

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry on *Commonwealth's contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices*

Answers to Questions on Notice

On 26 October 2011, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations appeared via teleconference and provided evidence at a public hearing for the Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry on *Commonwealth's contribution to former forced adoption policies and practices*. This document responds to the questions on notice provided by the Committee following that hearing, using, DSS Annual Reports 1942-81, DSS Statistical Summary 1966-75, DSS Statistical Summary 1969-78, DSS Statistical Summary 1976-86, and T.H. Kewley *Social Security in Australia 1900-72*.

Senator Moore

- 1. Many witnesses, in giving evidence, have said that one of the things that was not explained effectively to them was what assistance was available should they have wanted to keep their child. We have on record and in the archives considerable evidence that people were not told that they could have been eligible for a Commonwealth payment... I am interested to know what the methodology was for providing information to the public at the time we are talking about (1945-1960).*

For the period prior to 1961, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) did not find any evidence to determine what information on Commonwealth social security payments (and services) was available to clients and the broader community, and how this information was distributed.

The earliest identified publication, produced by the Department of Social Security (DSS), was the March 1961 *Social Services Handbook* (see **Attachment A**). This publication was intended primarily for use by individuals or groups such as Members of Parliament or social workers called upon to advise individuals on social service matters. Later editions of the *Social Services Handbook* were released in 1964 and 1970. In addition, a DSS publication was released on *Rates of Benefits*, dated October 1966 (refer to **Attachment B**). Public information, specifically for unmarried mothers, was not produced by the Department until the late 1960s.

It was not until 1969-70 that the Department of Social Security's publications and public relations activities were centralised. Previously, no single section in the Department was responsible for undertaking such activities. The 1969-70 DSS Annual Report identifies that pamphlets were available on social security benefits including Widows' Pension and Unemployment and Sickness Benefits. It was further noted in the Annual Report that an external individual was appointed to review the future needs of the Department's publications. After the centralisation to the National Office of publication and information services in 1970-71, community liaison (later information) sections were established in each of the state branches of the Department. Community liaison sections were responsible for the distribution

of the Department's publications and other relevant information produced by other departments (e.g. Subsidised Medical Services Scheme pamphlet). These sections also carried out national and State-based public relations programmes.

The first known publication produced by DSS for unmarried mothers was the pamphlet *Benefits available to girls in homes for unmarried mothers* (refer to **Attachment C**). This pamphlet was produced sometime between 1969 and 1972 (the time period is identifiable by the social security payments noted in the pamphlet). A national advertising campaign was launched upon the introduction of the Supporting Mothers' Benefit in July 1973. However it is not known through what mediums this advertising was run. Further, a new television drama film titled *Women Alone* was produced, drawing attention to the circumstances of single mothers. This film was shown on commercial television across Australia and utilised in subsequent external seminars held by the Department. The 1973-74 DSS Annual Report noted these seminars provided the Department with valuable information about the attitudes and problems associated with women bringing up children alone. Leaflets, including *Training Scheme For Widow Pensioners and Supporting Mothers* (see **Attachment D**) and *Benefits for women* were first produced in late 1974, after the introduction of the Supporting Mothers' Benefit in July 1973.

Expansion in public relations activities continued through the 1970s. It was noted in the 1970-71 DSS Annual Report that the level of public interest in information on social security payments and programs had grown, and the Department needed improved communications with community welfare organisations. The types of information, the distribution of this information and the mediums used to convey this information continued to evolve and expand to meet the demands of the community at large. Over this time information was distributed through three main information avenues:

- Direct from department;
- Welfare agencies and other organisations; and
- Mass media.

Throughout the course of 1971-72, social security pamphlets were redesigned, moving away from explaining legislation, to a more practical form of information, telling people about entitlements to the respective assistance, how much they would receive and the process of applying. For the first time, foreign language pamphlets on social security were produced. In addition, information posters on social security payments were distributed to hospitals and clinics.

From 1971-72, the Department expanded its public information campaign through advertising in country and suburban press (radio, television and print) in an effort to draw attention the range of assistance available. The campaign also emphasised that leaflets and application forms on social services could be obtained through post offices as well as from the Department's office locations around the country. Leaflets were also distributed with the assistance of State authorities for display in welfare agencies and community centres. Officers in the Department participated in various conferences, seminars and displays, and addressed numerous organisations and clubs in an effort to encourage people to seek advice and apply for assistance from the Department.

From the early 1980s the Department put greater effort into providing information for people in the community with specific needs such as non-English speakers, those with a disability or those with limited literacy skills. By this stage, DSS was producing leaflets in twenty two languages and, in cooperation with the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) audio material for multicultural radio programs in 12 languages.

Senator Moore

2. *... 'Introduced in the same legislation'—which refers to the Unemployment Sickness Benefit Act of July 1945—'special benefit was also available to unmarried mothers at the discretion of the Director-General of Social Services to be paid at a rate deemed appropriate by the director-general but not to exceed the rate of unemployment benefit.'... under what circumstances could that payment be made...?*

Introduced in July 1945 under the *Unemployment and Sickness Benefits Act 1944*, Special Benefit was designed to provide for people who did not qualify, or were ineligible, for any other benefit or pension and were experiencing financial hardship. Payment was granted at the discretion of the Director-General of Social Services to people “by reason of age, physical or mental disability or domestic circumstances or any other reason were unable to earn a sufficient livelihood for themselves and their dependents”. In determining whether hardship was present, the Director-General of Social Services was impelled to give consideration to:

- Whether the claimant had any money;
- If without money, the circumstances which led to this situation; and
- The time elapsed since the claimant had money available to themselves.

Until July 1947, the Director-General was given the discretion to make the payment conditional on complying with requirements that the recipient should undertake medical or rehabilitation treatment or vocational training.

When introducing the Bill into Parliament on 10 February 1944, the Minister for Social Security Senator James Fraser stated the Government envisaged Special Benefit would be claimed by people in particular circumstances, such as a young woman who was required to withdraw from the labour force to remain at home and care for aged or disabled parents¹. Throughout the years, the categories of people (including unmarried mothers) who received Special Benefit widened as specific circumstances of hardship arose. This increase arose due to the highly circumstantial and discretionary nature of the payment.

Following enactment in July 1945, Special Benefit was payable to unmarried mothers under a range of specific circumstances. Such circumstances included (but were not limited to):

- Deserted wife or husband in prison for less than six months (not in receipt of state assistance);
- Not qualified for Widows' Pension Class A or Supporting Mothers' (Parents') Benefit (due to six month qualification period or residency requirements), with no recent employment history and unable to qualify for Unemployment Benefit or Sickness Benefit;

¹ Payment for all carers of aged or disabled was introduced by the Hawke Government in November 1985.

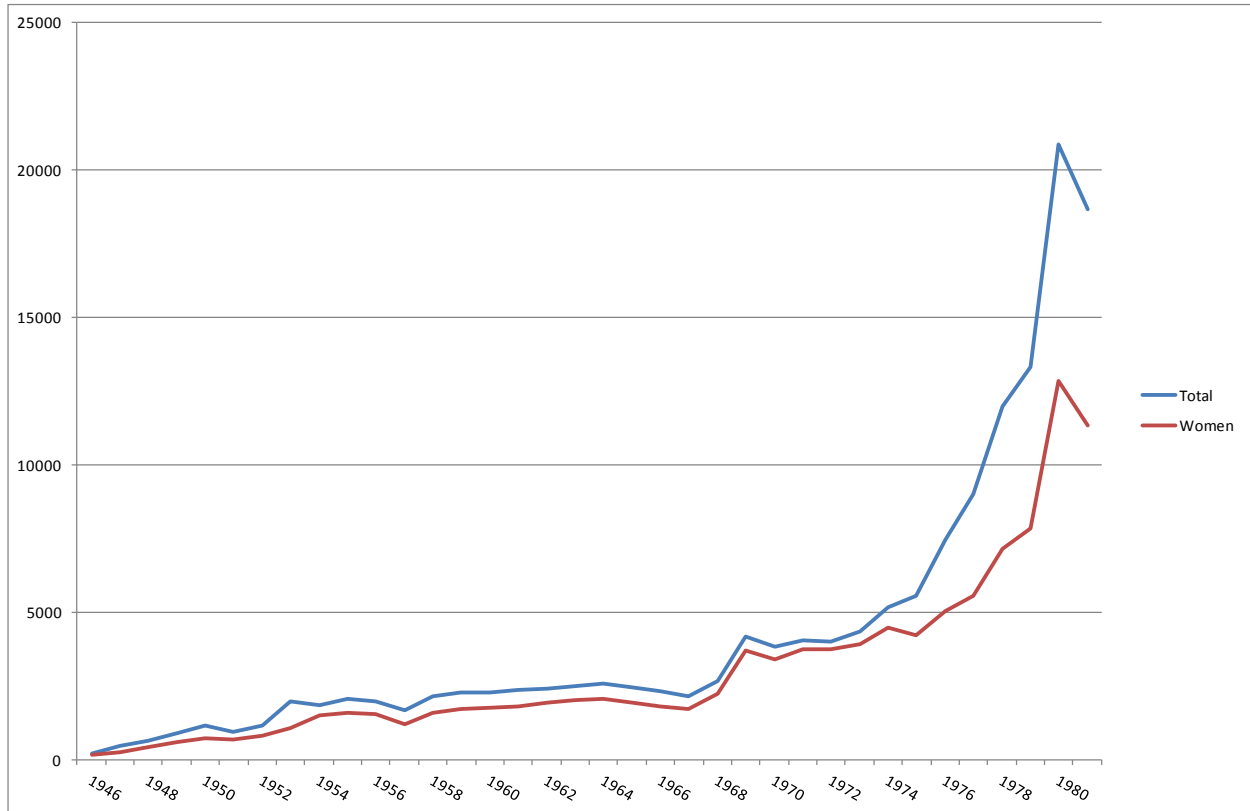
- Widows' Pension or Support Mothers' Benefit claimant experiencing hardship during assessment and determination period;
- In immediate hardship during the seven day waiting period for Unemployment Benefit;
- Under the minimum age (16 years) for Unemployment or Sickness Benefit;
- Ex-nuptial confinement up to 12 weeks prior and 6 weeks after the birth of a child (from 1968-69);
- Expectant mother under 16 years (from October 1973);
- Obligated to cease work to care for a sick dependent child.

From 1947, different arrangements for the triggering of eligibility and payment of Special Benefit applied in Victoria. As the only state government not to provide any level of assistance to deserted wives, wives of prisoners and other unmarried mothers during the six month waiting period before qualification for Widows' Pension Class A, the Chifley Government granted payment of Special Benefit (to be paid at the rate of Unemployment Benefit) to women in these circumstances in Victoria. This provision remained in place after April 1970, upon Victoria's participation in providing assistance under the *States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act 1968*. Women could continue to receive Special Benefit in Victoria (and other states) in these circumstances on the provision they were not in receipt of and were unable to receive any state assistance. This change in position by Victoria precipitated a sharp fall in the number of Special Benefit recipients in this category (to almost zero) and a corresponding doubling of Commonwealth grants under the scheme in 1970-71, which effectively rendered this provision redundant. This outcome is largely due to the more generous financial (and non-financial) assistance on offer under the funding provisions of the Act.

Senator Moore

3. ...are there available Commonwealth records of how many payments were made across the country under that particular scheme (Special Benefit) from 1945 until 1973?...how many payments were made in that period for single mothers.

Figure 1 – Special Benefit recipients 1946-1981



Source: DSS Annual Reports 1946-47-1980-81; DSS Statistical Summary 1966-75, 1969-78; T.H. Kewely, *Social Security in Australia 1900-72*.

Since its introduction in July 1945, data has been reported for the number of Special Benefit recipients. This data, reported at the end of each financial year (starting from 30 June 1946), was contained in DSS Annual Reports in accordance with legislative requirements (refer to **Attachment E**). While data by case type does exist for the period 1964-78, this breakdown does not specifically contain the number of unmarried mothers on Special Benefit (refer to **Attachment F**).

From its inception until the late 1960s, Special Benefit recipient numbers alternated between periods of slow growth and stagnation, peaking at around 2,600 people in 1964 (of which around 2,100 were women) . Over this period, the number of women in receipt of Special Benefit, as a proportion of the total recipient population, remained relatively stable between 70 and 80 per cent.

In 1964, around 250 (10 per cent) of people receiving Special Benefit were women who had been deserted by their husbands, and 100 (4 per cent) were women with husbands in prison. The majority of these women were from Victoria, where the state did not assist either deserted wives, or women whose husbands were in prison.

After 1968-69 a number of significant policy changes, many targeted at unmarried mothers, increased the number, but also the composition of Special Benefit recipients. Prior to this time the overwhelming majority of Special Benefit recipients included people withdrawing from the labour force to look after disabled parents or other near relatives.

With the transfer of ex-nuptial confinement cases from Sickness Benefit to Special Benefit in 1968-69, recipient numbers increased 56 per cent from 2,700 to 4,200. Of that total around 3,700 (or 89 per cent) were women, with unmarried mothers in ex-nuptial confinement cases accounting for around 2,000 (or 48 per cent) of all Special Benefit recipients. After the introduction of the *States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act 1968* in July 1968 and the change in position by Victoria in April 1970 to participate in the program, the number of deserted wives and husbands in prison in receipt of Special Benefit fell dramatically to almost zero by July 1970. The opening of Special Benefit to unmarried mothers under 16 years of age in October 1973 also contributed to the increase in the total number of Special Benefit recipients.

From 1972 until 1981, while the actual number of women on Special Benefit continued to grow (reaching a peak of around 12,900 in 1980) the number of women as a proportion of the total on Special Benefit declined to around 60 per cent by 1980. This was driven by a number of different factors including:

- Increased demand on state assistance under the *States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act 1968* (rendering women in receipt of state assistance ineligible for Special Benefit);
- Significant growth in the number of men on Special Benefit caring for a sick wife, child or relative;
- A dramatic rise from 1977 onwards of the number of people residentially ineligible for a pension (attributable to change in immigration policy following the Vietnam War);
- The removal of the six month qualification period for Supporting Parents' Benefit in November 1980.

Senator Moore

- 4. *Now that you have been able to provide the information about what the system was, we would like to know how that special benefit was triggered, what the process was for doing it...***

Under arrangements prior to 1946-47, claims for payments (including Special Benefit) were to be completed on forms by claimants available from, and lodged at Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) offices. Under the direction of DSS officers (who had control over determination and payment policy), CES officers were responsible for receiving claims and establishing eligibility for payment. After the early 1950s when the DSS embarked on a decentralisation process with the establishment of Social Security Offices around the nation, the CES looked after claims for unemployment, sickness and special benefits (those over the age for unemployment or sickness benefits) and application of the work test before referring them to the DSS for determination and payment. All other Special Benefit claims were lodged with and processed by DSS Social Security Offices. Special provisions were in place for people unable to attend personally to lodge their claim, lodged by telephone or letter. Claims could also be taken away for completion and returned at a later date

Archival processing instructional manuals indicate that generally a claimant for Special Benefit, and his or her spouse (if applicable) would be interviewed by a DSS officer prior to granting the payment. The purpose of this interview was to establish eligibility had been met, relevant information had been obtained by the interviewing officer, and address any inquiries the claimant may have. This interview would usually take place at the local DSS office but could also occur at the claimants' house, depending on the circumstance of the individual case. Alternative arrangements were made for claimants in remote locations.

Special Benefit was payable from a date and for a period as determined by the Director-General of Social Services. Once a start date had been determined, payment as with Unemployment Benefit and Sickness Benefit was paid weekly in arrears by cheque through the postal service.

Date of commencement for Special Benefit varied with the different categories. Where a waiting period was required, payment may be issued in exceptional circumstances where the claimant was experiencing extreme hardship.

Senator Moore

- 5. That particular wording—and I would imagine it was common wording in legislation of the day—of 'discretion of the Director-General of Social Services at a rate deemed to be appropriate by the Director-General' is a kind of general delegation statement. It would be interesting to know from the same research, if available, at what level that delegation was operated.*

Archival processing instruction manuals indicate claims for Special Benefit were processed internally within the local Social Security Office (unless the claim was for Special Benefit (over Unemployment Benefit age)) where the claim form was submitted to Counter Officers (equivalent to Customer Service Advisers).

While Registrar Officers were ultimately responsible for making determination on a payment claim (including Special Benefit), it is more likely that the actual decision was made at a lower level of authority, particularly in larger offices. Upon lodgement of a claim, a Counter Officer would review the claim and make a recommendation to their superior Registrar Officer (equivalent to a Centrelink Office Manager) who would then approve or reject a claim. In certain cases of Special Benefit, such as a single mother caring for a sick child, delegation was extended to Regional Registrars (equivalent to a Centrelink Regional Manager).

Senator Siewert (Chair)

- 6. If it is possible, could you give us a case example of how it was triggered where somebody had applied that benefit and the actual process that was used.*

In its research, DEEWR did not find an actual example of an individual who had applied for and was in receipt of Special Benefit. However archival processing instruction manuals used at DSS Offices included specific examples, including the following example.

Prior to the introduction of the Supporting Mothers' Benefit, and in particular the *States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act 1968*, a case of an unmarried mother receiving Special Benefit could have been a deserted de facto (dependent) wife with one or more dependent children. Such a

woman was ineligible for Widows' Pension Class A, as well as Supporting Mothers' Benefit during the six month qualifying period.

In such an instance where the woman had been deserted for less than six months, she could not simultaneously receive Special Benefit and assistance from the states. This rule applied both before and after the commencement of the *States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act 1968*. In situations before the *States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act 1968* came into effect, where a deserted de facto wife had been deserted for longer than six months, the availability of state assistance was not considered in determining the presence of hardship.

In establishing eligibility for Special Benefit for a deserted de facto wife with dependent children, a Social Worker was assigned to report on a number of case specific factors including:

- The period the parties resided together prior to the event (desertion) for which the de facto wife claimed Special Benefit. Where possible this should be substantiated by statements from three other reputable citizens;
- The reason for desertion;
- Whether suitable arrangements can be made for the children to enable the claimant to take work;
- Whether the claimant has taken or intends to take action for maintenance of the children;
- Whether an approach has been made for (State) Child Welfare assistance;
- All other relevant factors.

Senator Adams

- 7. I want to query how the unmarried mothers and widows payments were lumped together. ...it states that unmarried mothers and widows were able to access a certain amount. It just seemed a strange sort of situation.*

War Widows' Pension is a separate income support payment to the civilian Widows' Pension, with separate eligibility requirements, payment rates, indexation arrangements, means tests and access to supplementary allowances and concessions.

War Widows' Pension was first established under the *War Pensions Act 1914*, whereby a pension was provided for a financially dependent widow of her deceased husband, being a member of the Forces during active service. The rate of payment was determined by the rank of the member. From 1915 a widowed mother financially dependent on her son was paid a living allowance at a rate based on the number of the applicant's dependents.

In 1916, War Widows' Pension was extended to de facto war widows, and a remarried war widow was able to receive the pension for two years, after which it was deemed her new husband could fully maintain her.² From 1920, the parity in rates between the widow's and widowed mother's rate was broken, following the increase to the rate of the widow's rate of War Widows' Pension.

² Remarriage provisions changed in 1931, with the removal of the two-year pension continuation provision, but were later reinstated in 1950, providing a remarriage gratuity equivalent to one year's pension.

In 1926 an allowance was introduced for remarried war widows, who again became widowed and were without adequate means of support. From 1947, Domestic Allowance was payable to certain War Widows' Pension recipients as an additional payment to widows with dependent children under the age of 16. This allowance was later widened to cover war widows over 50 (from 1950) and permanently unemployable war widows (1951).

From July 1947, a widow in receipt of a War Widows' Pension was no longer able to simultaneously receive (if eligible) a 'civilian' Widows' Pension. Transitional arrangements existed in certain cases allowing for the receipt of both pensions for a certain period of time. Existing supplementary entitlements for War Widows' Pensions were not affected by this change.

In 1973, all de facto war widows became eligible for this pension. At the same time all War Widows' Pension recipients were issued with a treatment card (forerunner to the Gold Card), providing full and free access to health care. Prior to this, access to health care was free, but not comprehensive.

Under the *Widows' Pension Act 1942*, provision was made for the division of widows into three eligibility groups designated by the Department of Social Services (although this was not formally recognised in legislation until 1947) as Widows' Pension Class A, B, C and D. The Widows' Pension classes consisted of the following groups of women:

- Class A – widows maintaining (later care, custody and control) at least one dependent child under 16;
- Class B – widows aged 50 and over, without dependent children;
- Class C – widows (only de jure and de facto) under 50 without dependent children, who in the 26 weeks following the death of their husbands, found themselves in hardship circumstances;
- Class D³ – widows aged 50 and over with dependent children, with a husband in prison for longer than six months.

While the separate Widows' Pension payment classes shared a number of identical features, to War Widows' Pension, there were some differences. The main differences included:

- Widows' Pension Class A received the highest rate of payment which included an amount equivalent to the Child Allowance, reflecting the direct cost of children;
- Widows' Pension Class D had a higher rate of payment than Classes B and C, which (mostly) shared the same payment rate;
- A more liberal means test on the value of property and other personal assets was applied to Widows' Pension Class A (until a merged means test was applied to all Classes from March 1961);
- Widows' Pension Class D was subject to the same means test as Widows' Pension Class B, while Widow's Pension Class C had a tighter liquid assets test, reflecting the more temporary nature of the payment;
- The income free area applied to Widows' Pension Class A included an amount for each dependent child (under 16 years);

³ Widows' Pension Class D was established in July 1947 and abolished in February 1961. Recipients of this payment were transferred to Widows' Pension Class A and Class B as appropriate.

- Widows' Pension Class A received a number of additional allowances including:
 - Additional Pension for Children (APC) granted in respect of each child after the first under 16 of an aged or disabled recipient of Widow's Pension Class A (from October 1956) and Widows' Pension Class B, not being a child of her own entering her care before being widowed (from November 1974);
 - Mother's Allowance (introduced in September 1963) incorporated into the rate of Widows' Pension Class A. From September 1969, a higher rate of payment granted to Class A recipients with a child under 6 and/or a disabled child requiring full-time care. Mother's Allowance extended to Widows' Pension Class B under the same conditions, but not being a child of her own entering her care before being widowed (from November 1974);
 - Child Allowance (additional amount) payable to the first child of a Widows' Pension Class A recipient from October 1963 until its substitution in September 1968 for APC, which was then payable to all children;

As noted in DEEWR's submission, with the introduction of Supporting Mothers' (Parents') Benefit in July 1973 unmarried mothers in receipt of this payment, and widows with children in receipt of Widows' Pension Class A received a virtually identical payment. The main differences were tougher residency requirements as well as non-access to pensioner health concessions for recipients of Supporting Mothers' (Parents') Benefit.

This situation, borne from the exclusion under the *Widows' Pension Act 1942* of certain categories of unmarried mothers, implicitly recognised that the two income support payments were essentially covering the same group of people – single mothers of young children without a male 'breadwinner'. This overlap within the categories of the income support system was recognised and rectified when Widows' Pension Class A and Supporting Parents' Benefit were both abolished in March 1989 by the Hawke Government, and rolled into the new Sole Parent Pension payment.

Senator Moore

- 8. At the time the payment to unmarried parents was introduced, in the Whitlam years, it would be interesting to see whether the information that was provided had any comment about a clear difference and to see the kind of rhetoric that was used in the documentation held by the department about whether this was new and unprecedented. It would be interesting to see whether the government and the department of the day were making statements about this being a brand-new process.***

From the available information in DSS annual reports, a national advertising campaign was run to promote the newly available payment for certain women previously ineligible for Commonwealth support. However, DEEWR could not locate any available information on where the advertising occurred, nor the specific content of the advertising.

When introduced to Parliament on 22 May 1973, the Minister for Social Security Bill Hayden MP, spoke of the 'completely new benefit' (Supporting Mothers' Benefit) as a further step towards the aim of removing anomalies and discriminatory practices that existed within the social security system. The Minister stated that although this was a considerable improvement on previous arrangements, anomalies in the form of State relief during the six month qualification period remained. In promoting the new legislation, the Minister went on to state:

...the important thing about this Bill is that it is a clear demonstration of this Government's determination to bring an end as quickly as it can to the discrimination that existed against women and, in this case, certain classes of women such as unmarried mothers, deserted wives or wives who have been separated for other reasons.

The Government believes that when a mother gives birth to a child she should not be discriminated against merely because conception may have occurred after she became a widow or after she became separated from her husband. This form of discrimination, which has been practised in the past, involves undesirable moral overtones. This Bill will remove such discrimination.

Senator Siewert (Chair)

9. *Do you think it would be possible to find out whether that payment (Unemployment Benefit) was accessed by single mothers?*

No data exists, in the timeframe of interest to the Committee, on the number of unmarried mothers receiving unemployment benefits.

Senator Moore

10. *... 'Furthermore, assistance was restricted by a six-month qualifying period.' How does that work for someone who has an emergency need at birth? You go on to state that they are able to apply for unmarried rate of special benefit or 'forced to rely on Commonwealth funded state aid or assistance from other sources'. I am trying to see a woman who is a sole parent at the time of birth and in the periods after birth. What entitlement does she have for support?*

The Commonwealth support provided to an unmarried mother in emergency need at birth and ineligible for Widows' Pension Class A or Supporting Mothers' (Parents') Benefit due to disqualification on 'character' grounds and/or the six month qualifications period, changed over time.

Prior to June 1968, the only Commonwealth income support payment available for these unmarried mothers was Sickness Benefit. This was payable to unmarried mothers during confinement, 12 weeks prior and 6 weeks after the birth of the child. Unmarried mothers could also receive family payments in the form of Maternity Allowance and Child Endowment (as described in DEEWR's submission). In addition, specific arrangements were in place in Victoria from 1947, where Special Benefit was payable to deserted wives and wives of husbands in prison (both for a period of less than six months), but not unmarried mothers.

From June 1968, unmarried mothers could receive Commonwealth funded assistance from the States under the *States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act 1968*. Commonwealth grants amounted to the lesser of: (a) half of the cost of assistance approved by the State; or (b) half the amount of Widows' Pension Class A. The types of assistance attracting Commonwealth grants included the provision of cash payments, food or clothing. Transport and child education expenses were not covered under assistance provisions.

In 1968-69, confinement cases in receipt of Sickness Benefit were transferred to Special Benefit under the same conditions. If, after the end of a Special Benefit confinement period, an unmarried mother was experiencing medical illness or complications related to pregnancy that prevented her from returning to work, she could apply for Sickness Benefit.

From October 1973 an unmarried mother could reapply for Special Benefit if under the minimum age for Sickness Benefit. Duration on Sickness Benefit would be governed so long as she was unfit to return to work, or in other words remained qualified for payment. Further, unmarried mothers were still eligible for Maternity Allowance and Child Endowment in this time period.

Senator Moore

11. From the late sixties a Commonwealth grant would go to states so that the women could access the state payment, but that was not there before the Gorton government? Does that mean that it was up to the states to grant it? They made the decision?

Under the *States Grants (Deserted Wives) Act 1968*, introduced by the Gorton Government in June 1968 (applied retrospectively from January 1968), the Commonwealth provided grants to the State Governments to assist needy mothers of families “without a breadwinner”, where the mother was not eligible for Commonwealth social security benefits. Prior to the introduction of the Act, assistance was provided to these women by all states except Victoria. However the level and types of assistance provided by the states was not uniform.

This legislation covered women who were not eligible for Widows’ Pension Class A and later Supporting Mothers’ (Parents’) Benefit, on the grounds of a six month preclusion period for wives who had been deserted or had husbands in prison, or were a type of single parent (such as unmarried mothers) not included in the scope of the legislation under the *Widows’ Pension Act 1942*.

At different times, some states did not participate in providing assistance under the Act. Victoria did not participate in the program until April 1970 and withdrew in January 1980, prior to the removal of the six month qualifying period for Supporting Parents’ Benefit in November 1980. South Australia also withdrew from participating under the Act in July 1980. In Victoria from July 1947, direct Commonwealth assistance was provided through the payment of Special Benefit to single parents not in receipt of assistance from the State Government during this six month qualifying period.

On the introduction of legislation into Parliament on 2 May 1968, the Minister for Social Services William Wentworth MP, stated that the six month qualification period was in place on the grounds that, at least in the case of deserted wives, desertion could be difficult to establish as the husband may return (circumstances may have changed) and Commonwealth policy should not be calculated to impede any reconciliation.

Commonwealth grants amounted to the lesser of: (a) half of the cost of assistance approved by the State; or (b) half the amount of Widows’ Pension Class A. The types of assistance attracting Commonwealth grants included the provision of cash payments, food or clothing. Transport and child education expenses were not covered under assistance provisions.

Under the agreement between the Commonwealth and the States, administrative control including determining eligibility for assistance, resided with the State. Eligibility for assistance was conducted on a case-by-case basis, where eligibility was to be based on existing State 'hardship tests', thus providing a high level of individual discretion for the processing officer(s). During the passage of the legislation, the Commonwealth expressed the view that the States would engage in disciplined administration of the program (i.e. approving assistance claims), given the States were responsible for half of any expenditure provided under the Act. In the same reading of legislation, the Commonwealth also believed that administration of assistance required individual case knowledge and would therefore be better handled by the State (who had historical experience in delivering hardship assistance), as opposed to the Commonwealth which provided benefits on a broader categorical basis.