

Hi there,

I am confirming that there are no changes required to the Hansard transcript.

The AASW took a question on notice. We are providing the following responses to those questions:

CHAIR: Thank you, Senator Polley. I have a question for the Australian Association of Social Workers. In your submission, you said that there should be exemptions for migrants who need urgent support to be able to get it. I want to know your thoughts about the special benefit payments that are available and what your issues are with regard to the current exemptions that are in place.

AASW written response: Broadly speaking and as a subject on its own, Special benefit can be difficult to access, and the payment rate (as in the case of Jobseeker) is below the poverty line at only \$310.40 per week for a single adult. The AASW has raised concerns for a number of years for the need for payments such as Jobseeker and Special Benefit to be significantly increased to a liveable rate. In some cases Special Benefit can also be dangerous to access, for example in the case of older people who are in Australia on parent contributory visas. Our members have told us of instances where an older person is experiencing elder abuse by their adult child who has agreed to pay for the contributory visa. Where the older person goes to apply for Special Benefit so they can vacate the home of their abuser, Centrelink will contact the adult child to confirm whether or not the family is no longer financially supporting the older person. This can result in the older person not being able to receive the payment as well as risking an escalation in violence.

CHAIR: Great. There are still also exemptions for specific payments and concession cards in areas for migrants who experience substantial change in circumstances such as domestic violence, illness, injury, or the death of a partner or sponsor, and that's just one line. There's quite a bit in the explanatory memorandum where we address a lot of the issues that have been raised. I thought I would see whether, when you put that into your submission, you had some insight into what the issues were around that. I would appreciate if you could take it on notice.

AASW written response: While it's great that these provisions exist and are outlined in the explanatory notes, we still have concerns about migrants knowing their rights to access payments in cases of hardship, that a blanket rule of 4 years will mean that some people won't check if they meet hardship eligibility criteria and therefore miss out on much-needed income support. In addition to this, a lack of understanding and awareness of potentially available income support options, stigma and discrimination of and in accessing payments, fear of it having implications on any applications for permanent residency or Australian citizenship all may impact on, in particular, women, when needing to access payments.

Kind Regards,

Rachel