

Briefing note

Ending ParentsNext and championing gender equality for all

ParentsNext is making life harder for women

ParentsNext is **making life harder** for some of Australia's most disadvantaged women, particularly single mothers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers with babies as young as six months.

A raft of concerns have emerged through the recent Senate inquiry into ParentsNext. These were highlighted in our [joint submission](#), which noted that ParentsNext:

- discriminates against women, particularly single mums and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women;
- is punitive and is leaving some parents and children without money for food;
- devalues the already under-appreciated unpaid care work undertaken primarily by women;
- pushes women towards insecure and low-paid work; and
- subjects parents to the Targeted Compliance Framework ('TCF') – a highly automated system that lacks important procedural safeguards and sees parents unfairly exposed to sanctions.

ParentsNext should be scrapped

Gender equality shouldn't depend on where you live, what work you do or the colour of your skin.

These are fundamental Australian values that are being undermined by the ParentsNext program.

Primary carers of children should not be subject to mutual obligations or compliance

frameworks. These approaches are demeaning, devalue unpaid care labour and do not work.ⁱ More broadly, the Human Right Law Centre believes that the surveillance and punishment, through social security laws, of the many Australians who turn to social security in times of need should come to an end, and in particular for single parents, carers and people with a disability.

ParentsNext is a fundamentally flawed program, with control and punishment at its core. Funding being poured into the program should be redirected into voluntary programs that empower and support parents in all their diversity. Such programs will have **better prospects of succeeding if they do not threaten the emotional and financial wellbeing of women and their families and are delinked from complex and rigid social security laws.** Critically, future programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents should be designed by or in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Repeal of the Legislative Instrument

Ending ParentsNext requires the *Social Security (Parenting payment participation requirements – classes of persons) Instrument 2018* ('the Instrument') to be repealed.

The Instrument **targets and isolates** over 75,000 economically disadvantaged parents, mainly women, with pre-school aged children and babies, for less favourable treatment under the law. It does this by:

- isolating a "class of persons" receiving the parenting payment as "Targeted" or "Intensive" ParentsNext participants based on personal attributes and geographic location;ⁱⁱ
- making it mandatory in law for these parents to complete "participation requirements";ⁱⁱⁱ and
- exposing them to a system of sanctions (the TCF) by virtue of their "participation requirements".^{iv}

The Instrument needs to be repealed in its entirety. Not doing this and maintaining the current, discriminatory and punitive framework calls into question the Government's compliance with the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*.

Contact

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ⁱ See Department of Social Policy and Social Work, *Final Findings Report: Welfare Conditionality Project 2013–2018* (2018).

ⁱⁱ The Government has expressly stated that the geographic criteria for those in the Intensive Stream targets local government areas with higher numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents on the parenting payment.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Social Security Act 1991* (Cth) s 500(1)(ca). Participation requirements are set out in a person's Employment Pathway Plan, prepared by private employment service providers.

^{iv} Division 3AA of the *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999*. For Community Development Program ('CDP') participants, it is the "Jobseeker Compliance Framework" that applies, not the TCF.