITION: Branch Manager

BACKGROUND

NHHA

- The objective of the NHHA is to contribute to improving access to affordable, safe and sustainable housing across the housing spectrum, including to prevent and address homelessness, and to support social and economic participation.
- The NHHA is a multilateral agreement between the Commonwealth and the States and is supported by bilateral schedules between the Commonwealth and individual States.
- The NHHA provides considerable flexibility and scope for States to determine their spending on housing and homelessness related activities and services based on the specific needs in their jurisdiction.
- NHHA funding allocated to state and territories from 2018-19 to 2022-23.

(\$millions)	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	Total
2018-19	476.2	395.3	314.3	163.6	107.6	33.2	25.9	19.7	1,535.8
2019-20	482.7	405.3	320.5	166.9	109.3	33.8	26.5	19.9	1,564.9
2020-21	489.9	411.8	328.1	171.3	111.4	34.6	27.2	20.4	1,594.5
2021-22	495.0	415.9	334.4	174.5	113.0	35.1	27.6	20.7	1,616.2
2022-23	501.8	423.0	341.8	178.1	115.0	35.7	28.0	21.1	1,644.5
5 year total	2,445.6	2,051.3	1,639.2	854.3	556.2	172.5	135.2	101.7	7,955.9

Source: NHHA Budget model 2022-23

Productivity Commission Review of the NHHA

- On 13 December 2021, the Productivity Commission (PC) commenced a review of the NHHA to determine the extent it is meeting its objectives (as required under clause 54 of the NHHA). The review seeks to determine how well the Australian and state governments have achieved the objectives, outcomes and outputs of the NHHA.
- The Review is considering a range of issues across the housing spectrum, including homelessness, social housing, affordable housing and assistance for low-income renters, housing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, and Australia's Disability Strategy.
- Over 100 submissions have been made to the PC, including state and territory governments, housing industry peak bodies and organisations, social welfare organisations and service providers amongst other groups. The Department of Social Services lodged its submission on 25 March 2022.
- In their submissions to the PC Review, the majority of States are calling for the establishment of a national governance forum; the establishment of a broad policy-based national strategy; additional funding and national consistency and efficiency in data collection.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Home Equity Access Scheme (formerly Pension Loans Scheme)

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Home Equity Access Scheme (the Scheme) allows eligible Australians over Age Pension age to supplement their retirement income by unlocking the equity in their home through an Australian Government loan.
- The Scheme is available to both pensioners and self-funded retirees, and is similar to a reverse mortgage product.
- From 1 July 2022, participants have the option of accessing modest lump sum advance payments in addition to the fortnightly payment option the Scheme has always provided.
- Also from 1 July 2022, all participants benefit from a No Negative Equity Guarantee, ensuring they never have to repay more than the equity in the property they used to secure their loan.

KEY FACTS

- As at 30 June 2022, there were 6,041 participants with the Scheme growing by nearly 700 per cent since July 2019.
- The average age of a participant is 75 years.
- The average term of a loan is around 7 years.
- Around 73 per cent of Scheme participants receive the maximum rate of Age Pension.
- The **fortnightly payment option** allows participants to receive up to 150 per cent of the maximum Age Pension rate, less any pension payment they already receive.

- Maximum-rate pensioners can receive up to an extra 50 per cent of the pension rate.
- Self-funded retirees can receive the full 150 per cent of the pension rate.
- Part-pensioners can receive an amount in between, depending on the level of their part payment.
- This means a participant can use the Scheme to increase their fortnightly pension plus loan payment to a maximum of around:
 - \$1,480 for singles
 - \$2,230 for couples combined.
- The **lump sum advance option** allows participants to receive up to two lump sum payments in any 26 fortnight period, to a combined total of 50 per cent of the maximum annual rate of Age Pension.
- On current pension rates, the maximum advance is around:
 - \$12,840 for singles
 - \$19,355 for couples combined
- Any advance payment will reduce the maximum fortnightly loan amount a person can receive over the subsequent 26 fortnights.
- Payments under the Scheme accrue compound interest, currently at a rate of **3.95% per annum**.
- The loan must be repaid on the sale of the securing property, or out of the participant's estate.
- Voluntary repayments are not required, but can be made at any time.

Retirement village properties

- People who own retirement village properties may be eligible for the Scheme depending on their individual circumstances. The requirements are the same as for other property owners.
- To use the Scheme, a person must have freehold or equivalent title to property, including land, to offer as security for their loan.
- This allows the Commonwealth to assess whether the security is adequate for a loan which may extend over many years, with no repayments required until the end of the participant's life or when the property is sold.
- Retirement village models vary widely by jurisdiction and provider.
 - Some models do provide the kind of title that can be used for the Scheme.
 - Models that rely on lend lease, leasehold or similar arrangements do not provide land ownership and cannot be used as security for the Scheme.
- Commercial reverse mortgages have similar security requirements.

No Negative Equity Guarantee

- The No Negative Equity Guarantee brings the Home Equity Access Scheme into line with a key requirement placed on commercial reverse mortgage providers since 2012.
- The risk of a Scheme participant getting into a negative equity situation is low.
 - The Scheme includes maximum loan-to-value ratios that limit the total amount a participant can borrow based on their age and the equity they have in the securing property.

- Whether a participant chooses fortnightly payments, advance payments (or both), the total amount they can borrow per year is limited to 150 per cent of the maximum pension rate less any pension they already receive.
- The Australian Government Actuary estimates the amount of Scheme debt not expected to be repaid is well below 1 per cent.
 - Debt Not Expected to be Repaid (DNER) is a standard financial reporting measure for Commonwealth debt repayment arrangements.

BACKGROUND

- There were **6,041 participants** at the end of June 2022. Usage of the Scheme has grown by nearly 700 per cent since July 2019.
 - This followed changes to the Scheme which allowed access to full rate pensioners and all self-funded retirees for the first time.
- The 1 July 2022 changes are expected to drive further growth in participant numbers over the next few years. In particular, the introduction of advance payments gives people an entirely new way to use the Scheme. Previously, only a fortnightly income stream was available.

Table 1: Home Equity Access Scheme - participants by payment rate since June 2020

Date:	June 2019	June 2020	June 2021	June 2022
Total participants:	768	3,142	4,380	6,041
Maximum rate of pension	0	2,016	3,080	4,389
PLS Only (no pension paid)	91	176	206	299
Part rate - Income test:	269	568	591	746
Part rate - Assets test:	274	304	368	429
Others (registered for Scheme but not receiving loan, e.g. deceased persons):	134	78	134	178

- The total outstanding loan balance for the Scheme, as at 30 June 2022, is around \$138 million.

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PHONE: s 47F

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Indigenous Housing****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government recognises the important work to be done to support Indigenous housing. I understand there is so much more to do.
- The Albanese Government has committed several new initiatives to support Indigenous housing. These include allocating \$200 million from the returns from the Housing Australia Future Fund for the repair, maintenance and improvements of housing in remote Indigenous communities.
- In addition, the Government has committed to \$100 million to fund housing and essential infrastructure on Northern Territory homelands and negotiate a new remote housing agreement with the Northern Territory.
- Target 9 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is a joint commitment to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88 per cent. The Government has several initiatives to support this target (see below).

KEY FACTS

- The Government currently invests:
 - around **\$1.6 billion** annually to the states and territories through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA). The PC Review of the NHHA (due to Government by 31 August) is expected to provide specific findings regarding the effectiveness of the objectives, outcomes and outputs of the NHHA, which includes consideration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a homelessness priority cohort.
 - around **\$5 billion** in 2022-23 in Commonwealth Rent Assistance to help all eligible Australians pay their rent in the private market or in community housing.
 - **\$550 million** from 2018-23, matched by the Northern Territory government, for the National Partnership for Remote Housing in the Northern Territory to help reduce overcrowding through increasing the supply and standard of public housing in remote communities and town camps.
 - **\$150 million** in the 2020-21 Budget over three years to Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) to deliver 360 new construction loans in regional Australia. As at 30 June 2022 IBA has approved **95 home loans** to the value of **\$41 million**.
- According to the **2021 Census**, there was an improvement in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized housing from the baseline of **78.9 per cent** in 2016 to **81.4 per cent** in 2021.

- The Government is also supporting specific actions under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap aimed at improving Indigenous housing:
 - Under Priority Reform 1 (formal partnerships and shared decision making), housing is one of 5 sectors identified for shared decision making and policy partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments.
 - The Housing Policy Partnership will be established in late 2022.
 - Under Priority Reform 2 (building the community-controlled sector), housing is one of 4 key sectors identified for building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled sectors to deliver services.
 - Working with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association a Sector Strengthening Plan has been drafted.
 - This Plan will be considered by the Joint Council on Closing the Gap for agreement in August 2022.

CONTACT NAME: Julia Chandra	POSITION: Branch Manager Housing and Homelessness Policy
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BACKGROUND

Closing the Gap Target 9

- Target 9 of Closing the Gap seeks a 9.1 percentage point nationwide increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in appropriately sized dwellings from 78.9 per cent in 2016 to 88.0 per cent by 2031.
- The breakdown of states and territories' progress towards Target 9 is below:

	2016 (non-Indigenous) Census	2016 Census	2021 Census	% change 2016-2021
NSW	90.4	85.9	87.5	1.9
Vic	92.8	87.6	88.8	1.4
QLD	94.6	79.4	81.2	2.3
WA	95.5	75.2	78.8	4.8
SA	94.6	82.5	82.8	0.4
Tas	95.2	89.9	88.8	-1.2
ACT	95.1	91.6	90.7	-1.0
NT	90.2	38.4	43.4	13.0
Australia	92.9	78.9	81.4	3.2

Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in appropriately sized housing sourced from ABS Census.

- The indicator for Target 9 relies on the Canadian National Occupancy Standard with crowded dwellings defined as needing one or more bedrooms.
- The indicator for Target 9 considers overcrowding in the context of appropriately sized housing and does not consider other factors including security of tenure, dwelling design and quality and the affordability of housing.

Housing Sector Strengthening Plan

- The Sector Strengthening Plan contains 14 key actions to strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing sector and sets an agenda for the next three years to prioritise, partner and negotiate on agreed actions.
- State and territory governments will determine their priorities and actions and will progress these actions through their Closing the Gap Implementation Plans.
- The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA) is the national peak Indigenous housing organisation and co-chaired the Housing Sector Strengthening Plan Working Group. NATSIHA has recently received funding through the Closing the Gap Virtual Funding Pool for assistance in establishing its organisation.

Historical Partnership Agreements for Remote Indigenous Housing

- From 2008 to 2018 the Australian Government invested \$5.4 billion to reduce remote overcrowding and improve the standard of housing through National Partnership Agreements for Remote Indigenous Housing. These investments delivered 4,000 new houses and 7,500 refurbishments across 300 Indigenous communities.
- Any further questions about remote housing agreements should be referred to the Minister for Indigenous Australians the Hon Linda Burney MP.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

National Rental Affordability Scheme

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS, the Scheme) is an Australian Government affordable housing initiative, delivered in partnership with state and territory governments.
- The former Liberal Government has left a legacy of inaction to support Australians to have access to secure housing, including cutting NRAS in 2014 – 8 years ago.
- NRAS will continue to operate until June 2026, with properties progressively exiting the Scheme as their 10 year timeframe for incentives ends.
- As the 10 year timeframe concludes, ongoing tenancy arrangements will be a matter for discussion between tenants, property manager, approved participants and investors who own the dwellings.
- The Albanese Government is committed to working with states and territories as we work to implement a number of new initiatives from the Commonwealth, including the Housing Australia Future Fund.
- The Albanese Government understands access to secure and affordable housing has significant economic and personal benefits.
- We are working to help Australian households more easily access safe and affordable housing through a number of new initiatives including establishing:
 - a Housing Australia Future Fund;
 - a national Help to Buy shared equity scheme; and
 - a Regional First Home Buyer Support Scheme.

- In addition, the Albanese Government has committed to a number of strategic initiatives to improve housing supply and affordability in the medium and long term, including:
 - the establishment of the National Housing Supply and Affordability Council; and
 - the creation of a National Housing and Homelessness Plan.

KEY FACTS

- In 2021, NRAS provided affordable rental homes to around 55,000 people including individuals and families.
- As at 31 March 2022, there were 28,596 NRAS dwellings.
- NRAS dwellings are located roughly in proportion to the population with about 91 per cent of NRAS dwellings located in Major Cities and Inner Regional.
- Allocations started exiting the Scheme in 2018, with 4,210 NRAS dwellings exiting the Scheme this year.
- In the 2022-23 NRAS year, the total incentive for an NRAS dwelling is \$11,168.56 (\$8,376.42 Commonwealth and \$2,792.14 states and territories).
- There have been no new allocations made under NRAS since 30 June 2016.

BACKGROUND

NRAS

- NRAS commenced in 2008, its purpose is to provide an annual, retrospective financial incentive for up to 10 years to housing providers (known as approved participants), to rent dwellings to eligible people on low to moderate incomes at a rate at least 20 per cent below market rent.
- At the conclusion of the 10 year incentive period, NRAS dwellings remain subject to all relevant state government tenancy laws, with respect to lease agreements and rental increases.
- Some NRAS dwellings are held by endorsed charities, which may include Community Housing Providers (CHPs) who are subject to charters, which include restrictions on rent such as limiting rent to 80 per cent of market rates or charging no more than 30 per cent of household income.
- These arrangements are specific to CHPs, and may continue upon dwellings exiting NRAS.
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance will still be available for eligible tenants.
- The National Rental Affordability Scheme Regulations 2020 (NRAS Regulations) strengthened investor protections under the Scheme.
- There are protections for investors in circumstances where an approved participant would have superior bargaining powers to force those investors to purchase certain services from providers specified by approved participants, such as a tenancy management (or similar) or a service from providers (section 65).
- There are now also protections for investors in relation to paying excessive fees or charges if they do not purchase certain services from providers specified by approved participants. This includes, requiring approved participants to pass on incentives and not terminate an arrangement because an investor uses an alternative service and does not pay a bond to the approved participant (section 66).
- These provisions along with the Code of Conduct, which all approved participants must comply with, aims to protect the interests of investors and promote the integrity of the Scheme (section 27).

Kenjad Pty Ltd as Trustee for the Kenjad Trust (Kenjad)

- The Department of Social Services has received complaints from several investors about Kenjad, alleging breaches of the NRAS Regulations.
- On 3 March 2021, Kenjad appealed 4 individual breach determinations issued by the department to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT).
- The AAT hearing was held over 2 days from 1-2 November 2021, with decisions in the proceedings currently reserved.

NRAS Allocations and incentives

- The incentive is issued to housing providers (“approved participants”) to provide affordable rental dwellings to eligible tenants on low to moderate incomes at least 20 per cent below market rates.
- The maximum rent charged for a dwelling may change throughout the ten-year incentive period, in line with changes in market rent valuations (MRV) which are provided on the 5th and 8th anniversary of the incentive period. The MRVs are assessed by the department in order to confirm the valuation is compliant with the NRAS Regulations.
- The income levels for eligible tenants are specified in the NRAS Regulations. Each year, household income limits are indexed according to percentage changes in the All Groups component of the Consumer Price Index.
- Tenants cease to be eligible tenants if their combined gross income exceeds the income limit for their household by 25% or more in two consecutive eligibility years.

Initial Household Income Limits for the 2022-23 NRAS year (i.e. the period 1 May 2022 to 30 April 2023):

2022-23 NRAS Year	Initial income limit
First adult	\$54,643
First sole parent	\$57,474
Each Additional Adult	\$20,905
Each child*	\$18,127

*(under 18 years of age and financially dependent on an eligible tenant)

Locational / place considerations

- The below table shows the locations where dwellings are ending in Scheme, areas with the greatest number of dwellings ending in the Scheme will have the greatest impact on tenants ability to source alternative accommodation.

State	Allocations ceasing by calendar year					
	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Total
NSW	356	605	1,140	1,186	2,008	5,295
Vic.	561	1,356	2,143	388	0	4,448
Qld.	2,273	2,499	2,845	603		8,220
WA	273	1,110	920	891	1,574	4,768
SA	386	806	1,079	240	2	2,513
Tas.	127	25	321	98	596	1,167
ACT	86	93	542	60	361	1,142
NT	148	125	188	532	50	1,043
Total	4,210	6,619	9,178	3,998	4,591	28,596

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Support for Self-funded Retirees, Deeming Rates, Downsizing

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Government recognises the valuable contribution self-funded retirees make to Australia's economy through the steps they have taken during their working lives to provide for their retirement.
- Retirees are expected to use their own resources to support themselves where they are able to do so.
- The Government appreciates that self-funded retirees' income and assets may have been affected by the volatility in financial markets over recent years.

KEY POINTS

Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC) income limits

- The Government is **increasing the CSHC income limits** to \$90,000 a year for singles and \$144,000 a year for couples.
 - This change will allow more self-funded retirees to access Commonwealth pharmaceutical and medical concessions.
- This change requires legislation. As Parliament did not sit before 1 July 2022, the increase could not be implemented as planned.
- Subject to legislation passing, the increase will take effect on **20 September 2022** (see **QB22-000068**).

Freezing the Social Security Deeming Rates for Two Years

- The Government is easing cost of living pressures on pensioners and self-funded retirees by **freezing the social security deeming rates** at their current levels for two years to 30 June 2024.

- A **lower deeming rate of 0.25** per cent applies to the first \$56,400 of a single recipient's total financial investments or the first \$93,600 of a pensioner couple's total combined financial investments.
- An **upper deeming rate of 2.25** per cent applies to financial investments above these amounts.
- The thresholds at which the upper deeming rate applies are reviewed in line with the Consumer Price Index in July each year. This will continue during the freeze.
- **The deeming freeze benefits self-funded retirees** seeking to access a part-pension or the CSHC by ensuring they are not affected by deeming rate changes for the next two years.
- Even if a person does not qualify for an Australian Government concession card, the Government still provides assistance with medical and prescription costs by way of subsidies for higher cost Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines and the **general thresholds** for the PBS and Extended Medicare safety nets.

Incentivising Pensioners to Downsize

- The Government is making downsizing easier for pensioners and some other income support recipients by reducing the social security impact of selling their family home and buying a new one.
- From 1 January 2023 (subject to passage of legislation), the Government will:
 - Extend the assets test exemption on principal home sale proceeds from **up to 12 months to up to 24 months** to give people more time to purchase or build their new home; and

- Ensure only the lower deeming rate of **0.25 per cent** is applied to principal home sale proceeds during the exempt period.
- Currently, when a person sells their principal home and intends to buy or build a new home, the sale proceeds are exempt from the assets test for up to 12 months.
 - A 12 month extension is available under extenuating circumstances and will continue to be available (so in such circumstances a person will be able to access a total of 3 years exemption).
- At present, the usual deeming rules are applied to the exempt home sale proceeds under the income test.
 - The high value of most homes means the bulk of the proceeds are deemed at the upper rate of **2.25 per cent**.
 - This can significantly impact a person's income support payment.
- Applying only the lower deeming rate of **0.25 per cent** during the asset test exemption period reduces the impact on a person's payment.
 - It recognises people intending to purchase a new home often invest those funds in lower returning, more liquid investments.
 - These changes will cost an estimated \$61.4 million over the forward estimates and are expected to benefit around 7,100 income support recipients in the first year.

Other options available for self-funded retirees

- Self-funded retirees of Age Pension age can access the **Home Equity Access Scheme** (formerly Pension Loans Scheme) to supplement their retirement income through an Australian Government loan (see **QB22-000042**).

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Age Pension and Indexation

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Labor Government appreciates the important economic and social contribution senior Australians make to our community and ensures pensioners' living standards are safeguarded by the Age Pension.
- The Government understands the challenges Australian households are facing with increasing cost of living pressures, especially those on fixed incomes, such as pensioners.
- The Government is committed to a welfare system that supports the most vulnerable, encourages those who are able to work or study, and is sustainable for future generations.
- The indexation process ensures payments maintain their value over time. It complements the levers the Government is pulling across portfolios to help address the rising cost of living.
- These indexation arrangements have operated for many years under various governments.
- Older Australians are also able to supplement their retirement income by accessing the equity in their home through the Home Equity Access Scheme (see **QB22-000042**) and benefit from the exemption of the principal home from the assets test
- The Albanese Government is also helping to address cost of living pressures on older Australians by:
 - Freezing the social security deeming rates for two years; and
 - Lifting the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card income limits.

KEY POINTS

- Pensions are paid at the highest rate of income support in the social security system as pensioners are not expected to work to support themselves, due to age, disability or caring responsibilities.
 - Recipients of other payment types have greater capacity to support themselves or supplement their income through paid work.
- Pensions are indexed in March and September. Indexation is based on the higher of the 6-monthly increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living Cost (PBLCI).
- After indexation to prices, pension rates are then compared to the Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) benchmark and if necessary, increased to match the benchmark. This ensures they keep pace with community living standards as measured by increases in wages.
- As a result of indexation, pension rates increased on 20 March 2022, by **\$20.10 a fortnight for singles** and by **\$30.20 a fortnight** for couples combined.
 - The current maximum fortnightly rates (including Pension Supplement and Energy Supplement) are **\$987.60 a fortnight for singles** and **\$1,488.80 a fortnight for couples combined**.
 - The next indexation of pensions will be on 20 September 2022.
- Pensioners can access a range of other benefits and concessions to assist them with living costs, such as Commonwealth Rent

Assistance for those who rent, subsidised medicines, health care and aged care, and other concessions provided by state and territory governments.

- Pensioners over Age Pension age who want to supplement their pension with employment income also benefit from the **Work Bonus**, which allows them to keep more of what they earn (**see QB22-000058**).

If ASKED – Is the Government doing enough to address the cost of living crisis?

- Recent price increases primarily reflect a confluence of supply side problems including those stemming from the pandemic, the invasion of Ukraine, global energy price shocks and severe weather events. These factors have combined with a shift in consumer demand towards goods and capacity constraints in specific sectors to generate significant near-term price pressure.
- Many of the external shocks are expected to moderate as supply-side pressures ease beyond 2022, when inflation is expected to be increasingly driven by underlying factors.
- Indexation is one of the ways the social security system assists people with increases in the cost of living.

If ASKED – Why is there a delay between prices going up and payments being indexed?

- Indexation settings need to balance responsiveness with achievable and efficient administration.
- Some delay is necessary as the Australian Bureau of Statistics takes time to measure and release economic parameters such as prices and wages. For 20 September 2022 indexation:
 - CPI was released on 27 July 2022
 - PBLCI will be released on 3 August 2022
 - MTAWWE will be released on 18 August 2022
- New rates also need to be built into Services Australia's systems to ensure people are paid the right amounts.

If ASKED – Is the Age Pension fair for people who paid taxes their whole lives?

- Australia has a non-contributory Age Pension system, meaning the Age Pension is not based on past income or contributions, or taxes paid during a person's working life.
- Eligibility is based on age and residency requirements. The amount a person receives is based on a means test, which considers the person's levels of income and assets. This helps target Age Pension payments to those who need it most.
- Pensions such as the Age Pension are paid at the highest rate of income support in the Australian social security system because recipients are not expected to work to support themselves.
- The retirement income system contains other components that supplement the Age Pension safety net, including superannuation and private savings.

If ASKED – How does the Minister respond to the class action to reduce pension age for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders?

- We cannot comment on ongoing legal matters.
- The Government is committed to working with Indigenous communities to achieve better life outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

CONTACT NAME: Caitlin Delaney

POSITION: Branch Manager, Payment Structures and Seniors

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

Indexation

- Pension increases are calculated according to provisions in social security law. They are not based on individual decisions of government.
- Base pensions are indexed twice a year, in March and September, to the higher of the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and the Pensioner and Beneficiary Living cost Index (PBLCI).
 - PBLCI was introduced to ensure pension indexation better reflects changes to pensioners' costs of living. It takes into account the goods and services pensioners buy – not what the rest of the community buys.
 - For March indexation, the growth in CPI or PBLCI for the six months to December is used.
 - For September indexation, the growth in CPI or PBLCI for the six months to June is used.
- Pensions are also benchmarked to MTAWWE to align them with community living standards.
 - This provides an important mechanism to ensure pensioners' income increases in line with improvements in living standards, noting pensioners are not expected (or not able) to supplement their income through paid work.
 - With low wage growth in recent years, there has not been a need to apply the MTAWWE benchmark since September 2013.
- Importantly, social security law also provides a protection to recipients to ensure pensioners' living standards do not go backwards.
 - Payment rates, free areas and thresholds remain the same, even if price indices fall.
 - This is why pension rates did not decrease on 20 September 2020.
- The current maximum fortnightly rates (including Pension Supplement and Energy Supplement) are \$987.60 a fortnight for singles and \$1,488.80 a fortnight for couples combined.

Age Pension eligibility

- Consistent with legislation passed in 2009, the Age Pension qualification age has been increasing by six months every two years until it reaches 67 years on 1 July 2023. It is currently 66.5 years.
- To receive the Age Pension, a person must also satisfy the residence requirements and have income and assets below certain limits.

Deeming rates

- The Government announced deeming rates will be frozen for two years, remaining at their current levels until 30 June 2024. This will support pensioners who rely on income from deemed financial investments (see **QB22-000059**).

Locational / place considerations

- N/A.

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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY / COST OF LIVING

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- Australians are doing it tough. The most vulnerable Australians are at the moment making decisions between basic things like paying for their vegetables or paying for their rent. The Albanese Labor Government is committed to a welfare system that supports the most vulnerable Australians, encourages those who are able to work or study, and importantly is sustainable for future generations.

KEY POINTS

- The Government understands the challenges Australian households are facing with increasing cost of living pressures, especially those on low and/or fixed incomes.
- We inherited a budget heaving with a trillion dollars of debt so we need to be responsible when it comes to budget management, not only for now but also for future generations.
- The inflation figure out just released is confronting and the reality it is likely to get worse, which will have impacts on cost of living and the pressures Australians are under.
- It is not possible with our budget constraints to fund every good idea that people might have about cost of living relief.
- We need to tread a pretty careful path when it comes to budget. We need to make sure that everything we do ticks more than one box – both cost of living relief and also economic dividend.
- Childcare relief - which in opposition I helped to champion - and relief in the cost of medicines are key areas we are looking at. I have also just introduced today changes to the income threshold for the Commonwealth

Seniors Health Card which will enable 50,000 more self-funded retirees to get access to the card with higher income thresholds. This will reduce cost of living pain for older Australians, in line with our commitment to leave no one behind and hold no one back.

- There are good ideas and other things we might contemplate through the normal budget processes but we are intent on being responsible economic managers and we are operating under some pretty severe constraints and economic conditions.
- The cost of living package flagged in the October Budget will have a focus on long-term and sustainable relief, addressing the costs of childcare, power bills and medicines, among others. But it will be responsible.
- In our social security system, indexation is one of the ways to address increases in the cost of living as rates move in line with movements in consumer prices. Payments such as Job Seeker are indexed to increases in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Pensions, as long-term payments for those who are not expected to support themselves through paid work, are increased by the higher of the growth in CPI and the Pensioner and Beneficiary Cost of Living Index (PBLCI) and linked to community living standards through benchmarking to wages.
- Income support recipients may also be eligible for other benefits to assist with living costs, such as Family Tax Benefit for those with children, Commonwealth Rent Assistance for those who rent, subsidised medicines, health care and aged care, and other concessions provided by state and territory governments.

If Asked – Do you think that a payment of \$45.91 per day is an adequate amount for JobSeeker Payment recipients? ACOSS is calling for an increase of JobSeeker Payment rate to \$70 a day.

- JobSeeker Payment is designed to support Australians who are unable to support themselves whilst they look for a job or have a temporary injury or incapacity.
- As the Prime Minister has made clear, the Government will consider the rate of JobSeeker Payment at every Budget update from next year. This Government will always strike a balance between what is affordable and responsible and what people need. We're committed to our core principles of leaving no one behind and holding no one back.
- We don't want welfare to be punitive and we will help those who most need it but we have to look at this from a whole-of-budget context.
- Along with the basic rate of payment, everyone who receives JobSeeker Payment is eligible for at least one additional form of support which, depending on their circumstances, may include Commonwealth Rent Assistance for those who rent, Family Tax Benefit for those with children, as well as Pharmaceutical Allowance, Telephone Allowance and Energy Supplement.
- However, **JobSeeker Payment is not designed to replace lost salary or wages**. It is funded by taxpayers and this means we have an obligations to manage it in a sustainable and responsible way.
- The Government is holding a Jobs and Skills Summit on 1 and 2 September 2022. This will be followed by an Employment White Paper which will focus on keeping unemployment low and boosting participation.

- Together with the business sector, we will work through ways of expanding employment opportunities for all Australians including the most disadvantaged in our community and those facing barriers to work.

If Asked – Is the Government doing enough to address the cost of living crisis?

- The causes of recent price increases are complex and it will take time to address them. The Government has indicated that it would consider the rate of Job Seeker payment in future Budgets and do what it can to help those in need.
- It is estimated that through the Social Services portfolio the Government will spend around \$126 billion on income support payments, family assistance and student assistance payments in 2022-23.
- It is important that the government acts in a fiscally responsible manner so that the social security system is sustainable for the future.

CONTACT NAME: Alfred Opoku

POSITION: A/g Branch Manager, Participation and Supplementary Payments

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Key Facts about cost of living comments by key stakeholders

1. The current basic single rate of JobSeeker Payment is \$642.70 per fortnight. This rate is scheduled to be indexed on 20 September 2022, which will take into account recent inflation data.
2. ACOSS has called for the basic rates of all income support to be raised to \$70 per day, indexed to wages. This could be expected to cost tens of billions of dollars over the forward estimates.
3. The table below summarises proposed increases to the basic rate of JobSeeker Payment by various organisations.

	Per fortnight	Per day	Percentage increase
Current rate	\$642.70	\$45.91	N/A
Grattan Institute	\$792.70	\$56.62	23.3 per cent
BankWest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC)	\$922.70	\$65.91	43.6 per cent
ACOSS	\$980.00	\$70	52.5 per cent
The Greens	\$1,232.00	\$88.00	91.7 per cent
Independents	\$792.70	\$52.62	23.3 per cent

4. Jacqueline Phillips, Director of Policy and Advocacy and Co-Deputy CEO of ACOSS, recently made the following statements about the adequacy of JobSeeker Payment:
 - “Those getting by on \$46 a day – who were already struggling to cover the basics – are now facing a long and extremely difficult winter with even more impossible choices to make”;
 - “We are hearing of people who are limiting their showers to every second or third day, turning off the heater to save on electricity bills, skipping meals to make sure their children can eat”; and
 - “Rising interest rates and the risk of landlords passing these costs onto renters is yet another blow to those already experiencing the impossible housing market.”

Contact Officer's Name and Position: Alfred Opoku,
A/g Branch Manager, Participation and
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DSS Input Cleared By: Jo Evans, Participation and Family Payments

Phone/Mobile: s 47F

Clearance Date: 20 July 2022

MO Clearance Date: 1/8/22

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Employment incentives for seniors****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- I thank the member for their question and their interest in this issue – but I do wonder why they didn't act on it when they sat on the Treasury benches a few months ago.
- The Albanese Labor Government is always ready to consider ideas to boost workforce participation or labour supply.
- We know the Coalition is keen for pensioners to work more – they raised the retirement age to 70!
- Pensioners are able to work now if they wish to and it won't affect their pension.
- It was the last Labor Government who introduced the Work Bonus in 2009.
- Pensioners will always be financially better off if they do some work.
- A single age pensioner, who has no other income, can earn up to \$490 a fortnight from work and still receive the maximum rate of the Age Pension. This equates to approximately 20 hours a fortnight at minimum wage.
- Or they could choose to bank the Work Bonus, up to \$7,800, in order to do a few weeks from time to time, picking fruit or doing other seasonal work, and it would not affect their pension.
- I want to ensure that all Australians have every opportunity to work. People living with a disability and assessed as being partially able to work; mature age people; the long term unemployed – I want to look at all of the existing barriers to work.

- That's why the Albanese Government is convening the Job Summit next month – we want to do better at helping any and all Australians who want to work but can't right now.
- I expect the pensioner work bonus will be a part of these discussions and I look forward to the Summit.

KEY POINTS

- The income free areas (\$190 single and \$336 couple) and taper rates means a part pension is payable up to an assessable income of \$2,165.20 a fortnight for a single pensioner or \$3,313.60 a fortnight for a pensioner couple.
- For age pensioners, the Work Bonus provides an additional employment incentive. Under the Work Bonus the first \$300 of work income a fortnight is not counted in the pension income test and does not reduce the amount of pension received.
 - The income free area and Work Bonus combined allow, for example, a single age pensioner with no other income, to earn up to \$490 a fortnight from work and still receive the maximum rate of the Age Pension.
 - Pensioners are able to build up any unused amount of the \$300 fortnightly concession in a Work Bonus income bank up to a total of \$7,800. Pensioners who may do intermittent blocks of work within this income bank may therefore see no impact at all on their pension.

○

- As at March 2022, only **3 per cent of age pensioners (75,706 people out of 2.6 million)** were taking advantage of the current Work Bonus concession.
- The low number of pensioners undertaking work is likely due to other factors, such as a desire to be retired, physical impairments, and the type of work available.
- The number of age pensioners with employment earnings has been declining over time, despite previous increases in the value of the concession.

CONTACT NAME: Caitlin Delaney

POSITION: Branch Manager, Payment Structures and Seniors

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Income test

- Under the income test, a pensioner and their partner can receive a certain amount of income before their pension starts to be reduced. This may comprise income from various sources and is known as the income free area.
- From 1 July 2022, the pension income free area is \$190 a fortnight for singles and \$336 a fortnight for couples combined.
- For each dollar of income over the income free area a single person's pension is reduced by 50 cents.
- For couples, each of their individual pensions is reduced by 25 cents a fortnight for each dollar of income the couple has over the income free area.
- From 1 July 2022, a part pension will be payable up to an assessable income of \$2,165.20 a fortnight for a single pensioner or \$3,313.60 a fortnight for a pensioner couple.

Work Bonus

- As of 1 July 2022, a single age pensioner with no other income is able to earn up to \$490 a fortnight from work and still receive the maximum rate of the Age Pension.
- Pensioners are able to build up any unused amount of the \$300 fortnightly concession in a Work Bonus income bank, up to a total of \$7,800. This amount can be used to exempt future earnings from the pension income test.
- This means a pensioner could earn up to \$7,800 a year extra without it affecting their pension.
- The income bank amount is not time-limited – if unused it carries forward, even across years.

Work Bonus History

- The Work Bonus was first introduced in 2009 as an incentive for age pensioners to undertake employment.
 - Under the original design, half of the first \$500 of employment income earned in a fortnight was excluded from the income test (e.g. \$200 was excluded if a person had \$400 of employment income).
- In 2011 the Work Bonus was set to \$250 per fortnight and the Income Bank (\$6,500 per year) was introduced.
- From 1 July 2019, the Work Bonus increased to \$300 a fortnight and the maximum income bank amount increased to \$7,800 per year.
 - Despite the increase, the percentage of pensioners with employment income has declined from 4.3 percent in June 2019 to around 3 percent in March 2022.

Tax Concessions

- Retirees who choose to work also receive tax relief.
- Tax concessions such as the seniors and pensioners tax offset and low and middle income tax offsets, together with the tax free threshold of \$18,200, mean single senior Australians with incomes up to \$33,088 (or \$29,783 for each member of a couple) pay no income tax.

National Seniors Australia proposal

- National Seniors Australia's 'Let pensioners work!' campaign seeks to exempt employment income from the income test for age pensioners with limited wealth or savings.
 - National Seniors Australia's Chief Advocate, Ian Henschke, sent correspondence on 27 June to a number of Ministers outlining their proposed policy.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Caitlin Delaney, Branch Manager, Payment Structures and Seniors
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Clearance Date:	1827/07/2022
MO Clearance Date:	1/8/2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF
Unlegislated unimplemented Measures

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Government inherited a list of unlegislated unimplemented measures from the previous government.
- Each measure is being carefully reviewed and considered.
- The Government will be considering these measures and expects to make an announcement on them in the near future.

CONTACT NAME: s 22 - Out of scope
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POSITION: Executive Officer, Pensions, Housing and Homelessness

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

See **Attachment A** for a full list of Unlegislated unimplemented measures in the Social Security stream.

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MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

Delay to implementation of commitment to increase the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card income limits

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- During the 2022 Election, the Government committed to increase the income limit for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card.
- The increase requires legislation, so it was not possible to implement it on 1 July as planned.
- Last week the Government introduced legislation to increase the income limits, which if passed, are due to take effect from **20 September 2022**.

KEY POINTS

- The Government will increase the income limits for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card:
 - from \$57,761 to **\$90,000 for singles**; and
 - from \$92,416 to **\$144,000 for couples** (combined).
- This change is expected to assist **over 50,000 self-funded retirees** by providing access to concessional Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines, the concessional threshold for the PBS Safety Net and the concessional threshold for the Extended Medicare Safety Net.
- The income test for the card takes into account a person's adjusted taxable income plus deemed income from any account based pensions (the most common form of superannuation). There is no assets test.
- This commitment is expected to cost **\$69.4 million** over the forward estimates.

Indexation of the income limits

- The increase to the income limits, which are due to take effect from 20 September, will replace annual indexation for 2022.
- The income limits are indexed each year on 20 September by changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI).
- Annual indexation will continue each year from 2023.
- This is the largest increase to the income limits since 1999, equivalent to many years' of annual indexation in a single step.
- Following the significant increase to the income limits in 2001, indexation ceased until 2014.

Why is this change not being backdated to 1 July 2022

- People who become eligible for a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card under the new income limits from 20 September 2022 will be able to count any Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) prescriptions they have purchased during the calendar year toward their concessional PBS Safety Net threshold for 2022.
- Similar arrangements apply for the Extended Medicare Safety Net.
- This is the largest increase to the income limits since 1999.
- The increase is ongoing and will continue to benefit new cardholders in future years, including through annual indexation of the income limits.

CONTACT NAME: Caitlin Delaney

POSITION: Branch Manager – Payment Structures and Seniors

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- A bill to implement this commitment, the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (Lifting the Income Limit for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card) Bill 2022, was introduced on 27 July 2022.
- There are currently around 435,000 CSHC holders. The increase to the income limits is expected to result in at least an additional 45,000 CSHC holders in the first year, increasing to over 50,000 by the end of the forward estimates period (2025-26).

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) Safety Net

- The PBS Safety Net applies for a person or family per calendar year. Once a person or family's applicable out-of-pocket expenses for PBS medicines have reached a threshold amount, they are eligible for the PBS Safety Net.
- There are different threshold amounts for general and concessional patients/families.
- For people with a concession card, the concessional threshold has been reduced to \$1,457.10 from 1 July 2022. After they have spent this amount on concessional PBS medicines during 2022, they are eligible to receive PBS medicines for free for the rest of the calendar year.
- If a person changes from being a general patient to a concessional patient during the calendar year (e.g. from 20 September), they will become eligible for the concessional Safety Net threshold.
- Any prescriptions they purchased during the portion of the year when they didn't have a concession card will be counted towards the concessional threshold, but only at the concessional co-payment rate of \$6.80.

Extended Medicare Safety Net (EMSN)

- The EMSN provides additional benefits for people and families with high out-of-pocket costs for out-of-hospital Medicare funded services during a calendar year.
- Once a person or family's out-of-pocket costs (amounts paid above the Medicare benefit for the service) reach the relevant EMSN threshold, their Medicare benefit will cover 80 per cent of their out-of-pocket costs for the remainder of the calendar year.
- For people with a concession card, the EMSN threshold for 2022 is \$717.90.
- If a person changes from being a general patient to a concessional patient during the calendar year (e.g. from 20 September) they become eligible for the concessional EMSN threshold. Any out-of-pocket costs they have already incurred for 2022 are counted toward this threshold.

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MO Clearance Date:	25 July 2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Key facts social housing and homelessness****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government understands access to secure and affordable housing has social, economic and personal benefits for all Australians.
- The former Liberal Government was inept at supporting social and affordable housing and has left a legacy of inaction to support Australians to have access to secure housing.
- The Albanese Government is proud of the fact that we are showing leadership in this space.
- The Albanese Government is committed to working with states and territories as we work to implement a number of new initiatives from the Commonwealth, including the Housing Australia Future Fund.
- I was pleased to recently host a meeting of Australia's Housing Ministers, the first in almost 5 years, to help progress our housing reform agenda and demonstrate this Government's commitment to collaboration and leadership to support more Australians to have a place to call home.

KEY FACTS

- There are over 200,000 households on social housing waiting lists.
- There are 440,192 social housing dwellings across the country (as at 2021).
- States and territories will build 15,000 new social housing properties over the next few years.

- There were 116,427 people homeless on Census night in 2016.
 - New census data on homelessness is expected to be released in 2023.
- Indigenous Australians are over 7 times more likely to experience homelessness.
- The 2016 census also showed an increase in homelessness for:
 - Older females 6,866 (31 per cent increase)
 - Older males 11,757 (26 per cent increase)

Government Action

- In 2022-23, through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, the Government will provide around \$1.6 billion to states to assist with social housing and homelessness.
 - This includes \$135 million to assist the delivery of critical frontline homelessness services, which the states must match.
- The Albanese Government is establishing the Housing Australia Future Fund. This \$10 billion initiative will build **30,000 new social housing and affordable homes in its first 5 years**, including 20,000 social housing properties and 10,000 affordable homes.
- Investment returns from the Housing Australia Future Fund will also be made available to fund acute housing needs on an ongoing basis. In the first 5 years, this includes:
 - \$100 million for crisis and transitional housing options for women and children fleeing domestic and family violence and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness

- \$30 million to build more housing and fund specialist services for veterans who are experiencing homelessness or are at risk of homelessness.

CONTACT NAME: s 47F
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POSITION: s 47F

BACKGROUND

Social housing

- *Housing Assistance in Australia 2021* released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) provides a snapshot of social housing dwellings across Australia. At 30 June 2021 there were around 440,200 social housing dwellings:
 - 68 per cent were public housing dwellings, 25 per cent were community housing dwellings, 3 per cent were state owned and managed Indigenous housing and 4 per cent were Indigenous community housing.

Table 1: Social housing dwellings by state and territory at 30 June each year from 2017 to 2021

Year	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
2021	159,527	80,611	72,086	42,615	46,572	14,361	11,829	12,591	440,192
2020	156,019	80,599	71,424	43,113	46,576	14,274	11,921	12,407	436,333
2019	156,756	81,121	71,429	43,584	46,406	14,034	11,862	12,526	437,718
2018	156,260	80,488	71,045	44,059	46,624	13,288	12,076	12,373	436,213
2017	154,293	80,168	71,331	44,332	47,433	13,479	11,960	12,665	435,661

Data sourced from *Housing Assistance in Australia 2021 Social Housing Data tables*, AIHW

Table 2: Social housing waiting lists (as at 30 June 2021)

State	Public housing	SOMIH*	Community housing	Total
NSW	45,429	2,810	n/a	48,239
Vic	51,859	n/a	285	52,144
Qld	21,274	6,016	27,933	55,223
WA	17,207	n/a	458	17,665
SA	15,988	592	11,815	28,395
Tas	4,144	n/a	421	4,565
ACT	2,880	n/a	328	3,208
NT	4,727	2,680	n/a	7,407
Aus	163,508	12,098	41,240	216,846

Source: Report on Government Services 2022, Table 18A.5-18A.7.

* State Owned and Managed Indigenous Housing

Homelessness

- The Government's understanding of homelessness is informed by estimates of homelessness derived from the homelessness estimates in the **Census of Population and Housing** published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), as well as service usage statistics from **specialist homelessness services (SHS)** published by the AIHW.
- As per Table 3, between 2006 and 2016, homelessness estimates increased, driven by increases in severe crowding (44 per cent of all homelessness).
- There were 116,427 people homeless (50 per 10,000) on Census night in 2016, up from 89,728 persons (45 per 10,000) in 2006.
- Indigenous Australians are over 7 times more likely to experience homelessness (361 persons per 10,000), largely due to severe overcrowding in remote Australia.
- Newly arrived migrants and young people are overrepresented in homelessness estimates (157 per 10,000 and 73 per 10,000 respectively in 2016) and are more likely to experience severe overcrowding and 'couch surfing'.

- Older males experiencing homelessness increased from 9,350 in 2011 to 11,757 in 2016 (increase of 26 per cent). Men accounted for 63 per cent of older people experiencing homelessness in 2016.
- Older females experiencing homelessness increased from 5,234 in 2011 to 6,866 in 2016 (increase of 31 per cent). Older women are the fastest growing homelessness cohort.

Table 3: Census estimates of homelessness by state and territory from 2001 to 2016

Year	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total	Rate (per 10,000)
2016	37,715	24,817	21,671	9,005	6,224	1,622	1,596	13,717	116,427	50
2011	27,479	22,306	19,039	9,191	5,816	1,537	1,738	15,330	102,439	48
2006	22,219	17,410	18,856	8,277	5,607	1,145	949	15,265	89,728	45
2001	23,041	18,154	19,316	9,799	5,844	1,264	943	16,948	95,314	51

Data sourced from *Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness, ABS*

- As per Table 4, homelessness service usage has remained relatively stable, however, the number of **unassisted requests** for homelessness services **rose by 19.7 per cent** (to 114,026) in 2020-21.
- Around a third of homelessness services clients are Indigenous, a third have a mental health issue, and just under half are experiencing family and domestic violence.
- Three-quarters of clients accessing services for family and domestic violence are female and 60 per cent of all clients are female.
- 53 per cent of clients listed accommodation as a contributing factor, 34 per cent were experiencing a housing crisis, and 29 per cent nominated housing affordability stress as a factor.

Table 4: Clients assisted by SHS agencies by state and territory from 2016-17 to 2020-21

Year	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Total
2020-21	70,588	105,510	41,227	24,470	18,610	6,567	4,012	10,122	278,275
2019-20	70,372	115,306	43,094	24,956	19,218	6,444	4,143	10,277	290,462
2018-19	73,549	112,919	43,087	24,871	19,637	6,623	3,808	9,646	290,317
2017-18	71,628	116,872	41,118	23,739	19,641	6,508	4,026	9,285	288,795
2016-17	74,216	109,901	41,438	24,626	20,771	7,789	4,585	9,187	288,273

Data sourced from *Specialist homelessness services annual report (published annually around December), AIHW*

Recent media on social housing, affordable housing and homelessness

- *Social housing stock barely changes as waiting lists blow out and rental stress rises across Australia*, The Guardian 29 June 2022.
 - The article highlights the low-growth in social housing dwellings and increases in social housing waiting list. The article highlights recent growth of social housing dwellings in New South Wales and forthcoming investment in Victoria as positive signs.
- [Social housing stock barely changes as waiting lists blow out and rental stress rises across Australia | Housing | The Guardian](#)

- *Tent sales surge in South Australian town as desperate homeless families shelter from cold*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation 1 July 2022
 - The article highlighted a 'big surge' in the number of people purchasing tents and increasing numbers of people seeking homelessness assistance in regional areas. The article highlighted vacant property stock as a contributing factor.
[Tent sales surge in South Australian town as desperate homeless families shelter from cold - ABC News](#)
- *Can we solve Australia's housing crisis? Ambitious plan launched to eradicate rental stress and lower homeless rate*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation 1 August 2022.
 - Homelessness Australia has launched a plan calling on state and federal governments to invest in 50,000 homes a year and increase current annual funding allocated to states for housing. The plan would include investing in 25,000 affordable rental properties per year for low-income earners, plus an additional 25,000 social housing properties.
[Can we solve Australia's housing crisis? Ambitious plan launched to eradicate rental stress and lower homeless rate - ABC News](#)
- *Calls for more social housing and higher allowances for Tasmania's homeless youth*, Australian Broadcasting Corporation 3 August 2022
 - A recent Mission Australia survey found during the COVID pandemic, more than one in 30 young Tasmanians experienced homelessness for the first time. The article points to rising rents and a large group of people on low incomes as contributing factors. Peak bodies Shelter Tasmania and Youth Network call for an increase in Youth Allowance and for more social housing to be allocated to young people.
[Calls for more social housing and higher allowances for Tasmania's homeless youth - ABC News](#)

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MO Clearance Date:	4/08/22

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

National Redress Scheme

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- The Albanese Government is committed to delivering a timely, trauma-informed, accessible Redress Scheme that supports and recognises survivors of institutional child sexual abuse.

KEY POINTS

- For many survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, lodging their redress application is the first time they have told anyone what happened to them.
- I recently announced funding of **\$39.2 million** over 2 years for free and confidential support services for survivors to access the National Redress Scheme.
- 43 services are funded to provide support to survivors, including 15 new providers from July with at least one new provider in each state and territory.
- As at 29 July 2022, 17,783 applications have been received by the Scheme, with 10,038 outcomes issued to survivors.
- There are currently 598 institutions participating in the Scheme.
 - In addition, there are 73 unique institutions where the Commonwealth, with state and territory governments, have taken responsibility under Funder of Last Resort arrangements.

If ASKED – What is the average application processing time?

- Processing times can vary, depending on the complexity of an application, or whether an institution has joined.
- Each application is considered carefully and given as much attention as its individual circumstances require.
- Over the life of the Scheme, the average processing time from the date the Scheme first receives an application until notifying an outcome is **11.8 months**.
 - This includes time outside the Scheme's control, such as when gathering information from institutions or applicants.
- The Scheme continues to look for improvement opportunities at each step of the application process to maximise efficiency.

If ASKED – What is the current status of Fairbridge applications?

- I recently declared expanded Funder of Last Resort arrangements to cover the five Australian Fairbridge farm schools.
- This means jurisdictions can now fund redress payments for applicants in circumstances beyond a child being a ward of the state.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

- As at 29 July 2022:
 - 17,783 applications for Redress have been received by the Scheme
 - 10,038 outcomes have been issued to applicants
 - 9,342 applications have been finalised
 - 8,968 payments have been made, totalling approximately \$781 million dollars
 - The average payment is \$87,119 (which is 34.0% higher than the Royal Commission's estimate of \$65,000)
 - 7,953 applications are currently on hand being processed
 - 676 offers have been made and are awaiting an applicant's decision
 - 740 applications are with institutions to provide information
 - 83% of applications name multiple institutions, with 34% of applications naming four or more institutions
 - 1,587 applications are on hold
 - 488 have been withdrawn
 - 1,305 applicants are eligible for advance payment and 885 advance payments have been made
 - 46 applicants have requested payment by instalments
 - 276,700 calls (approx.) have been made to the Scheme.
- To date, 5 institutions have been publicly named as declining to join the Scheme: Woodlands Golf Club (VIC), CYMS Basketball Association (VIC), Devonport Community Church (TAS), Forrest Tennis Club (ACT) and Kenja Communication (NSW).
 - Institutions which fail to join the Scheme will be publicly named, be ineligible for Commonwealth grant funding and may be stripped of their charitable status.
- To date, 73 individual institutions are declared under the FOLR arrangement. Of these
 - 66 institutions are declared under the original FOLR arrangement, which includes 10 institutions that are also declared under the expanded FOLR arrangement.
 - 17 institutions are declared under the expanded FOLR arrangement, including the Fairbridge Farm Schools in five states.
- Significant improvements made to the Scheme over the last 12 months include the removal of the statutory declaration requirement, introduction of a \$10,000 advance payment, payments by instalment and expanded Funder of Last Resort arrangements.
- As a result of recent improvements, claiming is easier, evidenced by the significant increase in applications lodged recently.
 - In the period 1 July 2021 to 12 March 2022, the Scheme received an average of 84 new applications per week. From 13 March 2022 to 30 June 2022, this increased to an average of 179 new applications per week.

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Clearance Date:	2 August 2022
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QUESTION TIME BRIEF

NDIS WORKFORCE

KEY ISSUE

- The Australian Government is committed to building a stronger NDIS workforce and service provider market to support NDIS participants to achieve their goals.

KEY FACT

- The NDIS will require around **83,000 additional workers** by 2024.
- Disability is one of the most female-dominated industries in Australia (**79 per cent**). Improving the skills and quality of this workforce will help to **increase women's workforce participation**, improve job quality, and support career pathways for women.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- The Government has committed to a review of the NDIS, which will include a focus on pricing, markets, compliance and quality and safeguards, and we will also develop a **comprehensive NDIS workforce strategy** to ensure NDIS participants can access the supports they need.
- The Workforce Strategy will address **attraction and retention, training, skills** development and career pathways, and ensure workers are **paid fairly**.
- The Workforce Strategy will also seek to **grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce** so NDIS participants can access culturally safe services, and support **NDIS service delivery in rural and remote areas**.
- The **high demand for workers** in the disability sector provides an opportunity to **employ Australians**, including entry-level jobs and employment opportunities for Workforce Australia participants.
- The Government is similarly committed to supporting people with disability to themselves participate in the workforce, including in the care economy.
- This Government will be convening a NDIS Jobs Summit next month & a National Jobs & Skills Summit on 1-2 September 2022, which will look at NDIS Workforce issues.

PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT

- The previous Government failed to address the systemic NDIS Workforce issues. Hence, the need for a NDIS Review.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED – Are you scrapping existing NDIS Workforce Plan initiatives?

- The NDIS is still facing significant workforce challenges. We need to make sure everything we do is well targeted and effective.
- As part of the development of the NDIS Workforce Strategy, we will review what worked and what didn't, and where the gaps are in previous plans and initiatives.

If ASKED – The NDIS National Workforce Plan: 2021-2025 was released June 2021. Why is an NDIS Workforce Strategy being developed?

- The review of NDIS pricing, markets and compliance and the development of a NDIS workforce strategy will be subject to detailed consultation and co-design of initiatives to ensure they have broad support and are effective, including having regard to areas the NDIS National Workforce Plan did not adequately address, including:
 - More solutions to address worker shortages in the sector and reduce worker turnover.
 - Improved pay and conditions for NDIS workers.
 - Skills uplift and career development opportunities for NDIS workers.
 - Reducing barriers to service delivery in remote areas of Australia and other thin markets including by growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and improving access to culturally safe services.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- The current NDIS workforce is estimated at **270,000 workers** across **20 occupations**.
- Of the estimated 270,000 workers providing services to NDIS participants:
 - **178, 000 (66 per cent)** are home-based support workers;
 - **63,900 (23.7 per cent)** are community-based support workers; and
 - **19, 900 (7.4 per cent)** are allied health workers
- The NDIS workforce will need to grow by an additional **83,000 workers by 2024** (in addition to replacing workers lost to workforce churn) in order to meet demand for disability services to support over 500,000 NDIS participants, this includes:
 - **60,900** additional home-based support workers;
 - **10,000** additional community-based support workers; and
 - **8,000** additional allied health workers.

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DSS Input Cleared By:	Debbie Mitchell, Deputy Secretary
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Clearance Date:	25 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION & SDA HOUSING

KEY ISSUES

- The Australian Government recognises that safe, affordable and suitable housing is essential for the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of all Australians, including people with disability.
- The Government is committed to ensuring that people with disability who are eligible for housing supports in the NDIS can access appropriate housing as soon as possible. A key focus is on improving the pathways for participants to pursue their home and living goals, including through Specialist Disability Housing (SDA), Supported Independent Living (SIL), Medium Term Accommodation (MTA), home modifications and Individualised Living Options (ILOs).
- States and territories also continue to have a key role to play as they are primarily responsible for the provision of disability housing through social housing, and the private rental and ownership markets.

KEY FACTS

SDA

- As at 30 June annualised SDA in active plans was \$271 million for 19,358 active NDIS participant with SDA supports. The total number of SDA dwellings as at 30 June 2022 was 7,086.

Home Modifications

- As at 31 March 2022, 14,891 participants had \$134 million in their plans for home modifications. The average home modification amount in NDIS plans as at 31 March 2022 is \$9,000.

SIL

- As at 30 June 2022, there were 26,950 NDIS participants receiving \$8.8 billion in SIL supports. The average plan budget was \$358,000.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- To improve the availability of accommodation through the NDIS the Government will be:
 - engaging with people with disability and providers about how to improve access and reduce red tape to make it easier and faster for eligible NDIS participants to access housing supports.
 - investigating the \$500 million underspend in SDA to ensure people are not missing out on housing.
 - pausing SIL reforms to ensure any future reforms are informed by consultation with the disability community.
- I have also asked the NDIA to rapidly examine these issues to ensure SDA funding decisions are made in a timely, consistent and accurate way.
- I will also be working closely with the Minister for Housing the Hon Julie Collins MP and state and territory Disability Ministers to increase supply of safe and affordable housing for people with disability, including social and affordable housing.
- The Terms of Reference for the SDA price review will be released shortly.
- We are ensuring the ToRs adequately address the issues to support the direction of the SDA market to ensure participants get the support they need.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED – Why haven't you released the terms of reference for the SDA price review?

- It is important the Government had time to review the proposed Terms of Reference and to ensure the review delivers the pricing certainty the sector is seeking to invest and grow the sector.
- The NDIA has committed to releasing the Terms of Reference for the SDA Price Review as soon as practicable. The Terms of Reference will be supported by a comprehensive communication plan.
- The NDIA's SDA Reference Group made up of representatives from the sector have had an opportunity to provide feedback and advice on the draft Terms of Reference.

If ASKED – Will you commit to completing the review by December?

- The SDA Pricing Review is a complex piece of analysis that will be undertaken in a number of stages. The SDA Pricing Review will involve extensive consultation with the sector, government jurisdictions, and industry stakeholders.
- The review will be completed in time to ensure any pricing outcomes can be implemented from 1 July 2023.

If ASKED – What will the impact of a delay in the introduction of the National Construction Code (NCC) minimum accessibility standards have on the supply of accessible accommodation for people with disability?

- The implementation of the new minimum accessibility standards through the National Construction Code is a matter for each state and territory.
- The Commonwealth through Building Ministers is working with all jurisdictions to ensure a coordinated transition and implementation of the NCC changes.

- Several states and territories, including the Northern Territory, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Tasmania have indicated they will adopt the minimum accessibility standards introduced into the NCC.
- For those states and territories that choose to implement these new provisions, there is expected to be a significant increase in the availability of new dwellings that are suitable for people with disability and we welcome that.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- As at 30 June 2022:
 - there were 19,358 active NDIS participants with SDA supports in their plans. Of these 4,720 (24 percent) were seeking a dwelling (new or alternative).
 - the annualised SDA in active plans was \$271 million.
 - the average SDA payment was \$10,523.
 - the total number of SDA dwellings was 7,086. Of these dwellings 3,987 were existing, 250 legacy, 2,775 were new builds and 74 new builds (refurbished).
 -
 - there were 319 active SDA providers.
- In 2011, the Productivity Commission forecast demand for SDA at full scheme would be approximately 27,880 or around 6.8 per cent of the total projected population of scheme participants. The expected total funding cost of SDA at full scheme was anticipated to be around \$700 million per annum. The forecast did not expect this level of expenditure would be reached until 2036.

NDIA Reporting

- The NDIA is now reporting on the end-to-end process for Home and Living applications and streamlining processes to improve timeframes.
 - In the June 2022 quarter, 7,616 Home and Living applications were closed or implemented and 62 per cent were finalised within 90 days.
 - At 30 June 2022, 3,973 applications remained in-progress. 2,964 in progress applications were waiting for a decision from the Home and Living Panel, while a further 1,009 were waiting for supports to be implemented in a Plan. Approximately 5 per cent of the open applications have been in progress for 90 days or more.

SDA Price Review

- A review of SDA pricing is required every five years under the SDA Pricing and Payments Framework. The next review was due to occur in the first half of 2023 with any changes to pricing to start from 1 July 2023.
- On 14 April 2022, the NDIA announced that it would bring forward commencement of the Review of the Specific Underlying Assumptions within the Pricing Methodology for SDA.
- The review will now take place in the second half of 2022 with pricing changes still to occur from 1 July 2023

Supported Independent Living

- On 1 July 2022, the price limits for all NDIS supports delivered by disability support workers, including in SIL, increased by 9 per cent.
- The price increase took into account a range of factors that have impacted the cost of delivering supports, and will ensure that the workers who support participants are properly compensated for their work.
- The Government has also made up to an extra \$514 million available to registered providers of activities of daily living and community participant supports to recognise costs of keeping participants safe, particularly during COVID-19, and the significant additional overhead costs incurred by providers this year.

SIL Demonstration Projects

- While changes to SIL are paused, the NDIA is working with participants and providers to design improved ways of delivering home and living supports, through Home and Living Demonstration Projects.
- Demonstration Projects look at different ways of delivering home and living supports to give greater flexibility to participants and providers.
- The Projects are designed to be outcomes-focused and encourage better practice and will help ensure participants get the right individual supports they need.

Individualised Living Options

- ILOs are an alternative to SIL and promote a more natural, inclusive type of living, with participants able to utilise their supports to live in a home environment of their own choosing, such as with friends, housemates or a host family.
- ILOs give participants greater control over where they live, with who, and how their supports are delivered.
- As at April 2022 there were approximately 890 NDIS participants living in ILOs, with the number of NDIS participants investing in exploration of ILO exploration and design growing consistently over the past 12 months.
- The market for ILOs is continuing to grow, with 76 per cent of providers who have claimed from ILO support line items having done so for the first time.
- However, the Government recognises there is still more to be done to support uptake of ILOs as an alternative to SIL, in particular by building awareness of the benefits offered by this model of home and living supports.
- The Government will continue to work with and listen to participants, providers and the broader disability community to progress continuous improvements to the ILO model.

Down to 10 Campaign

- The Summer Foundation recently launched (16 March 2022) it's down to 10 days campaign calling for faster, more accurate decisions around housing and supports for Australians with a disability.
- The Summer Foundation and Housing Hub released in June 2022 its Specialist Disability Accommodation Provider Experience Survey.
- Nine recommendations were made including improving the clarity on the demand side of the SDA market, using available supply of SDA and enhancing the quality of SDA funding decision.

National Construction Code (NCC)

- Building Ministers are scheduled to meet in late August 2022 and will consider NCC 2022, including final analysis from the Australian Building Code Board (ABCB) on proposed improvements to residential energy efficiency provisions for NCC 2022.
- Recognising the tight timeframes associated with Building Ministers not meeting until late August, and the complexity of other issues currently affecting the construction sector, the ABCB will recommend to Building Ministers that the publication date for NCC 2022 be further delayed from 1 September 2022, to be not earlier than 1 October 2022.
- In addition to this recommended deferral of publication, at the meeting in late August Building Ministers will be provided with the advice – requested at their March 2022 meeting from senior officials and the ABCB – on transition timeframes for the residential energy efficiency and livable housing provisions.

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DSS Input Clear By Luke Mansfield, Group Manager, Strategic Policy, Markets and Safeguards Group

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Clearance Date: 3 August 2022

MO Clearance Date: To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

COVID-19 RESPONSE – Vaccine Rollout and Winter Preparedness

KEY ISSUES

- The Government is committed to ensuring people with disability are included at every stage of our pandemic response.
- Increasing the uptake of vaccination among people with disability, including the additional booster dose where eligible, is a key priority of the Government to safeguard people with disability against serious illness from COVID-19.
- I am committed to working very closely with people with disability and other stakeholders as the Commonwealth continues to adjust and strengthen its COVID-19 response to the changing health impacts of the pandemic.
- The NDIA has implemented a range of responsive measures to support participants and providers to manage the impacts of the pandemic.
- Extensive communication campaigns and engagement activities have been implemented to promote vaccinations and assist Health agencies to provide vaccination opportunities to participants in high-risk settings.
- The NDIS provides funding to support providers with increased costs associated with the pandemic.

KEY FACTS

- Supported Independent Living (SIL) providers can continue to claim \$12.50 per RAT per support worker COVID-19 test, and participants can buy RATs with plan funding to safely access disability supports at no cost to them.
- National distribution of 6.8 million Rapid Antigen Tests (RAT) to SIL providers will be completed on 31 July 2022. This includes 160,000 for rural and remote locations. Access to the National Medical Stockpile is available where necessary.

- 90.2 per cent of eligible NDIS participants in residential settings (residential aged care and disability accommodation) have had three doses; 19.2 per cent ahead of the eligible general population aged 16 plus with three doses.
- 85.6 per cent in the broader NDIS cohort 16 plus group have had two doses; 75.6 per cent of those eligible have received three doses; 4.6 per cent ahead of the eligible general population aged 16 plus with three doses.
- Among 12-15 year old NDIS participants, the rate of vaccination has steadily increased, with 71.6 per cent with two doses and 3.8 per cent have received more than two doses. This is 8.0 per cent below the general population aged 12-15 who have had two doses.
- Among NDIS participants aged 5-11, 38.1 per cent have received two doses. This is 2.3 per cent below the general population aged 5-11 who have had two doses.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- Some people with disability feel they had been de-prioritised in the Commonwealth's response to the pandemic to date.
- The Government is committed to working with people with disability and the sector to continually adjust and strengthen the Government's pandemic response as circumstances change.
- At my request, people with disability, disability representative organisations, independent health experts, providers, unions and officials came together on 18 July 2022 to test the Commonwealth COVID-19 responses for people with disability to ensure they are robust in the face of the current wave of people infected with the BA.5 and BA.4 variants. .

The insights from this exercise are informing further work to strengthen our arrangements, with a particular focus on communication, workforce, infection control and vaccination.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED - How is the Government putting people with disability at the centre of the COVID response?

- Within 10 days of becoming Minister for the NDIS, I met with disability sector representatives, unions and people with lived experience to hear their concerns around the impacts of COVID-19 on people with disability.
- I am meeting with state and territory disability Ministers regularly and our collective pandemic response remains a key focus of conversation and collaboration.
- On 18 July 2022, a simulation testing exercise with health experts, people with lived experience, sector peaks, union officials and officials to test the effectiveness of the COVID-19 response for people with disability. Insights from this exercise highlighted strengths in our current response and areas for further work to be explored further across government.

If ASKED - What is the Government doing to increase vaccination rates?

- Compared to the general population, COVID-19 booster rates are higher among NDIS participants aged 16 years and markedly higher for those in residential disability settings and aged care.
- With the expansion of eligibility for a second booster (or 4th dose), officials are actively working with NDIS providers to accelerate the in-reach program for people with disability in residential settings, in line with ATAGI's updated guidance.
- We also remain focused on efforts to close the gap for young people and people with disability who are harder to reach outside the NDIS.

If ASKED - What is the mortality rate for people with disability and how does this compare with the general population?

- As of 31 March 2022, there have been 122 COVID-19 associated deaths among NDIS participants and 241 COVID-19 associated deaths among Disability Support Pension recipients.
- Every single death from COVID-19 is a tragedy and we will continue to work with people with disability, providers and health officials around vaccination and other controls that help reduce the risk of infection and protect those who do contract COVID-19 from serious illness.

If ASKED - Why are people with disability left out?

- Some people with disability feel they had been de-prioritised in the Commonwealth's response to the pandemic to date.
- Within 10 days of becoming Minister for the NDIS, I met with disability sector representatives, unions and people with lived experience to hear their concerns around the impacts of COVID-19 on people with disability.
- At my request, people with disability, disability representative organisations, independent health experts, providers, unions and officials came together on 18 July 2022 to test the Commonwealth COVID-19 responses for people with disability to ensure they are robust in the face of the current wave of people infected with the BA.5 and BA.4 variants.
- The insights from this exercise are informing further work to strengthen our arrangements, with a particular focus on planning, co-designed communications, workforce supports and of course use of data to inform targeted approaches that drive up vaccination rates.
- This will ensure people with disability who are at greatest health risk from COVID-19 are not left behind in our pandemic response.

If ASKED - Why don't people with disability get the flu vaccine for free?

- People with disability who are at increased risk of complications from influenza are able to receive a free flu vaccine, under the Commonwealth's National Immunisation Program.
- People eligible for a free flu vaccine include:
 - all children from 6 months to less than 5 years of age
 - all adults aged 65 years and older
 - pregnant women
 - all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over
 - individuals aged 6 months and older with medical conditions which increase the risk of influenza disease complications:
 - cardiac disease
 - chronic respiratory conditions
 - chronic neurological conditions
 - immunocompromising conditions
 - diabetes and other metabolic disorders
 - renal disease
 - haematological disorders
 - children aged six months to 10 years on long term aspirin therapy.
- All National Immunisation Program influenza vaccines are free, but a GP or other health care provider (such as a pharmacy) may charge a consultation/administration fee for the visit.
- In some states and territories, influenza vaccines may also be provided for free to other people not eligible under the Commonwealth National Immunisation Program.

BACKGROUND/KEY FACTS

Vaccination

- With the current increase in COVID-19 infection, all Australians including people with disability, are encouraged to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccination, including a 2nd booster (fourth dose) if eligible.
- We are ensuring NDIS participants in higher risk residential accommodation settings have an opportunity to receive their booster doses through in-reach to their home where this is their wish.
- The Portfolio continues to promote vaccinations for people with disability via social media and official websites.
- Eligible NDIS providers can currently claim \$75 per participant per COVID-19 dosage when they support a participant to receive a COVID-19 vaccination, and \$100 for any disability support worker booster vaccination
- The NDIA has also encouraged participants to get vaccinated through partnerships with trusted organisations, including support coordinators and the Pharmacy Guild of Australia.

Vaccination rates

- NDIS Participants (As at midnight July 18 2022)
 - 5-11 years:
 - **49.4% at least one dose (2.9% below general population)**
 - 38.0% two doses
 - 12-15 years:
 - 76.0% at least one dose
 - **71.6% two doses (8.0% below general population)**
 - Aged 16+
 - 87.0% at least one dose (10.7% below general population)
 - 85.5% two doses (10.5% below general population)
 - **75.5% eligible three doses (4.6% ahead of general population)**
 - 23.4% four or more doses
 - NDIS participants in residential disability accommodation
 - 89.0% at least one dose (8.7% below general population)
 - 87.6% two doses (8.4% below gen pop.)
 - **89.3% eligible three doses (18.4% ahead of general population)**
 - 28.8% four or more doses
 - NDIS participants in residential aged care
 - 89.5% at least one dose (8.2% below general population)
 - 88.1% two doses (7.9% below general population)
 - **93.9% eligible three doses (23.0% ahead of general population)**
 - 80.9% four or more doses
- DSP recipients (as at midnight July 18 2022)
 - 86.3% at least one dose (11.4% below general population)
 - 84.9% two doses (11.1% below general population)
 - **73.9% eligible three doses (3.0% ahead of general population)**
 - 16.2% four or more doses
- NDIS Workforce (as at 14 July 2022)
 - 3.0% part vaccinated
 - **95.4% fully vaccinated** (based on public health orders)

Mortality rate (as at 31 March 2022):

- NDIS Participants: 122 COVID-19 associated deaths
- DSP Recipients: 241 COVID-19 associated deaths

General COVID-19 response - NDIA

- During the Covid-19 pandemic the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), has implemented a range of measures to support participants and providers to manage the impacts of the pandemic.
- The NDIA has undertaken extensive communication campaigns and engagement activities to promote vaccinations and assist Health agencies to provide vaccination opportunities to participants in high-risk settings.
- The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) provides funding to support Supported Independent Living (SIL) providers with increased costs associated with managing outbreaks and funding for providers who assist participants and disability support workers to obtain their vaccinations.
- The Government is helping NDIS providers with disrupted workforces by offering access to flexible workforce support arrangements.
- As at 30 June 2022, NDIS total expenditure across all COVID-19 related supports was \$440.07 million.

Other NDIA supports

- The NDIA has made advice available to support participants to get vaccinated via voice recordings on the contact centre, and offers to transfer callers to the Disability Gateway for assistance in booking a vaccine appointment.
- As of early July 2022 the NDIA Contact Centre reports around 5-10 calls per week are COVID-19 related.
- The recent NDIA price limit increase enables providers to deliver supports that keep NDIS participants safe.
 - Up to \$514 million is also being made available to eligible registered providers in recognition of the increased cost of keeping participants safe during the pandemic.
- A robust audit and assurance regime will sit around these payments to ensure this money goes where it is intended.
- In Local Government Areas with low vaccination rates, the NDIA arranged for its Partners in the Community to contact participants to offer vaccine appointments assistance, arrange transport and advice to address vaccine hesitancy and misinformation.
- The NDIA Provider Engagement Branch called 1,195 registered providers near Commonwealth vaccination hubs to raise awareness, confirm NDIS supports available and identify barriers providers might be experiencing.
- Settlement Services International (SSI) trialled a targeted vaccine outreach service to support Culturally and Linguistically Diverse participants in Sydney and South-West Sydney. It made 3471 calls. 98.4% of participants contacted did not need assistance.

Workforce

- The disability sector has managed contingency workforce issues well, despite disruptions and workforce challenges experienced.
- The NDIS COVID-19 Sector Workforce Support Framework developed in late 2021 outlines the Agency's flexible approach to refine new and enhanced pandemic support options to assist participants and providers in winter 2022 and beyond.
- The Agency's workforce support initiatives complement but do not replace the requirement for providers to have contingency plans in place to comply with practice standards administered by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission.

NDIS provider workforce support arrangements

- The NDIA has a 3-tiered workforce support arrangement.
- Any or all tiers can be activated if the provider workforce is disrupted and they have exhausted their contingency plan.
- Providers who require essential services workforce support advise the NDIS Commission and/or the NDIA. Available supports are:
 - Tier 1 – GenU Workforce Support – virtual peer coaching and mentoring support. Since 13 December 2021, the NDIA has resolved 160 provider workforce challenges. GenU virtually coached and mentored 42 providers.
 - Tier 2 - Ready Teams – GenU linked with 6 large disability providers to provide their own workforce to smaller providers in critical need. Ready Team Partners operate in QLD, NSW, VIC, TAS, SA and ACT. The NDIA is working to identify partners in WA and NT. The receiving provider pays deployed staff costs.
 - Tier 3 / Winter Relief Workforce (WRW) register. NDIA engaged IPA Personnel to create a register of qualified former or retired disability support workers or final year students, willing to be deployed at short notice to fill critical vacancies in their local areas. This is able to be used where Tier 1 or 2 supports are not sufficient. By 14 July 2022, IPA Personal reported 217 nominees had registered, of which 27 are fully screened, registered and deployable.
- Self-managing participants should work with their providers to plan for COVID-19 related disruptions to their supports. Self-managing participants can engage registered or unregistered providers, and/or move to Agency or plan management.
- Self-managing participants can also access emergency preparedness planning supports developed by and available from the Collaborating 4 Inclusion website.

Aspen clinical first response service

- From 1 July 2022, Aspen Medical is delivering an updated Clinical First Response Service. This includes virtual management of outbreak clinical advice and how to deploy clinical staff to assist with critical situations. Infection control and outbreak management webinars are planned late July-September 2022.

Communications

- All NDIA communication channels promote and assist participants and disability support workers to book and access vaccinations via a 3 pillar COVID-19 communications and engagement approach:
- Pillar 1 – Amplifies Department of Health and Aged Care (DHAC), Department of Social Services (DSS) and NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's latest health promotion and policy content.
- Pillar 2 – Paid social media to promote NDIA vaccination initiatives targeted by Local Government Area vaccination with low take-up.
- Pillar 3 – Educates participants and providers via webinar series from June – September 2022 to address known concerns. Provider concerns are clear. Further work is underway with DSS, DHAC and sector representatives to define and address disability community concerns.

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Clearance Date:

26 July 2022

MO Clearance Date:

To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Quality and Safeguarding

KEY ISSUES

- The Australian Government is committed to ensuring we have the right safeguards in place to uphold the rights of NDIS participants to be safe and to receive quality services from the providers and workers they choose to support them.
- To do this, we must continue to lift the capability of providers and workers through responsive regulation and education, including ensuring participants have the information they need to make informed choices and, if they have a concern or complaint, to raise it knowing that it will be investigated and acted on.
- Safeguards such as registration, worker screening, mandatory reporting, monitoring and investigative activities are important protections for participants as is building and retaining a skilled workforce and provider market.

KEY FACT

- The NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework (the Framework) provides a nationally consistent approach to ensure high quality supports and services for all NDIS participants.
- Since 1 December 2020, all providers and workers delivering NDIS supports and services across Australia fall within the regulation of the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission (the NDIS Commission) which is an independent agency responsible for the Commonwealth regulatory functions under the Framework.
- There have been a number of recent reviews that look to NDIS quality and safeguarding arrangements including the Robertson Review into the Death of Ann Marie Smith, the Joint Standing Committee report into the NDIS Commission, and early findings from the Disability Royal Commission.

- Under Australia's Disability Strategy, the Safety Targeted Action Plan commits all governments to a range of actions to improve quality and safeguards including identify NDIS participants at risk of harm; examining outreach and working with state and territory governments on mainstream interfaces.

OUR GOVERNMENT

- I am committed to improving the quality and safety of supports for NDIS participants.
- We need to make sure the service that is promised is the service delivered.
- Quality and safeguards will be an important part of the review of the NDIS as will issues around the market, workforce and compliance.
- The review will consult widely and will particularly hear from people with disability about their experiences around quality and safeguarding issues.
- I look forward to hearing from them, and from other stakeholders, around ways we can continue to strengthen safeguards for participants and particularly those who are at greater risk of harm; and ensure effective monitoring, compliance and enforcement in relation to providers, including tackling fraud in the Scheme.

PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT

- The previous Government failed to tackle the problem of fraud and the systemic quality and safeguarding issues in the scheme.

POTENTIAL HOT ISSUES

If ASKED - Wasn't there already a commitment to conduct a separate review of the NDIS Quality and Safeguarding Framework and will quality and safeguards get lost if rolled into a broader review?

- When the Framework was endorsed by the then Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2016, there was also agreement to conduct a review of the Framework in 2021-22 to ensure it remains fit for purpose.
- Including quality and safeguards as part of the broader review of the NDIS ensures any improvements to quality and safeguards are considered in the context of any broader reforms to the NDIS.

IF ASKED – What is government doing to address the Joint Standing Committee report on the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission?

- The Government welcomes the Joint Standing Committee on the National Disability Insurance Scheme report on its inquiry into the NDIS Commission, published on 30 November 2021.
- The Government is considering this report and will respond in due course.
- Steps have already been taken to address many of the recommendations including establishment of a number of operational protocols between the NDIS Commission and the NDIA to share information and protect at risk participants; the development of a Site Visit policy by the NDIS Commission; and additional requirements on providers and workers to better protect participants receiving services from a sole-worker.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

December 2016	Framework endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments.
July 2018	The NDIS Commission commenced operations in NSW and South Australia
April 2019	The Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability (Disability Royal Commission) was established
July 2019	The NDIS Commission commenced operations in Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory
May 2020	Additional funding of \$6.2 million over two years (2019-21) to the NDIS Commission to support its COVID-19 response
September 2020	Robertson Review into the NDIS Commission response and the death of Ann Marie Smith
October 2020	Disability Royal Commission interim report
December 2020	The NDIS Commission commenced operations in Western Australia and achieved national coverage
December 2020	The NDIS Commission received additional ongoing funding of \$92.9 million over four years as an immediate boost in funding to address immediate pressures identified in the 2020 Tune review of operational funding of the Commission
February 2021	NDIS worker screening commenced in all jurisdictions except for the Northern Territory
May 2021	\$12.3 million was invested (two years to 2022-23) under the Aligning Provider Regulation Across the Care and Support sector measure
June 2021	NDIS Worker Screening checks were recognised in the Aged Care Act 1997
July 2021	NDIS worker screening commenced in the Northern Territory
November 2021	Joint Standing Committee Report into the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission released
December 2021	Safety Targeted Action Plan (Safety TAP) under Australia's Disability Strategy was released
May 2022	\$10.8 million was invested to continue the regulatory alignment work.
September 2023	Final report of Disability Royal Commission expected

Contact Officer's Name and Position: Luke Mansfield
 Phone/Mobile: s 47F
 DSS Input Cleared By (include position): Policy, Markets and Safeguards
 Phone/Mobile:
 Clearance Date: 2 August 2022
 MO Clearance Date: To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**COVID-19 RESPONSE – People with disability outside of the NDIS****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Labor Government is committed to ensuring people with disability are included at every stage of our pandemic response.
- Increasing the uptake of vaccination among people with disability, including the additional booster dose where eligible, is a key priority of our Government to safeguard people with disability against serious illness from COVID-19.
- That's why this month we are rolling out a text message campaign to reach more than a million Disability Support Pension and Carer Payment recipients to highlight the opportunity to access a fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose and help ensure awareness of anti-viral treatments.

KEY POINTS

- Our Government is working very closely with people with disability and other stakeholders as we continue to adjust and strengthen its COVID-19 response to the changing health impacts of the pandemic.
- Extensive communication and engagement activities continue to be implemented to promote vaccinations and assist Health agencies to provide vaccination opportunities to people with disability.
- A text message campaign developed in consultation with the disability community will kick off within the next few weeks.

KEY FACTS

- Among Disability Support Pension (DSP) recipients, 62.8 per cent have received three doses of a COVID-19 vaccine. This is 3.1 per cent ahead of the eligible general population who have had three doses.
- 84.9 per cent of DSP recipients have had two doses, compared to 96.1 per cent of all Australians aged over 16.

If ASKED - How is the Government putting people with disability at the centre of the COVID response?

- Our Government has brought people with disability to the table to help understand what can be done better to meet their needs during the pandemic.
- On 18 July 2022, people with disability, representative organisations, independent health experts, sector peaks, union officials and Commonwealth and state officials engaged in a detailed exercise to rigorously test the effectiveness of the COVID-19 response for people with disability.
- Insights from this exercise are informing further work to strengthen our arrangements, with a particular focus on planning, co-designed communications, workforce supports and of course use of data to inform targeted approaches that drive up vaccination rates.
- Our Government has also stepped up the level of engagement with state and territory disability Ministers and our collective pandemic response is a key focus area for collaborative action.

If ASKED - What is the Government doing to increase vaccination rates?

- Compared to the general population, COVID-19 booster rates are higher among DSP recipients, as well as NDIS participants aged 16 years and over.

These rates are markedly higher for those NDIS participants aged 16 and over in residential disability settings and aged care.

- This Government is focused, along with our state and territory counterparts, on efforts to close the gap in vaccination rates for young people and people with disability who are harder to reach outside the NDIS.
- Beginning in August, text messages will be sent to more than a million DSP recipients and Carer Payment recipients to highlight the opportunity to access a fourth COVID-19 vaccine dose and reinforce that anti-viral treatments may be available for people with disability who contract COVID-19 to prevent severe illness.
- My message to all people with disability is: get your fourth dose of a COVID-19 vaccine as this is one of the best ways you can protect yourself from severe illness, and if you need help, you can call the Disability Gateway on 1800 643 787 to get information and support.

If ASKED - What is the mortality rate for people with disability and how does this compare with the general population?

- As of 31 March 2022, there have been 241 COVID-19 associated deaths among DSP recipients.
- Every single death from COVID-19 is a tragedy and we will continue to work with people with disability, providers and health officials around vaccination and other controls including masks and antivirals that help reduce the risk of infection and protect those who do contract COVID-19 from serious illness.

If ASKED - Why don't people with disability get the flu vaccine for free?

- People with disability who are at increased risk of complications from influenza are able to receive a free flu vaccine, under the Commonwealth's National Immunisation Program.
- People eligible for a free flu vaccine include:
 - all children from 6 months to less than 5 years of age
 - all adults aged 65 years and older
 - pregnant women

- all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 6 months and over
- individuals aged 6 months and older with medical conditions which increase the risk of influenza disease complications:
 - cardiac disease
 - chronic respiratory conditions
 - chronic neurological conditions
 - immunocompromising conditions
 - diabetes and other metabolic disorders
 - renal disease
 - haematological disorders
 - children aged six months to 10 years on long term aspirin therapy.
- All National Immunisation Program influenza vaccines are free, but a GP or other health care provider (such as a pharmacy) may charge a consultation/administration fee for the visit.
- In some states and territories, influenza vaccines may also be provided for free to other people not eligible under the Commonwealth National Immunisation Program.

BACKGROUND/KEY FACTS

Vaccination promotion including text message campaign

- With the current increase in COVID-19 infection, all Australians including people with disability, are encouraged to stay up to date with their COVID-19 vaccination, including a 2nd booster (fourth dose) if eligible.
- In coming weeks, all DSP recipients and recipients of carer payments contactable by phone (more than 1,000,000 people) will be sent an SMS message raising awareness around eligibility for a fourth dose and antiviral medication which help prevent severe complications from COVID-19.
- The SMS message also prompts people to contact the Disability Gateway or Carer Gateway for further information and support.
- Only 40,000 text messages can be sent per day, so this will take some time to reach every person.
- This is the Social Services Portfolio's fourth COVID-19 text message campaign. Similar messages were sent regarding primary dose bookings and booster shots.
- All people with disability can receive free COVID-19 information and support over the phone or online through the Disability Gateway including:
 - help with booking vaccination appointments
 - fact-checked information on COVID-19 and support on getting tested
 - applying for COVID-19 financial support
 - COVID-19 information in accessible formats such as Easy Read or Auslan.
- The Carer Gateway provides a range of information to assist carers supporting people with COVID-19 in their home, or with vaccination.
- Promotion of vaccination for people with disability via social media and official websites continues to be a priority.

Communication

- Within the Portfolio and the Department of Health and Aged Care, there is ongoing, intensive work around communication to improve and simplify targeted messaging in formats that people with disability understand.
- Communication includes targeted activity through:
 - Information and support available via the Disability Gateway and Carer Gateway
 - Social media messaging across Portfolio platforms
 - Engagement with disability representative organisations, providers and relevant grant recipients including those who specifically support children, CALD and First Nations people to increase COVID-19 vaccination and communication.
- The Department of Health and Aged Care leads the creation of communication products on COVID-19, in consultation with the Advisory Committee for the COVID-19 Response for People with Disability.
- Communication channels include:
 - Easy read resources
 - Webpages for providers on disability support services during COVID-19
 - Webinars for providers on topics such as infection control, vaccine consent and hesitancy, and oral treatments
 - Online videos including Auslan content

- Regular Disability Provider Alerts with information on COVID-19 which are distributed to all DSS disability and carer grant recipients
- National Coronavirus Helpline
- Healthdirect, a 24-hour service with health information and advice.
- State and territories also have information and in some cases dedicated teams focused on supporting people with disability to take up vaccination opportunities.

Vaccination rates

- DSP recipients (as at midnight July 25 2022)
 - 86.3% one dose (11.4% below general population)
 - 84.9% two doses (11.2% below general population)
 - **74.2% eligible three doses (3.1% ahead of eligible general population)**
 - 19.0% four or more doses

Mortality rate (as at 31 March 2022):

- DSP Recipients: 241 COVID-19 associated deaths.

Data collection and localised activation to support increased vaccination

- Services Australia provides near-real time vaccination data through matching of DSP recipients with Australian Immunisation Register records.
- The Department of Social Services has leveraged programs it manages to raise awareness of the importance of vaccination against COVID-19 and influenza ahead of winter, for example speaking with leaders of community organisations delivering services to vulnerable people in the community including those represented at the National Coordination Group meeting.
- The Department has provided messaging kits for Services Australia Indigenous Services Officers, Multicultural Services Officers and Community Engagement Officers and Home Affairs Multicultural Officers to talk about COVID-19 and flu vaccines on the ground.
- Messaging includes an up to date summary of areas with low vaccination rates and updated information on COVID-19 and oral treatments.
- The COVID-19 Vaccine Clinic Finder on the Department of Health and Aged Care website includes features like wheelchair access, low sensory areas, and staff who speak languages other than English.
- The Social Services Portfolio provides weekly LGA-level data to each state and territory to activate localised options for people with disability who haven't yet taken up opportunities to be vaccinated and to support those with complex requirements.

Contact Officer's Name and Position: Jodi Cassar, Portfolio Lead, BM,
Portfolio Response COVID-19 Taskforce

Phone/Mobile: **s 47F**

Clearance Date: 1 August 2022
MO Clearance Date: 1 August 2022

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**DFSV Commission****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government has established the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (Commission) and has commenced an open, national search for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner.
- The Government has invested \$22.4 million to establish the Commission to amplify the voices of victim survivors in policy and oversee implementation of the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-32 (National Plan).
- Applications for the position of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner are open until 14 August 2022.
- Consistent with search and selection processes for other significant appointments, public-notice style advertising will be placed in selected print and online media outlets.
- A vacancy notice will also be published on the APS Jobs website and in the Gazette.

KEY POINTS

- The Commission is an executive agency for the purposes of the *Public Service Act 1999*.
- Key functions of the Commission include:
 - co-ordinating action across the country so that people experiencing violence can access the support and services they need no matter where they live.
 - working with Commonwealth agencies, states, territories and community organisations to gather the data we need to invest resources effectively and track progress.
 - tracking implementation and progress against targets in the National Plan.
 - amplifying the voices of victim-survivors.
- In establishing the Commission, the Albanese Government is responding to recommendation 23 from the report from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence (the Inquiry).
- Establishing the Commission also responds to recommendation 20 of the Inquiry to establish a program of monitoring and reporting against the next National Plan.

If ASKED – Why did the Government not proceed with the appointment of Ms Catherine Fitzpatrick? Is Ms Fitzpatrick entitled to compensation?

- The Government will not be proceeding with the appointment of Ms Catherine Fitzpatrick, who was due to take up this role on 1 July 2022.
- This decision was not about Ms Fitzpatrick but about the importance of undertaking an open, competitive process, a process the Albanese Government believes is critical to the success of the inaugural Commissioner.
- The terms and conditions of Head of Executive Agency appointments, including any entitlement to compensation, are determined by the Remuneration Tribunal.

If ASKED – When will the search for a new candidate begin? What will the process be?

- An open, national search for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner is currently underway and I encourage interested candidates to apply.
- The position was advertised on 22 July 2022 and applications will be accepted until 14 August 2022.
- NGS Global is assisting with the search process.

If ASKED – Is the Commission fully established and independent of Government?

- On 17 March 2022, an Executive Order establishing the Commission was made by the Governor-General, with the order expressed to commence on 1 July 2022.
- The Commission is an executive agency for the purposes of the *Public Service Act 1999*.
- While the appropriate basis for the Commission is finalised, the Commission is grouped with the Department of Social Services for administrative purposes.
- Arrangements are being progressed by my department as a priority.
- A senior public servant is undertaking the role of interim Commissioner. Staff for the Commission have commenced.

CONTACT NAME: Rhiannon Box

POSITION: A/g Branch Manager, Women's Safety Policy

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- 17 March 2022 – Commission established as an Executive Agency in accordance with section 65(1) of the *Public Service Act 1999* (see below).
- 8 April 2022 – Ms Catherine Fitzpatrick announced as Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner by the former Government.
- 30 June 2022 – Minister for Social Services and the Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence issued a media release announcing the Government will undertake an open, national search for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner (**Attachment A**).
1 June 2022 – Governor General issued an Executive Order identifying the Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence, the Hon Justine Elliot MP, as the Minister responsible for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission (see below).
- Recent media coverage of Commission:
 - An article in the Australian on 22 July 2022, which announced that the national search for a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission had been launched (**Attachment B**)
 - An article in the Saturday Paper on 25 June 2022, which noted:
Several sources tell The Saturday Paper that the April appointment of Catherine Fitzpatrick as the inaugural Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner will be rescinded and a proper appointment process will take place, with Fitzpatrick invited to apply (Attachment C).
 - An article in the Sydney Morning Herald on 30 June 2022 which noted:
Social Services Minister Amanda Rishworth has dropped the inaugural Family Domestic and Sexual Violence Commissioner the day before she was due to start the job but will allow her to apply for the role in a new, transparent recruitment process (Attachment D).
- 22 July – 14 August 2022 – Position is advertised to recruit a substantive Commissioner with support from recruitment firm NGS Global (**Attachment E**).

Locational / place considerations: Nil

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Rhiannon Box, A/g Branch Manager, Women's Safety Policy
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Greta Doherty, A/g Group Manager, Women's Safety
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
Clearance Date:	26 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Public Service Act 1999

Order to Establish the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission as an Executive Agency

I, General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, acting with the advice of the Federal Executive Council and under section 65 of the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth):

- (a) establish the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission as an Executive Agency;
- (b) allocate the name Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission to the Executive Agency;
- (c) allocate the name Commissioner to the Head of the Executive Agency;
- (d) identify the Minister for Women's Safety as the Minister responsible for the Executive Agency;
- (e) specify the functions of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission be as follows:
 - i. provide strategic policy advice to the Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence;
 - ii. promote and enhance coordination across Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and the not-for-profit and private sectors;
 - iii. promote coordinated and consistent monitoring and evaluation frameworks by all governments for the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (National Plan);
 - iv. develop and maintain a supportive and structured approach to victim-survivor engagement;
 - v. inform priorities for policy, research and data collection in cooperation with jurisdictions and relevant organisations and agencies; and
 - vi. promote the objectives of the National Plan across all parts of Australian society.

This order will commence on 1 July 2022.

Dated 17 March 2022

Governor-General



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Public Service Act 1999

Order to Identify the Minister Responsible for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission

I, General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia, acting with the advice of the Federal Executive Council and under section 65 of the *Public Service Act 1999*, identify the Assistant Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence as the Minister responsible for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission.

Dated 1 June 2022

David Hurley
Governor-General

By His Excellency's Command

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**1800RESPECT****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government is committed to ongoing support for 1800RESPECT, the national telephone, online and counselling support service for people at risk of or experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence.
- 1800RESPECT is a free, confidential service available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- Following a comprehensive procurement process, Telstra Health was selected to deliver 1800RESPECT for 5 years with the possibility of extension, at a contract value of around **\$200 million**.
- On 28 June 2022, delivery of 1800RESPECT was successfully transferred from Medibank Health Solutions to Telstra Health.

KEY POINTS

- Telstra Health is delivering 1800RESPECT with the support of specialist organisations DVConnect, Save the Children and Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre.
- Qualification and skill requirements for counsellors and staff have been maintained.
- People can still access the service confidentially, including using a pseudonym, and have needs assessed by a qualified counsellor.
- Counsellors assist by providing information, advice, short to medium-term counselling or referrals to a senior counsellor or state and territory based service.
- So 1800RESPECT continues to meet the diverse and complex needs of its users, service improvements will be progressively implemented from 1 July 2022.
- Service changes will include:
 - technology improvements to support a 'tell it once' model of service delivery to minimise the need for users to repeat their story
 - making the service accessible through SMS and video call, when safe and appropriate
 - redesigning digital products, including the 1800RESPECT website and mobile applications, to improve user experience and interactions, and
 - expanding the service to address workplace sexual harassment, consistent with the Respect@Work report.

If ASKED – How has the expertise of the 1800RESPECT workforce (qualified counsellors) been maintained through transition?

- Providing high quality, responsive and trauma-informed support to people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence is a priority for 1800RESPECT.
- In February 2022, Telstra Health held recruitment rounds that were open to the former 1800RESPECT workforce and the broader community.
- All counsellors were required to undertake training to ensure they were informed about the complex and diverse needs of all service users, and are able to provide the appropriate support.
- The previous qualification and skill requirements for counsellors and staff have been maintained.
- Team leaders are required to meet additional requirements, including registration with an appropriate professional body.

If ASKED – Has the service remained uncapped under Telstra Health?

- 1800RESPECT is a demand-driven service, and continues to ensure people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence and in need of counselling can access this support when they need it.
- Telstra Health will continue to deliver 1800RESPECT to meet demand.

CONTACT NAME: Stephanie Rake
PHONE: 02 6146 6740 / 0422 497 933

POSITION: Branch Manager, 1800RESPECT

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- Department of Social Services (the department) recently conducted a two-stage open competitive procurement process to secure a suitably qualified provider to deliver 1800RESPECT into the future.
- 24 January 2022 – Telstra Health announced as the successful tenderer.
 - Telstra Health, with support of DVConnect and other specialist organisations, was assessed as offering the strongest service and technology solution with the capability to provide a high quality, inclusive service.
- Department worked closely with the previous service provider, Medibank Health Solutions, and Telstra Health to transfer the service by 1 July 2022.

Future funding

- 6 October 2020 – ongoing funding provided through the 2020-21 Budget for the future delivery of 1800RESPECT.
- 24 January 2022 – former Government announced Telstra Health would deliver 1800RESPECT from 1 July 2022 for 5 years with possibility of extension, at an estimated contract value of around \$200 million.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Stephanie Rake, Branch Manager, 1800RESPECT & Capability
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Greta Doherty, A/g Group Manager, Women's Safety
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
Clearance Date:	20 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Women's Safety Election Commitments****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government is providing the national leadership needed to end violence against women and children in Australia.
- Already as Minister I have taken action to release the National Plan Stakeholder Consultation Report, which delivers a strong evidence base for the next National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032.
- The Government has committed to a \$1.3 billion budget to support the implementation of the National Plan, as well as \$157.8 million over four years for an additional 500 frontline and community sector workers.

KEY POINTS

- The Government has committed:
 - **\$157.8 million to generate 500 new jobs** for community organisations, by providing funding for new frontline and community sector workers who can provide support to women and children experiencing violence with a specific focus on meeting service gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in rural and regional communities.
 - **\$100 million for crisis and transitional housing** options for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence, and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness.
 - To legislate **10 days paid family and domestic violence leave** per year to ensure that no individual should have to choose between a job and leaving an abusive relationship.
 - **\$22.4 million to establish the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission** to act as an advocate for victim survivors and oversee implementation of the National Plan, including monitoring and evaluation (see QB22-000026).
 - **\$77.6 million for respectful relationships to be taught in schools**. The Government will partner with participating states, territories and school systems to support the rollout of consent-based respectful relationships and protective behaviours programs.

- To address the unacceptable high rates of family violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, families and communities the Government has committed:
 - A **standalone Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Plan** to end family violence.
 - An **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Summit**, chaired by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar AO, in responding to the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women’s Voices) report.
 - An immediate boost of **\$100 million for housing and essential services** on Northern Territory homelands and **\$200 million from the Housing Australia Futures Fund** for maintenance and upgrades to remote housing across Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.
 - Support for **justice reinvestment** in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with a **\$79 million investment** to reduce incarceration rates, including early intervention to stop family violence.
 - **\$3 million to fund the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum** to improve access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experiencing family violence.

If ASKED - How and when will the standalone National Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family safety be developed?

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence is leading work on the development of a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan under the National Plan.
- This means we will have actions in place in the short-term to address the service needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and support the achievement of Target 13 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- I am working closely with my state and territory counterparts as well as my ministerial colleagues the Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Linda Burney MP, and the Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians and Indigenous Health, Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, to make sure policies and initiatives to address violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are aligned with the broader national approach.

If ASKED – When/how will the Government’s commitment of 500 frontline community workers be implemented?

- Implementation planning for this commitment is underway.
- Further details of this commitment will be outlined in the Government’s 2022-23 Budget.

CONTACT NAME: Rhiannon Box

POSITION: A/g Branch Manager,
Women’s Safety Policy

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- Government committed to generating 500 new jobs for community organisations, by providing funding for new frontline and community sector workers to support women and children experiencing violence.
- This is to address the significant number of women who are turned away when they reach out for help, due to funding and staffing shortages in shelters and crisis support services.

Locational / place considerations:

- Government announcements about the 500 community and frontline workers have specified numbers of new community sector workers to provide support for women in geographical locations and for priority groups experiencing violence. This includes the below selection of announcements (not a comprehensive list):
 - Half (250) of the new workers are to be located in rural, regional and regional communities. This includes meeting service gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in rural and regional communities.
 - five new workers in Canberra
 - five new workers in Orange
 - seven new workers in the Cairns region
 - seven new workers in Geelong
 - nine new workers in Macquarie
 - 10 new workers in Newcastle and Lake Macquarie
 - 10 new workers in the Gold Coast
 - 17 new workers in the Northern Territory
 - 15 new workers in LGBTIQ+ community organisations
 - 60 new workers in community organisations that support people from culturally diverse communities.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Rhiannon Box, A/g Branch Manager, Women's Safety Policy
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Amber Shuhyta, A/g Group Manager, Women's Safety
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
Clearance Date:	20 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- All Australian governments have committed to the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (National Plan).
- Finalising the National Plan is a high-order priority for me. The former Government ran down the clock on its expiration on 30 June 2022.
- Commonwealth, state and territory ministers with responsibility for women and women's safety met on Friday, 22 July 2022 and agreed a pathway to finalising the National Plan by October 2022.
- All ministers agreed the current rates of violence are unacceptable and we particularly acknowledged recent tragic events in the Northern Territory.
- We agreed to work collaboratively towards ending violence against women and children in Australia.
- Already as Minister I have taken action to release the National Plan Stakeholder Consultation Report, which delivers a strong evidence base for the next National Plan. This is something the former government had refused to do.
- The Albanese Government has committed to a standalone National Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family safety.

KEY POINTS

- Women's safety is a national priority and the Australian Government will provide the focus and national leadership needed to deliver change.
- To support the goal of ending violence against women and children, the Government has committed to the \$1.3 billion already budgeted for initiatives to support the National Plan, as well as \$157.8 million over four years for an additional 500 frontline and community service workers (see QB22-000036).
- The current draft of the National Plan has been informed by broad consultation that commenced in 2020 and continues throughout 2022.
- However, I have taken the opportunity to strengthen the draft National Plan to better address the consultation feedback received and embed the Government's priorities and commitments to women's safety.
- I am committed to delivering a strong and evidence-based National Plan that will meet the needs of everyone in Australia experiencing gender-based violence.
- This means taking an inclusive and intersectional approach to the National Plan.
- The experiences, recovery and safety needs of groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, LGBTIQ+ people, women with disability, children and young people, older women, migrant and refugee women and women on temporary visas must be addressed in the National Plan.

- Actions to implement the National Plan will be outlined in two supporting five-year Action Plans, providing a roadmap for the investment and efforts required across Commonwealth, and state and territory governments to implement actions within each focus area of the National Plan.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence (Advisory Council) is leading the development of a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan under the National Plan while the design and pathway for the development of a standalone National Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety is considered.
- I am working closely with my state and territory counterparts to make sure we will have the National Plan in place by October 2022.
- On 22 July 2022, the Minister for Women, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service, Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher and I met with our state and territory ministerial counterparts to discuss a number of key policy priorities for women.
- State and territory ministers agreed a pathway to finalising the National Plan by October 2022.
- The National Plan includes a focus on:
 - Addressing structural issues that contribute to violence against women including housing and financial insecurity.
 - Building the frontline sector workforce and ensuring women and children can access support no matter where they live.
 - Making sure tailored and culturally-safe support is available and accessible to all women, including Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander women in remote and very remote communities.

- The need for person-centred services and better coordination and integration across systems.
- Eliminating systems abuse and other barriers to women and children accessing support and leaving violence.

IF ASKED – Why was the draft National Plan not finalised prior to the first National Plan ending?

- The first National Plan, the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* came to an end on 30 June 2022.
 - While the next National Plan was not in place before the first National Plan ended, there were no reductions in funding or cessation of services caused by this.
- We need to get the National Plan right. This means taking the time to make sure we deliver a strong National Plan with strong national leadership and clear actions on ending violence against women and children.

IF ASKED – How much funding will be provided under the National Plan?

- The Government has committed to the \$1.3 billion already budgeted for initiatives to support the implementation of the National Plan.
- In addition, our Government is showing national leadership by addressing the structural issues that contribute to violence against women, for example housing, women's economic security, access

to childcare, paid family and domestic violence leave and respectful relationships and consent education in schools.

- We have also committed:
 - **\$157.8 million to generate 500 new jobs** for community organisations, by providing funding for new frontline and community sector workers.
 - **\$100 million for crisis and transitional housing** options for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence, and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness.
 - **\$77.6 million for respectful relationships to be taught in schools.**
 - To legislate **10 days paid family and domestic violence leave** per year to ensure that no individual should have to choose between a job and leaving an abusive relationship.
 - To address the unacceptable high rates of family violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, families and communities (see QB22-000036).

IF ASKED - How does the government's social security system support people leaving a violent relationship?

- There are arrangements in the social security system to assist people who have experienced family or domestic violence, including:
 - A one-off Crisis Payment equal to one week of a person's maximum basic rate of income support.
 - A temporary exemption of up to 13 weeks from mutual obligation requirements.

- The waiver of a Newly Arrived Residents Waiting Period for Special Benefit, if one applies.
- People who have experienced family or domestic violence within eight weeks of claiming a social security payment, may be taken to have lodged a claim on the day they contacted Services Australia about the payment provided they lodge an actual claim within 14 days of the contact day.
- Exemption from the Maintenance Action Test, so a person is not required to collect child support from a perpetrator to receive more than the minimum rate of Family Tax Benefit (subject to meeting other eligibility criteria).
- Any cash or electronic transfer a person receives as part of the Escaping Violence Payment is not treated as income for the purposes of social security income testing.
- Services Australia has social workers available who can assist people experiencing family or domestic violence and make referrals to other community organisations. An appointment with a social worker can be arranged by contacting a Customer Services Officer.
- Where a person experiencing family or domestic violence has a social security debt they may be also eligible for a special circumstances waiver to remove their debt.

IF ASKED – Will the National Plan include targets?

- The Commonwealth supports the inclusion of targets in the National Plan.
- My department is working closely with the sector and states and territories to set meaningful and measurable targets in the National Plan and underpinning Action Plans.
- The National Plan incorporates Target 13 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which aims to reduce all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls by at least 50 per cent by 2031, as progress towards zero.

IF ASKED – How have you consulted with victim-survivors?

- Monash University was engaged to undertake a dedicated consultation activity with victim-survivors and victim-survivor advocates in October-November 2021.
- This consultation engaged 80 victim-survivor advocates from across Australia and provided important insights into how the voices and experiences of victim-survivors can inform our forward program of work under the National Plan.
- The National Plan Advisory Group includes a victim-survivor advocate as a member.
- We are working on additional strategies to amplify the voices of victim-survivors.

IF ASKED – How are the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people informing the development of the National Plan?

- The Advisory Council was established to provide advice to Government on the development of the National Plan.
- The Advisory Council is continuing work on the dedicated Action Plan under the National Plan while the design and pathway for the development of a standalone National Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family safety is considered.

CONTACT NAME: Rhiannon Box

POSITION: A/g Branch Manager, Women's Safety Policy

PHONE: s 47F

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Consultation on the draft National Plan:

- The draft National Plan has been informed by broad consultation processes including:
 - The House Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs Inquiry into family, domestic and sexual violence (298 submissions were received and the committee's report delivered 88 recommendations).
 - 3 online public consultation surveys through my department's Engage platform (a combined total of over 2,000 responses were received through surveys and over 300 written submissions).
 - 30 targeted thematic virtual workshops with subject matter experts and sector representatives.
 - jurisdictional workshops in each state and territory facilitated by Monash University
 - 26 one-on-one interviews and small focus groups with key stakeholders and other subject matter experts.
 - The 2021 National Summit on Women's Safety including the Statement of Summit Delegates.
 - Dedicated consultation with 80 victim-survivor advocates.
 - The establishment of the National Plan Advisory Group and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence.

Standalone National Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander family safety:

- The development of the standalone Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander National Plan is expected to take some time to allow for a comprehensive consultative process that supports genuine partnership and shared decision making as articulated in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Recent media/media releases

- On 11 July 2022, the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Minister Rishworth MP, published a media release regarding an upcoming meeting between Commonwealth, state and territory ministers responsible for women and women's safety.
- On 22 July 2022, the Minister for Women, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service, Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, and Minister Rishworth published a joint media release regarding the meeting between Commonwealth, state and territory ministers to discuss finalising the draft National Plan.

Locational / place considerations: Nil

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Rhiannon Box, A/g Branch Manager, Women's Safety Policy
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
DSS Input Cleared By (include position):	Greta Doherty, A/g Group Manager, Women's Safety
Phone/Mobile:	s 47F
Clearance Date:	1 August 2022
MO Clearance Date:	

QUESTION TIME BRIEF**Escaping Violence Payment****HEADLINE RESPONSE**

- The Albanese Government knows women experiencing family and domestic violence can face significant barriers when attempting to leave a violent situation.
- The Government is committed to improving the Escaping Violence Payment (the Payment) trial's timeliness in delivering support to victim-survivors.
- Over \$18 million has already been provided to victim-survivors based on their individualised financial assistance package.

KEY POINTS

- The Payment supports eligible individuals with financial assistance packages of up to \$5,000 to establish a home free from violence.
- The program aims to reduce the financial barrier some victim-survivors face after leaving a violent relationship.
- The Payment trial provides victim-survivors with another financial support option when changing living circumstances after experiencing intimate partner violence.
- It is currently taking too long for victim-survivors to access the payment and I am committed to addressing this challenge.
- There is overwhelming demand and the Payment is reaching a new cohort of victim-survivors who haven't accessed formal support before.
- Around 80 per cent of victim-survivors are self-referring into the trial. This has resulted in UnitingCare Network needing to provide more intensive service delivery to ensure the safety and needs of victim-survivors are met.
- I am committed to ensuring the Escaping Violence Payment is responsive to the needs of victim-survivors accessing this support
- I will continue to work with the UnitingCare Network to resolve the challenges to meet the needs of those accessing the Payment.
- The Payment is a 2-year trial and is subject to an ongoing and independent evaluation. I am looking forward to seeing how the trial is meeting the needs of victim-survivors.

If ASKED – What is the Government doing to improve the timeliness of the payment?

- I am working closely with UnitingCare Network to revise the delivery model for the Payment to focus on timeliness and ensure assistance is tailored to what each victim-survivor needs.
- The revised model will aim to increase choice and autonomy for the victim-survivor by providing choice as to how much support they need to develop their individualised financial support plan.
- I will also continue to work with stakeholders and listen to concerns or opportunities for improvements in the program.

If ASKED – What is the data and uptake of the trial to date?

- The trial was originally expected to support 12,000 victim-survivors per year. The UnitingCare Network has received over 21,000 individual applications as at 30 June 2022, eight months since commencing.
- It is anticipated the UnitingCare Network will support 29,600 victim-survivors nationally during the trial period to access financial assistance and wrap-around support to establish a home that is free from violence and abuse.

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

Background and Key Facts

- 19 October 2021 – Escaping Violence Payment trial commenced.
- The financial assistance is an individualised package of up to \$5,000 based on victim-survivors needs and generally consists of \$1,500 in cash and the remaining funds provided in goods, services and supports.
- To be eligible for the Escaping Violence Payment, individuals must be an Australian Citizen or permanent resident, aged 18 years or older, experiencing financial stress and be the victim of intimate partner violence that has resulted in a changed living arrangement.
- The Escaping Violence Payment forms part of a suite of options available to those experiencing violence and complements other family and domestic violence supports by providing referrals and connections to other appropriate services based on the needs of the client.
- Of the individualised case plans approved through the Escaping Violence Payment:
 - 32.9 per cent of individuals accessing the payment identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, which suggests the trial is already performing well regarding cultural accessibility.
 - 13.8 per cent of victim-survivors identify as male.
- The grant agreement with Uniting (Vic Tas) Limited, lead of the UnitingCare Network is for \$178 million (GST exclusive) for the two year trial.
- The trial has received widespread feedback from the broader sector, with the sector in New South Wales particularly vocal about the trial and advocating for changes. Engagement by both UnitingCare Network and the department have occurred to understand and resolve issues raised.
- The department has engaged WhereTo Research Consulting Limited to undertake an ongoing and independent evaluation of the EVP trial. As part of this evaluation, engagement activities are occurring with sector representatives as well as Escaping Violence Payment clients.

Locational / place considerations

- A place-based trial for the Escaping Violence Payment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders will be established in the Cairns region. The department has undertaken a number of engagements with service providers in the Cairns region, including Indigenous-led and non-Indigenous organisations, to inform the place-based trial, including the selection and grant process.

Contact Officer's Name and Position:	Amber Shuhyta, Branch Manager
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Clearance Date:	21 July 2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO

QUESTION TIME BRIEF
Domestic Violence in the Northern Territory

HEADLINE RESPONSE

- I would like to acknowledge the tragic deaths recently in the Northern Territory related to domestic violence.
- My most sincere thoughts and condolences are with the families, the communities and all Northern Territorians.
- This violence needs to stop and the Albanese Government is fully committed to working with states and territories to take real action to prevent incidents like these from happening.
- I acknowledge that the Northern Territory has higher rates of family, domestic and sexual violence including homicide rates six times the national average.
- I have had conversations with the Northern Territory Minister, Minister Worden, in relation to needs in the Northern Territory and to discuss progressing the additional \$10.7m committed to the NT in the 2022-23 Budget.

- We have also made finalising the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 a high-order priority and are working with our state and territory government colleagues to finalise the Plan by October 2022. We are working in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence to develop and deliver a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan under the National Plan to address immediate family safety needs in First Nations communities.
 - On 28 July 2022, Minister Burney, Assistant Minister McCarthy and I met with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence to discuss the government's commitment to addressing the unacceptable rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.
- We are also progressing our election commitment of providing \$157.8 million to generate 500 new jobs for frontline and community sector workers to support to women and children experiencing violence.
 - Half of the new workers will be located in remote, rural and regional communities and will have a focus on meeting services gaps for Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

KEY POINTS

- The Government is committed to making sure investment in women's safety goes towards areas of greatest need.
- The Government is providing \$260 million under a two-year National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses with state and territory governments.
- This funding from the Commonwealth is to boost frontline family, domestic and sexual violence services and to trial new initiatives to support women and children experiencing violence.
- Payments under the National Partnership include a loading in recognition of the complexity of delivering services in remote and very remote locations, including in the Northern Territory.
- The Northern Territory has a total funding allocation of \$4.78 million under the FDSV National Partnership from 2021-22 to 2022-23.
- This includes a specific focus on meeting service gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in rural and regional communities.
- The national Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner will support the coordination of action across the country so that people experiencing violence can access the support and services they need no matter where they live.
- We have all signed up to reducing family violence against First Nations women and children by 50 per cent by 2031, as progress towards zero under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

- Reducing violence in the Northern Territory will be crucial to achieving this aim.

IF ASKED: About new ABS figures showing a significant increase in violence in the NT.

- Recent statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Victims of Crime show the Northern Territory continues to have the highest rates of family, domestic and sexual violence nationally.
- I am deeply saddened by these figures and am committed to addressing the high rates of violence in the Northern Territory.

IF ASKED: What is the Government doing to address family and domestic violence in the Northern Territory?

The Government is progressing our election commitments to:

- provide \$157.8 million for 500 new frontline workers to support women in crisis, with a specific focus on meeting service gaps for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in rural and regional communities.
- support justice reinvestment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with a \$79 million investment to reduce incarceration rates, including early intervention to stop family violence.
- invest \$3 million to fund the National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum, which works to improve access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing family violence.

- improve the Housing in Remote Communities and Homelands initiative with an immediate boost of \$100 million for housing and essential services on Northern Territory homelands as well as investing \$200 million from the Housing Australia Futures Fund for maintenance and upgrades to remote housing across Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory.
- The Government has also committed to delivering a standalone National Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander family safety.

IF ASKED: How are payments to jurisdictions calculated under the National Partnership Agreement?

- The Commonwealth is distributing up to \$260 million to states, split evenly over 2021-22 and 2022-23, on a per capita basis with loading for remote and very remote communities.
- Funding was allocated on a per capita basis with additional loading for remote and very remote populations.
- This is the same allocation that was applied to the second and third payments under the National Partnership on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses from 2019-20 to 2020-21.

IF ASKED: Will the Government match the previous Government's commitment of an additional \$10.7 million in funding for the NT under the National Partnership?

- I am committed to making sure investment in women's safety goes towards areas of greatest need.

- All governments have signed up to reducing family violence against First Nations women and children by 50 per cent by 2031, as progress towards zero under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- Reducing violence in the Northern Territory will be crucial to achieving this aim.
- I will continue to support the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses.
- Payments under the National Partnership include a loading in recognition of the complexity of delivering services in remote and very remote locations, including in the Northern Territory.
- I am aware that the former Government made a commitment to the Northern Territory of an additional \$10.7 million in 2022-23 in recognition of the higher rates of family, domestic and sexual violence and the increased complexity of service delivery in remote and very remote areas.
- Government will consider this commitment through the October Budget process.

If ASKED - Will the FDSV National Partnership be extended with a longer timeframe when the current National Partnership ends on 30 June 2023?

- The Government will be considering its commitment to support women and children experiencing violence as part of the 2022-23 Budget.

IF ASKED: About the alcohol ban ending in some Northern Territory communities on 17 July 2022

- The *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act (2012)* ('the Stronger Futures Act') sunset on 17 July 2022, consistent with its legislative provisions.
- This means the Stronger Futures Act is no longer in effect.
- The Stronger Futures Act Restricted alcohol in certain areas of the Northern Territory (NT).
- The approach to the sunseting of the Stronger Futures Act is consistent with the Government's commitment to self-determination for First Nations peoples.
- The Australian Government recognises the Northern Territory Government is well placed to administer its jurisdictional responsibilities, including the responsibility to regulate alcohol access through the *Liquor Act 2019 (NT)*.
- The Government has had discussions with relevant Peak organisations on all aspects of the sunseting legislation.

CONTACT NAME: Rhiannon Box
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POSITION: Branch Manager, Women's Safety Policy a/g

BACKGROUND / KEY FACTS

As part of around \$1.1 billion in funding for women's safety announced in the 2021-22 Budget, the Australian Government has committed up to \$260 million for a 2 year National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses (2021-23) (FDSV National Partnership) with state and territory governments to support frontline family, domestic and sexual violence services and to trial new initiatives to support women and children experiencing violence.

The FDSV National Partnership builds on the \$130 million the Government provided to states in 2020 under the National Partnership on COVID-19 Domestic and Family Violence Responses, to invest in services to support women and children experiencing or at risk of violence during the pandemic.

Funding is being provided under the FDSV National Partnership over 2021-22 and 2022-23, coinciding with the next National Plan to end violence against women and their children.

On 28 February 2022, the former Government announced an additional \$10.7 million to the Northern Territory in 2022-23 under the FDSV National Partnership in recognition of the higher rates of FDSV incidences, increased complexity of remote service delivery, and to work towards Closing the Gap commitments.

NT funding under the FDSV National Partnership

The Northern Territory received \$4.78 million under the original terms of the National Partnership. The Northern Territory Government used the first payment \$1.195 million to fund flexible support packages and additional costs of service delivery during COVID-19 outbreaks. Flexible support packages provide essential services and goods to women and children experiencing family and domestic violence.

Commonwealth and Northern Territory officials have been working to finalise the development of a project plan for Payment 2 of the FDSV National Partnership.

Payment	Amount allocated (\$m)
Payment 1	1.195
Payment 2	1.195
Payment 3	1.195
Payment 4	1.195
Total	4.780

NT alcohol ban – Stronger Futures Act

The *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory Act (2012)* ('the Stronger Futures Act') and Part 10 of the Classification (Publications, Films and Computer Games) Act 1995 (Classification Act) sunset on 17 July 2022, consistent with its legislative provisions.

The Stronger Futures Act:

- Restricted alcohol in certain areas of the Northern Territory (NT);
- Provided for land reform in town camps and community living areas; and

- Established a remote stores licensing scheme.

On 17 May 2022, the NT Government passed legislation which allows communities to 'opt-in' to continue alcohol restrictions.

For communities who do not opt in, the NT Chief Minister has the ability to restrict alcohol, if required. Baseline data is being monitored to inform this decision.

The NT Government can also place restrictions on individuals through the banned drinkers register, either by the person being referred or self-referring, where the person is prohibited from buying alcohol.

The NT Government can also place alcohol restrictions on public housing, where the tenant is able to declare the house and yard as an alcohol-free zone.

Not all areas of the NT are affected by the change in alcohol restrictions. Of the 73 remote communities in the NT, 67 are classed as 'General Restricted Areas' under the NT's Liquor Act 2019 and will continue to have alcohol restrictions in place.

As at 26 July 2022, seven areas (2 communities, 4 town camps and 1 homeland) have formally opted in to alcohol restrictions

New ABS figures

On Thursday, 28 July 2022, the ABS released the *Recorded Crime - Victims, 2021* publication.

This publication provides national statistics about victims of a range of personal, household and family and domestic violence offences as recorded by police.

The release showed:

- There were 105 victims of family and domestic violence (FDV) related homicide nationally in 2021, a decrease of 28% (40 victims) from the previous year.
 - This was the lowest recorded number in the eight-year time series.
- FDV related assault victims increased in all states and territories in 2021 compared with 2020, ranging from 1% in Tasmania and South Australia to 12% in the Northern Territory.

The data shows there were 5733 victims (women and men) of physical assault in the Northern territory in 2021, as reported in the ABC news article: *28 July 2022 – ABC News, New figures show problem of family and domestic violence growing in Northern Territory.*

The victims of family domestic and sexual violence in the Northern Territory are predominantly women. Of the 5733 victims of physical assault, 4473 were women or around 80 per cent. The table below shows that the number of FDSV victims in the NT has generally increased over time between years 2014 to 2021:

Recorded Crime – Victims, 2021

Released at 11.30am (Canberra time) Thurs 28 July 2022

Table 30 Victims of family and domestic violence related offences by sex, States and territories, 2014–2021

Sex and offence	Number							
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Northern Territory(l)								
Females								
Homicide and related offences(e)	3	9	0	3	0	3	3	7
Assault	3,483	3,370	3,311	3,632	3,542	3,239	4,070	4,473
Sexual assault	101	112	102	135	92	70	96	90
Kidnapping/abduction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Persons(g)								
Homicide and related offences(e)	4	14	4	7	3	3	3	7
Assault	4,282	4,096	4,009	4,478	4,359	4,030	5,131	5,733
Sexual assault	111	120	106	140	98	79	111	90
Kidnapping/abduction	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

na = not applicable

np = not published

Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data. Discrepancies may occur between sums of the component items and totals.

Victims of selected offences have been determined to be FDV related where the relationship of offender to victim, as stored on police recording systems, falls within a specified family or domestic relationship, or where an FDV flag has been recorded, following a police investigation.

(e) Homicide and related offences includes murder, attempted murder and manslaughter. Excludes driving causing death.

(g) Includes victims for whom sex was not specified.

Recent Media

- 28 July 2022 – ABC News, New figures show problem of family and domestic violence growing in Northern Territory
- 27 July 2022 – Northern Territory News, 'NT DV Anger'
- 27 July 2022 – The Australian, Multiple articles including 'NT warned lifting grog bans would cause grief'
- 26 July 2022 – SBS News, 'Nation urged to take notice in wake of horrific NT domestic violence deaths'
- 25 July 2022 - NT Minister Worden appeared on ABC Radio Darwin seeking confirmation the Government will match the \$10.7 million announced by the former government, and identifying a need for 'at least \$15 million per year' in funding from the Commonwealth.
- 17 July 2022 – national coverage of a domestic violence incident where the bodies of a man, woman and baby were discovered on Sunday at an outstation, 25 kilometres north of Alice Springs.

Locational / place considerations

- Nil

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Clearance Date:	3 August 2022
MO Clearance Date:	To be completed by MO