

Submission:

Social Security Commission Bill 2018

The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare (the Centre) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on the *Social Security Commission Bill 2018* for consideration by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs.

The Centre is the peak body for child and family services in Victoria. For over 100 years we have advocated for the rights of children and young people to be heard, to be safe, to access education and to remain connected to family, community and culture. We represent over 150 community service organisations, students and individuals in Victoria working across child and family services.

According to the *Poverty in Australia 2018* report, of the estimated 3.05 million people in Australia living below the poverty line, 53% receive income support as their main source of income.¹ However, our social safety net is no longer fit for purpose.

The proposed Social Security Commission promises an evidence-informed approach to reviewing income support levels. As an advisory body, it will conduct regular reviews and provide independent and transparent advice and recommendations to government. Although government will be required to respond, responsibility for decisions relating to payment rates will remain with government.

Income support sufficient to provide an adequate standard of living is a human right. The *Social Security Commission Bill 2018* will support Australia's capacity to uphold our obligations under the various human rights acts to which we are signatories.

For many years, government has made decisions relating to income support without these being evidence-informed or transparent.² It is in the interests of the community to be better informed about our income support system and how decisions about an adequate standard of living are made. Recently, there has been a groundswell of support for raising the Newstart allowance and other payments in response to widespread recognition that these payments are too low and are further entrenching poverty. Transparent and publicly available access to reviews conducted by the Commission will facilitate evidence-informed public debate about how we can best deliver a fair society for all.

An adequate standard of living provides a critical foundation for improving the lives of children, young people and families experiencing disadvantage. This Bill will help to make sure that the people in our country who are living in or at the edge of poverty will not be forgotten; that as our society's living standards improve, those in need are not left behind.

The Centre fully supports the Social Security Commission Bill 2018 and urges the committee to recommend that it be passed.

¹ Davidson, P, Saunders, P, Bradbury, B & Wong, M 2018, *Poverty in Australia 2018*, ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 2, ACOSS, Sydney.

² Catholic Social Services Australia 2008, *An Australian Entitlements Commission: a proposal for an independent commission to inform decisions about the adequacy of pensions and other income support payments*, Catholic Social Services Australia, Canberra.