

THE AUSTRALIAN

Welfare shake-up looms as grog violence eases, says report



Human Services Minister Alan Tudge rejected claims the approach hurt welfare recipients. Picture: Aaron Francis

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Tabled Document

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SARAH MARTIN THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM October 13, 2016

The federal government is preparing the next step in its mammoth welfare overhaul after receiving early proof that its stricter rules on payments are delivering results, with a confidential report showing reductions in alcohol-fuelled violence and other social gains from the new approach.

The government will act on the new findings by extending the use of its controversial Healthy Welfare card despite the prospect of a clash with Labor, the Greens and social services groups over the future of welfare.

The Australian can reveal that a detailed study of the government's pilot schemes shows a 20 per cent fall in ambulance call-outs and a 28 per cent reduction in alcohol-related calls to authorities in the East Kimberley where welfare payments are made to debit cards rather than in cash.

The data report on the Healthy Welfare test sites, obtained by *The Australian* at the midpoint of the government's trials, also shows fewer people going to detox centres and a fall in spending on gambling.

Poker machine revenue in the Ceduna region was 6 per cent lower in August than 12 months previously, with almost \$30,000 less going through machines in the region, the data report shows.

In Kununurra, there has been a 41 per cent reduction in the number of people being referred to the town's sobering-up centre and a 36 per cent reduction in the number of alcohol-related pick-ups by the town's community patrol, down from 524 in April to 335 in August. With legislation essential to advance the reforms, advocates for the card, including a key adviser, businessman Andrew Forrest, met Senate

crossbenchers this week to argue for an expansion of the schemes to disadvantaged communities based on success demonstrated by early results.

Crossbench senators Jacqui Lambie and Pauline Hanson, along with independent MP Bob Katter, met Mr Forrest and a group of community leaders on Tuesday night to discuss results of the trial, which quarantines 80 per cent of recipients' welfare payment to cashless debit cards.

Human Services Minister Alan Tudge rejected claims the approach hurt welfare recipients, declaring he wanted to protect the "human rights of women to be safe and children to be fed" rather than see taxpayer funds spent on alcohol and - gambling.

"These results are very promising and if they continue to deliver good outcomes then of course we would be seeking to roll it out more broadly," he told *The Australian*. "I am very concerned about the amount of violence in some communities, fuelled by alcohol which is almost all paid for by welfare cash, and all of us have to be serious about confronting this."

Mr Tudge said other communities had expressed interest in the card, who would likely be next in line for its rollout should trials continue to report success over the last six months of the program.

He has also flagged that young unemployed people could be targeted for cashless welfare, based on a New Zealand model that gives those under the age of 18 just \$50 a week cash.

The new data from the trials came as Mr Forrest yesterday slammed "heartless academics" and the "lazy thinking" of critics of the card, saying opponents were perpetuating an "inane logic of human rights" that was consigning vulnerable children to harm.

"What about the rights of a child? What about their right to a future? Is that not a far greater priority?" he said. "You are casting that child's future to the dustbin with your kindness and your actual heartlessness."

Ceduna Mayor Allan Suter said the results of the card in his community were "very encouraging" and urged other places to take up the card, regardless of critics of the cashless scheme.

"Any community that has the facts before it and which is prepared to acknowledge a problem would be silly not to trial the card," he said. "There is a small group of

protesters who are entitled to be heard, but don't necessarily deserve much sympathy."

Ian Trust, Kununurra-based chairman of Wunan Foundation which has overseen trials in the East Kimberley, said his community had embraced the card because "enough was enough".

He pointed to high rates of foetal alcohol syndrome and the suicide of children as young as 10 years old as reasons for challenging the status quo. "It is just not acceptable," he said.

Jean O'Reeri, director of the Ngnowar Aerwah Aboriginal Corporation, said there had been a noticeable reduction in alcohol-related hospital admissions in her community of Wyndham. "It has really improved, and people are starting to say kids are coming to school and people are surprised that they are saving money."

Crackdown on parental leave 'double dippers' to be considered by parliament again

OCTOBER 19, 2016



Crackdown on paid parental leave will be back in parliament this week.

Charis Chang and AAPnews.com.au

PARENTAL leave “double dippers” will be targeted once again when the federal government makes a fresh attempt to pull back entitlements this week.

Social Services Minister Christian Porter will take a bill to parliament on Thursday to stop pregnant women claiming paid parental leave from the government and their employer.

The controversial measure was first put forward in the 2015 Budget, with then-treasurer Joe Hockey describing it as “double dipping”.

The policy was a sharp turnaround from the “rolled gold” scheme then-prime minister Tony Abbott took to the 2013 election, and was expected to save \$1 billion over four years.

But the government was not able to get the measure passed through the Senate and the Turnbull Government announced in April that it had shelved the plans.

Despite this, it still remained part of the Coalition's election platform.

Currently, new parents are entitled to 18 weeks of paid parental leave at the minimum wage, which works out as \$11,826 per household.

Instead of providing parents with 18 weeks of leave on top of what they get from their employers, the Coalition wants to "top up" leave that parents get from employers so they get a total of 18 weeks.

While Mr Hockey chose to describe it as "double dipping", Mr Porter believes it is a question of equity.

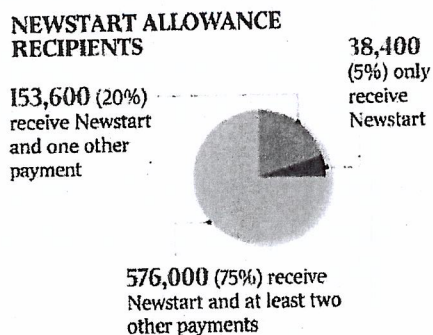
The minister told the National Press Club last month some people earning up to \$150,000 a year could receive \$30,000 in parenting payments from an employer as well as \$12,000 from taxpayers.

About three per cent of mums who have accessed the government-funded leave over the past five years earned more than \$120,000.

An ABC survey taken during the election campaign found 58 per cent of voters believed government payments should not be made available if an employer was also making paid leave available.

THE AUSTRALIAN

Christian Porter rules out rise for \$38-a-day Newstart Allowance



DAVID CROWE THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM September 21, 2016

Unemployed Australians will get no increase in their Newstart Allowance of \$38 a day as Social Services Minister Christian Porter dismisses an “adequacy” argument that has been used for years to demand a big rise in the base payment.

Infuriating social service groups, Mr Porter rubbished demands for \$7.7 billion in bigger payments over the next four years and declared the government could not justify the higher taxes or bigger debts to fund it.

He also stood by one of the government’s most controversial budget savings — to force people who are out of work to wait four weeks before they can qualify for Newstart in the hope they will find a job and will not need the help.

About 770,000 people get a Newstart payment worth about \$38 a day, a level that has been fixed for years despite proposals from the Greens, the Australian Council of Social Service and the Business Council of Australia to make it more generous.

Mr Porter said the ACOSS proposal to offer everyone on Newstart a further \$53 a week could not be justified when most of the recipients were not relying on the base payment alone.

“I would accept that argument if it were the case that the lion’s share or the great majority of that 770,000 were living off \$38 a day,” he said. “But

what the advocates of the adequacy point don't tell anyone is that that is not true, and in fact the exact opposite is true."

Mr Porter argued that 75 per cent of the 770,000 recipients receive two or more other payment types and a further 20 per cent get at least one other payment. That leaves 5 per cent who get Newstart alone — or the base rate of \$38 a day — as well as the clean energy supplement worth about 62c a day on top.

While some of the additional payments are small, there are more than a dozen of them available, including family tax benefits, rent assistance, remote area supplements, carers' supplements, a telephone allowance and a pensioner education supplement for training.

In a further controversial argument, Mr Porter said that 96 per cent of those receiving the base Newstart payment moved off the welfare support within six months, which meant the number of people relying on the base rate for a long period was only the remaining 4 per cent — or 1500 people.

Mr Porter said this proved the payment was working because it discouraged people from staying unemployed.

"I would actually put to you that the fact that people who find it challenging to subsist on Newstart do so for a short period of time might actually speak to the fact that that's one of the design points of the system — because the encouragement is there to move off those payments really quickly," he said.

The Newstart rate has been a regular flashpoint in political debate, with Labor families spokeswoman Jenny Macklin coming under fire in 2013 for suggesting she could have lived on the base rate, which was \$35 a day at the time.

Greens social services spokeswoman Rachel Siewert said Newstart was "woefully low" and Mr Porter had a poor understanding of how the most vulnerable in society were struggling to get by.

The Australian was told that one in every five Newstart recipients had reported earnings through working in the past fortnight. The government has spent more than two years trying to get reforms to Newstart to force

new applicants to wait longer for the payment, a measure first included in the May 2014 budget when the period was set at six months.

Although the government has scaled back the waiting period from six months to four weeks, it is still being blocked in the Senate.

Mr Porter stood by the change yesterday, saying the objective was to prevent people getting into the welfare system and then struggling to ever leave it.

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4:34pm September 20, 2016

No dole payment rise on horizon

By AAP

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An increase in the rate of the dole is not on

Feedback

the Turnbull
government's radar.

Welfare groups have
long argued
unemployed people
cannot live on the \$38
a day Newstart
Allowance and a rise is
justified.

Social Services
Minister Christian
Porter said while
Newstart was a
"modest payment",
boosting it by \$53 a
week as proposed by
the Australian Council
of Social Service
would cost taxpayers
an extra \$7.7 billion.

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"So we either borrow
that money or we tax
someone \$7.7 billion,"
Mr Porter told the

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National Press Club in
Canberra on Tuesday.


He said he would
accept the argument
for a rise if most of the
768,000 recipients
were living off \$38 a
day.

But he quoted
statistics showing 75
per cent of Newstart
recipients get two
other payment types
and 20 per cent get
another payment type.

"Only five per cent get
just Newstart, only five
per cent face that
adequacy scenario,"
he said.

Further, 96 per cent of
people move off
Newstart within six
months, leaving only
1500 people facing the
prospect of the \$38 a
day payment for the
long term.

The minister said the
fact that most Newstart
recipients were on it
for a short period of

 [Feedback](#)

time showed the system was working "because the encouragement is there to move off those payments quickly".

ACOSS chief Cassandra Goldie said keeping the dole at its current level was "unconscionable".

She argues the payment should rise so people can "live with dignity while looking for work".

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Dole recipients rise as national welfare bill soars to \$200 billion a year

EXCLUSIVE Daniel Meers and Simon Benson, The Daily Telegraph
October 10, 2016 12:00am
Subscriber only

THE number of Australians on the dole has increased by about 70 per cent over the past decade, as our welfare bill balloons towards \$200 billion a year.

Thousands of welfare recipients are being moved on to the dole where they are forced to actively search for jobs to keep benefits. The Daily Telegraph can reveal the number of Australians claiming the dole has risen from 453,793 in 2005 to 768,375 in March this year.

There are 16 different types of welfare payment Australians can claim with the welfare budget projected to increase from \$158.6 billion this financial year to \$191.8 billion in 2019-20.

In all, the total number of welfare recipients from 2005-2015 increased from 4.4 million to 5.2 million. Just over 20 per cent of the nation are claiming welfare, that does not include family tax benefits.

Crackdowns on payments such as the Disability Support Pension, which does not require recipients to seek work, has seen the number claiming the DSP drop from a peak of 832,533 to under 788,099.

Some have been moved on to Newstart which pays jobless singles \$528.70 a fortnight and jobless couples \$954.80 a fortnight, providing they enter a job plan and apply for work.

Thousands of welfare recipients are being moved on to the dole where they are forced to actively search for jobs to keep benefits.

The startling figures are behind a crackdown led by Social Services Minister Christian Porter to encourage more people into work rather than live off the taxpayer.

"Part of what the government has sought to achieve is to identify people who have a fair and reasonable capacity to work, but who are on a payment type that imposes no real obligation on them to search for work, and have those individuals move to the Newstart system where there are obligations," Mr Porter told The Daily Telegraph.

Mr Porter said it was incumbent on the government to encourage more Australians to work.

"It's clear there are too many people in the welfare system with the capacity to work," he said.

"We need to find a better way of helping people become self-reliant."

Mr Porter did concede the dole system also needed to be tightened.

There were still about 100,000 people flying under the radar.

"Even inside the Newstart system there is room to reform the mutual obligation process."

The government's welfare reform has been hampered by the Labor Party which believes the government is attempting to rip money from the country's most vulnerable people.

One controversial measure still before parliament is forcing young Australians to spend at least one month looking for work before they can access the dole.

It is understood that Senator Pauline Hanson, whose One Nation party has four senate spots, will likely support much of the Turnbull government's crackdown on welfare cheats.

Crackdowns on payments such as the Disability Support Pension, which does not require recipients to seek work, has seen the number claiming the DSP drop from a peak of 832,533 to under 788,099.



David and Deb Johnson, with their son, Andrew, who has been in care since he was 13. Photo: Penny Stephens

Family's Centrelink trauma

Neelima Choahan

A man with severe disabilities who has been in state care since 1999 was ordered by Centrelink to prove his eligibility for a disability pension.

Andrew Johnson was diagnosed with profound autism when he was four and went into a Department of Human Services-managed group home when he was 13.

The 30-year-old cannot speak, has autism, Tourette syndrome, bipolar disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, epilepsy, and needs a stomach tube to help him feed.

His mother, Deb Johnson, said she felt "physically sick" after receiving a letter from Centrelink on September 15 demanding evidence that her son was entitled to the pen-

sion.

She was given just two weeks to collate the paperwork, which included decades-old documents.

Mrs Johnson was finally granted an extension, but was then told to start preparing for a review for her elder son, William, 32, who has been in state care since 1999, and suffers from profound autism.

She was also told Andrew would be required to undergo an IQ test.

But on Thursday, the mother-of-four suddenly received a call from Centrelink saying no further action would be required, citing a letter from Andrew's gastroenterologist as the reason behind the decision.

Human Services Minister Alan Tudge - who stepped in following

questions from Fairfax Media - said Andrew would continue to receive his disability pension.

"We will not be asking him to look for work because he has met the specific criteria for manifest eligibility," Mr Tudge said.

"Once the department can confirm a person meets the specific criteria for manifest eligibility for DSP, they will not need to complete another review again in future."

While Mrs Johnson was happy with the eventual outcome, she was less than pleased with the process.

"They have put me through absolute hell," she said. "I have been really severely stressed. I have been to four appointments in a week, three specialists and one GP."

"I can't believe they have accep-



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The Saturday Age, Melbourne

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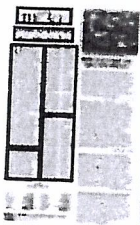
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ted just a gastroenterologist's report and say it covers all disabilities, when they have asked us to jump through hoops with [documents showing] onset of symptoms, dates of diagnosis, and an IQ test," she said.

Federal MP for Bruce, Julian Hill, who wrote to the Human Services Minister on behalf of the Johnson family, said the review was "more than a little ridiculous".



THE AGE

Welfare reviews must put vulnerable first

A society ought be judged by how it treats its most vulnerable members. It's a well-established principle and one that the federal government, and its welfare agency Centrelink, would do well to keep at the forefront of its thinking.

A report in *The Age* at the weekend that a severely disabled man who has been in state care since 1999 was ordered by Centrelink to prove his eligibility for a pension was distressing for all who read it, but of course so much more traumatic for this man and his family. Andrew Johnson, 30, cannot speak; has autism, Tourette syndrome, bipolar disorder; attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder and epilepsy; and needs a stomach tube to help him feed. Despite this, his case was included in a widespread crack-down on disability support recipients. Essentially, Mr Johnson was told he must prove why he was not out working, rather than receiving the disability pension.

The review, delivered without warning via an officious letter from Centrelink, not surprisingly put Mr Johnson's family under a huge amount of stress as they scabbled to find decades old medical documents and other evidence of his severe impairment. While the review was eventually dropped after intervention from Mr Johnson's gastroenterologist, letters to *The Age* confirm this cruel and farcical situation is not a one-off. The government is reviewing

90,000 disability support recipients for their ability to work, following welfare changes in the 2016 federal budget. Centrelink says the target group for the reviews is current disability support pension recipients who have not been assessed in the past two years.

While we understand and support the need to ensure public money is wisely spent, the case of Andrew Johnson highlights the need for compassion, sensitivity and simple common sense, in reviewing support for the disabled. Even the most fleeting glance at Mr Johnson's records should have ruled him out of any need to repeat proof of his entitlement for a pension. Those at Centrelink responsible for the decision to review his situation certainly owe Mr Johnson's family an apology. Anecdotal evidence shows there are many other cases which ought be excluded from such a review.

While there is always a need for checks and balances where public money is involved, we argue that in the disability sector there is a far more pressing need for oversight of the standards of care and support provided to those who have additional needs.

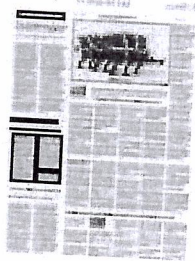
Regulations and standards need to be closely monitored to ensure that disabled people in our community are safely and properly supported and cared for. It is a fear that keeps too many families awake at night: will my disabled son or daughter be safe and well cared for in an institution or service? We

hear all too often of ageing parents, terrified of the day when they can no longer care for their disabled adult child and must put them in care to be looked after by strangers. With the NDIS rolling out across the country, there will be many more carers and disability workers involved in this sector; and those with disabilities, and their families, are entitled to have confidence in the quality of care provided.

Social Services Minister Christian Porter recently signalled a new direction for welfare in this country, including targeting those on carer's payments, many of whom look after disabled family members. We urge the government to tread carefully in any efforts to improve efficiency in this sector.

Disability is a lottery; it could equally affect any one of us or someone we love. As an affluent, fair-minded society, we have a responsibility to care for and support our most vulnerable members.





THE AUSTRALIAN

THE HEART OF THE NATION

Investing in welfare to work

Christian Porter has outlined an encouraging new approach

It is a mistake to characterise any effort to move people from welfare to self-reliance as a breakthrough. From the time the welfare state was born we have seen the traps it creates. Just as an individual's great strength can be their undoing, so too the generosity of a society can undermine its ambition. It is a fine balance that, arguably, no nation has yet struck. But strive we must.

Just as Robert Menzies talked of lifters and leaners, we should aspire to have citizens who control their destiny. This inherently good ideal should be a universal goal, yet we know the existence of a safety net can, for some, sap their personal drive. Social Services Minister Christian Porter has bravely ventured into this intersection. As he outlined his welfare plans yesterday, he was asked about the adequacy of dole payments and said the fact people found it "challenging to subsist off Newstart" and that they tended to do so for short periods was actually a sign the system was working well because the "encouragement is there to move off those payments quickly".

Almost 20 years ago British Labour prime minister Tony Blair set himself the goal of leading a "welfare to work" government. Under John Howard, we saw "work for the dole" schemes as the Coalition adopted Mr Blair's mantra that "work is the best form of welfare". Yet the aim of fostering self-reliance remains incomplete.

Mr Porter's policy prescriptions are not complete as yet, but their intent is clear. Armed with unprecedented data, his Australian Priority Investment Approach to Welfare intends to target those welfare recipients susceptible to falling into a trap or having potential to find a way out for special assistance. Programs will aim to deliver the best outcome for those individuals and their families. As a corollary, if those investments are successful, there will be long-term benefits for the welfare budget. This is a contentious and

delicate area where a variety of initiatives will be attempted and not all will succeed. Advocates and politicians should engage in this process to deliver the best outcomes for individuals and, ultimately, also for the sustainability of the \$160 billion welfare budget.

Y. E.

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