

16<sup>th</sup> November 2022

Dear Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services: ParentNext,

**Re: Additional responses following the Canberra hearing on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2022.**

What are the core principles that should underpin any program that follows ParentsNext?

1. **Centre the voices and ideas of the cohort of people that were subject to ParentsNext in the redesign.** This cohort of people and their advocates have great insight and lived expertise that would offer a great deal in the policy redesign. They should not just be one of the many stakeholder groups to be consulted with, *but central in the design* of any new program. There also should be variation in the program design to allow for First Nations peoples to self determine a design to fit with their needs. Representatives from this cohort of people should be given the opportunity to formally review any new program in the future.
2. **Support unpaid care as legitimate and important work.** Unpaid care work is extremely important and crucial– it is the work of raising the next generation in which the economy and society depends on. The economy and society free rides on this unpaid labour, - depending on how you measure it, unpaid work nationally contributes to the equivalent of around 50% of GDP<sup>1</sup>. Because of gendered norms, most of this unpaid work is undertaken by women. This work should be valued and people undertaking it should be given the space, economic security, support and time needed to undertake it. Government must accept and make policy that appreciates workforce participation as just one form of work, amongst many forms of work, which whilst being extremely critical for the economy and society, are often unpaid.
3. **Focus on job quality and security.** Many single parents and women carers who are looking for paid employment have very real difficulties in work in finding suitable and dignified work that fit around their childcare responsibilities. Not only are women precarious in unpaid caring roles, but often the only work they could find was precarious casual or contract work which continued to subject them and their families to economic insecurity. Providing more thought to how policy can support women in this difficult situation, including paying attention to the intersections between employment and social security is critical. Free and accessible childcare would help, but so too is the need to strengthen casual worker's rights and conditions.
4. **Reject the ideology of mutual obligations and move towards unconditional and liveable social security.** There is a large evidence base in Australia, Europe and the US that show how mutual obligations do not get people into work, and in many cases, work against this goal. Furthermore, not everyone can work, and in the case

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<sup>1</sup> ABS 41.6% to 58.7% of GDP for that year

of many single parents, are working but their work is unpaid care work. On the other hand, unconditional welfare, and payments without mutual obligations, have much better results. We saw this with the 2020 natural experiment when the Australian Government made an additional \$550 per fortnight 'Coronavirus Supplement' temporarily available to people receiving various social security payment types, as well as suspending, in part, mutual obligation.

The research found that the \$550 Supplement was used by respondents for meeting basic needs, as well as other strategic expenditures to improve their livelihoods<sup>2</sup>. The Supplement and suspension of mutual obligations improved respondents' physical and mental health and contributed to their overall wellbeing. These dramatic changes enabled people to turn their attention away from day-to-day survival and towards envisioning and working towards a more economically secure future for themselves and their dependents.

Thank you,

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<sup>2</sup> Klein, E., Cook, K., Maury, S., & Bowey, K. (2022). An exploratory study examining the changes to Australia's social security system during COVID-19 lockdown measures. *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, 57(1), 51-69.