

Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Technical Changes No.1) Bill 2026

Submission to the Community Affairs Legislative Committee

13 March 2026

About ACOSS

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) is a national voice in support of people affected by poverty, disadvantage and inequality and the peak body for the community services and civil society sector.

ACOSS consists of a network of approximately 4000 organisations and individuals across Australia in metro, regional and remote areas.

Our vision is an end to poverty in all its forms; economies that are fair, sustainable and resilient; and communities that are just, peaceful and inclusive.

Introduction

ACOSS makes this brief submission to the inquiry on the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Technical Changes No.1) Bill 2026, which seeks to address the lack of legislation for some aspects of our social security system. Due to the short inquiry timeframe, ACOSS restricts its comments to Schedule 2, which concerns urgent payments.

Schedule 2: Urgent Payments

ACOSS was surprised to learn that there is no clear legislative basis to make urgent payments¹, which has been a feature of our social security system for many years. Urgent payments allow someone to receive part of their social security payment early if they are in financial hardship and have an unexpected expense. This legislation introduces a legal basis for urgent payments to be made, which is welcome.

ACOSS supports allowing people to receive urgent payments more than twice per year and the removal of the requirement that a person demonstrate they

¹ Parliamentary Library (2026) 'Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Technical Changes No.1) Bill 2026' 24 February

https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd2526/26bd045

are in severe financial hardship for an urgent payment to be made.² This legislation also allows for an urgent payment to be made when a person declares they have unforeseen or exceptional expenses, rather than requiring the person demonstrate this being the case. This is also welcome.

The legislation places a \$200 cap on the amount of urgent payment that someone can receive. We recommend that the bill be amended to remove this cap. It appears that Services Australia does not currently impose a cap, with guidance for Services Australia staff in administering urgent payments stating:

“The amount payable is a minimum amount of \$20 and is the smallest of:

- available funds calculated by the system
- the amount requested by the customer, or
- the minimum amount required to meet the immediate hardship need”.³

While removal of the two-per-year restriction on urgent payments will support people who are in financial need, we recommend the government ensures that if someone requires an amount higher than \$200 to meet an unforeseen expense and they have accrued more than \$200 in their fortnightly payment, that this be made available.

Recommendation 1:

Allow people to obtain more than \$200 where they need a higher amount to cover an unforeseen or exceptional expense and they have accrued that amount in the relevant fortnight.

Adequacy of income support payments

It is no surprise that over 400,000 urgent payments were made in the last financial year, given people typically do not have savings to meet unexpected costs. Our 2024 report on material deprivation found that almost 40% of people receiving JobSeeker or Parenting Payment did not have \$500 in savings for an emergency.⁴

JobSeeker is currently \$401 a week and more than two thirds of people receiving the payment have done so for more than 12 months. JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment and related supports remain below all

² Social Security Policy Guide 8.4.2.10 Urgent Payments: <https://guides.dss.gov.au/social-security-guide/8/4/2/10>

³ Services Australia (2025) 'Urgent payments due to expenses associated with a funeral 003-10010010' <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2026-01/lex-88764-document.pdf>

⁴ Naidoo, Y., Wong, M., Smyth, C. and Davidson, P (2024), Material deprivation in Australia: the essentials of life, Sydney: Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and UNSW Sydney. https://povertyandinequality.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Material-deprivation-in-Australia_the-essentials-of-life.pdf p.32

measures of adequacy. If these payments provided enough to cover people's costs, there would be a reduced need for urgent payments.

The government did increase JobSeeker and Youth Allowance and related supports by \$20 a week in real terms in 2023, and expanded Parenting Payment Single to single parents whose youngest child is aged up to 14, which we welcomed. The government must build on these reforms and substantially lift these payments so that they prevent poverty and provide people with enough money to meet their needs. JobSeeker and Youth Allowance must also be tied to wages as well as prices so that they do not lose pace with community living standards.

Recommendation 2.

Build on the 2023 real increases delivered, and lift JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment and related income supports to parity with pensions (including the pension supplement), at least \$589 per week on current rates, and index payments to wages as well as prices.

Abolish the Liquid Assets Waiting Period

Clearly having a cash buffer to support you whilst receiving a poverty-level payment for any length of time would reduce financial hardship.

ACOSS calls for the abolition of the Liquid Asset Waiting Period (LAWP), which imposes up to a 13-week wait to receive JobSeeker, Youth Allowance or Austudy if someone has more than \$5,500⁵ in cash assets when applying for income support. This policy results in people depleting modest savings prior to gaining access to income support, which could have otherwise helped them cover unexpected expenses.

ACOSS recommends that the LAWP be removed and that cash assets are assessed as part of means testing.

Recommendation 3.

Abolish the Liquid Assets Waiting Period and replace it with a comprehensive means test.

⁵ Single person threshold