



100 Families WA

# The Life Experiences And Hardship Faced By Those On Newstart And Related Payments: Evidence From The 100 Families WA Study

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Ami Seivwright  
Paul Flatau  
UWA

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**100 Families WA has a commitment to ongoing engagement in the project of those with lived experience of poverty, entrenched disadvantage and social exclusion**





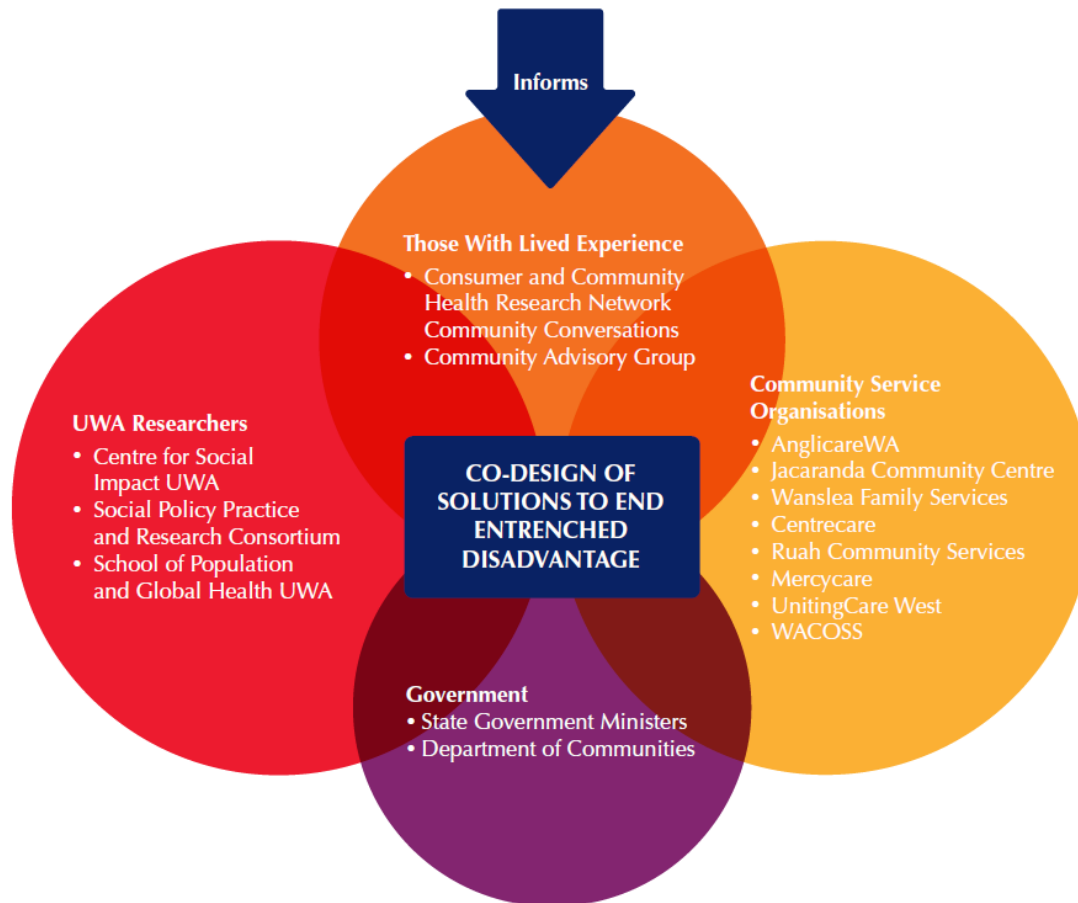
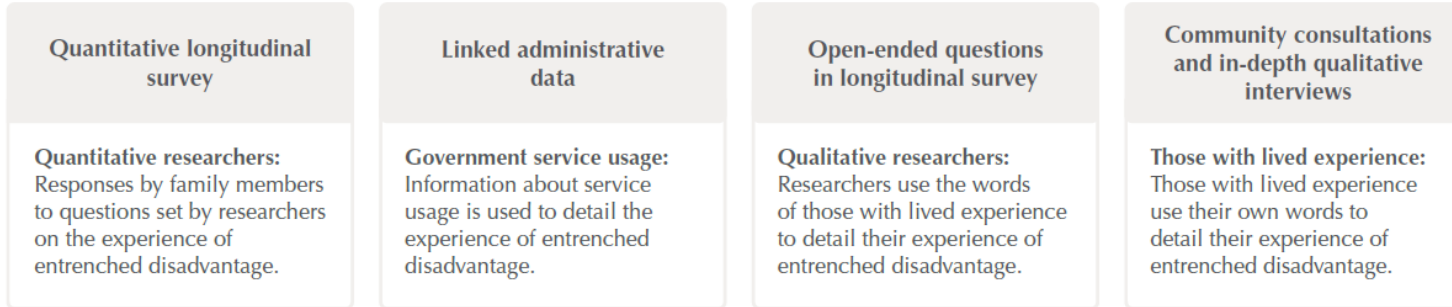
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*Through action research to reduce hardship and disadvantage for families living in Western Australia, the 100 Families WA project is working towards a vision of an economically, socially and culturally just WA where all families are supported to thrive together*

**100 Families WA Project Partners**

Anglicare WA, Jacaranda Community Centre, The Centre for Social Impact The University of Western Australia (CSI UWA), the UWA Social Policy, Practice and Research Consortium, UWA School of Population and Global Health, Wanslea Family Services, Centrecare, Ruah Community Services, UnitingCare West, MercyCare, and WACOSS.

## Comprehensive picture of entrenched disadvantage



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**The 100 Families WA project involves a rich research design and a strong partnership bringing together academics from different disciplinary backgrounds, families, community service organisations, community advocacy organisations, policy-based stakeholders and those with lived experience of entrenched disadvantage**



**Poverty creates financial stressors which leads to debts and the taking on of risky high interest and risky debt worsening the financial circumstances of people and leading to adverse health and social impacts which in turn lead to low income .....**



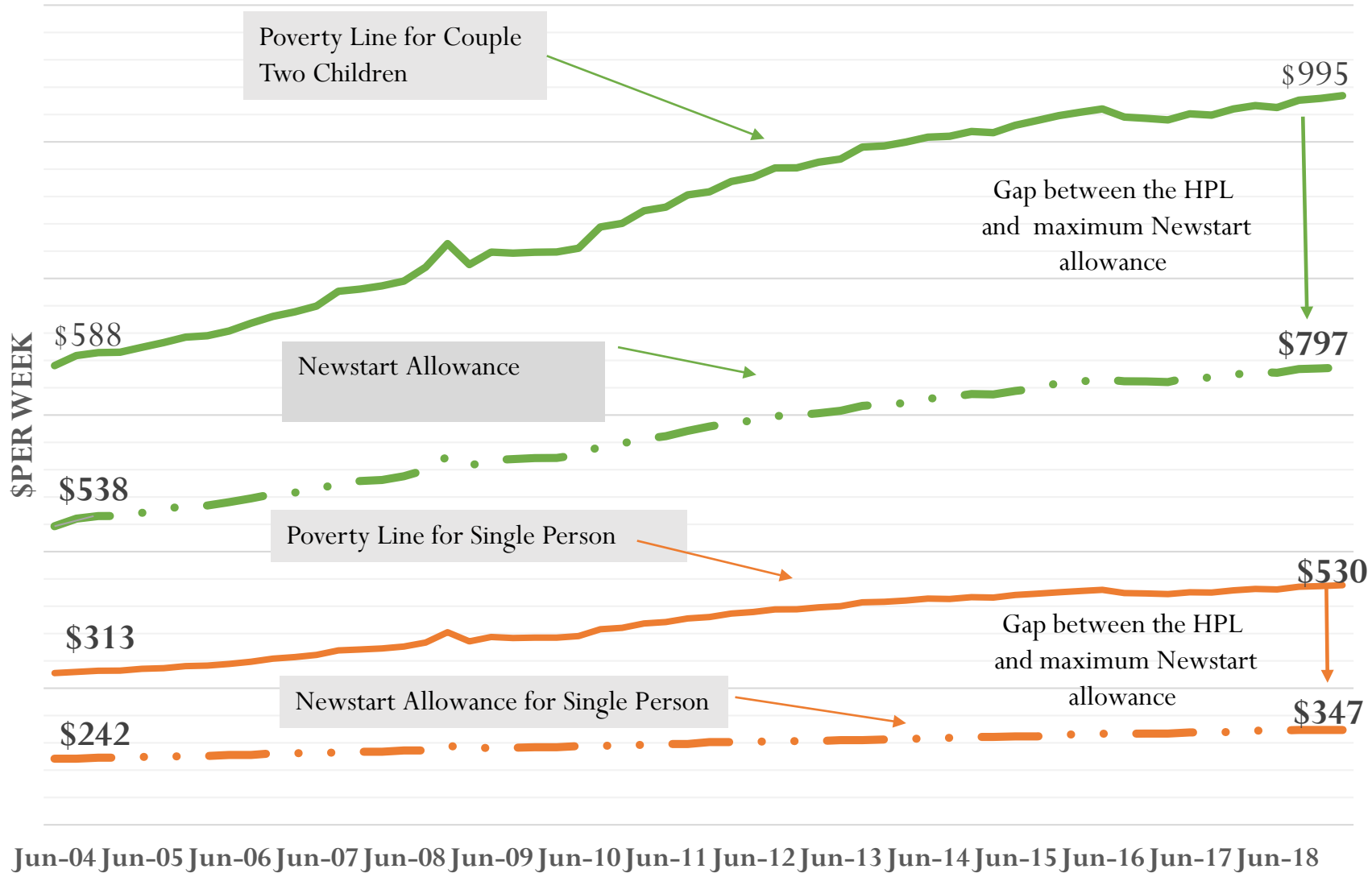
- Demographics
- Use of Services
- Housing
- General wellbeing and quality of life
- Economic participation
- Health
- **Income Support Payments**
- Drug and alcohol
- Mental health
- Adverse life experiences
- Open ended questions to close out the survey

**Fortnightly interviews**

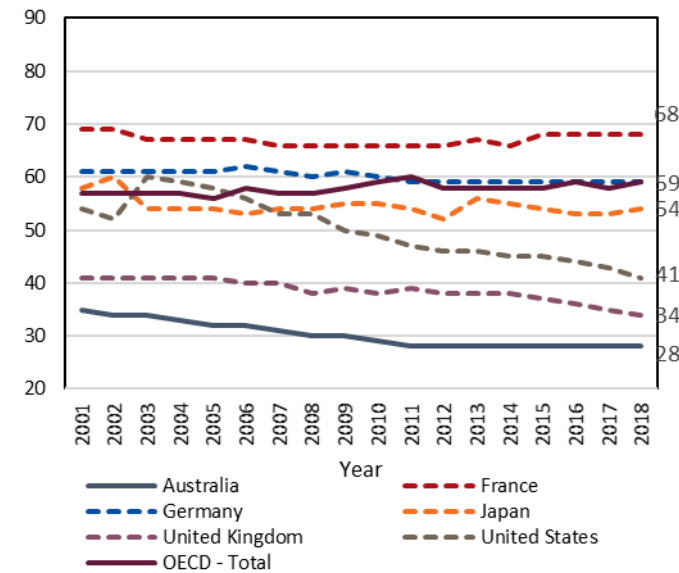
# The Increasing Gap Between Poverty Lines and Newstart



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**RAISE  
THE RATE**



Jun-04 Jun-05 Jun-06 Jun-07 Jun-08 Jun-09 Jun-10 Jun-11 Jun-12 Jun-13 Jun-14 Jun-15 Jun-16 Jun-17 Jun-18  
Source: Poverty Lines

# Newstart & Related Payments



<b>Payment type</b>	<b>N(% of total sample)</b>
<b>Newstart</b>	147(36.8%)
<b>Austudy</b>	10(2.5%)
<b>Youth Allowance</b>	7(1.8%)

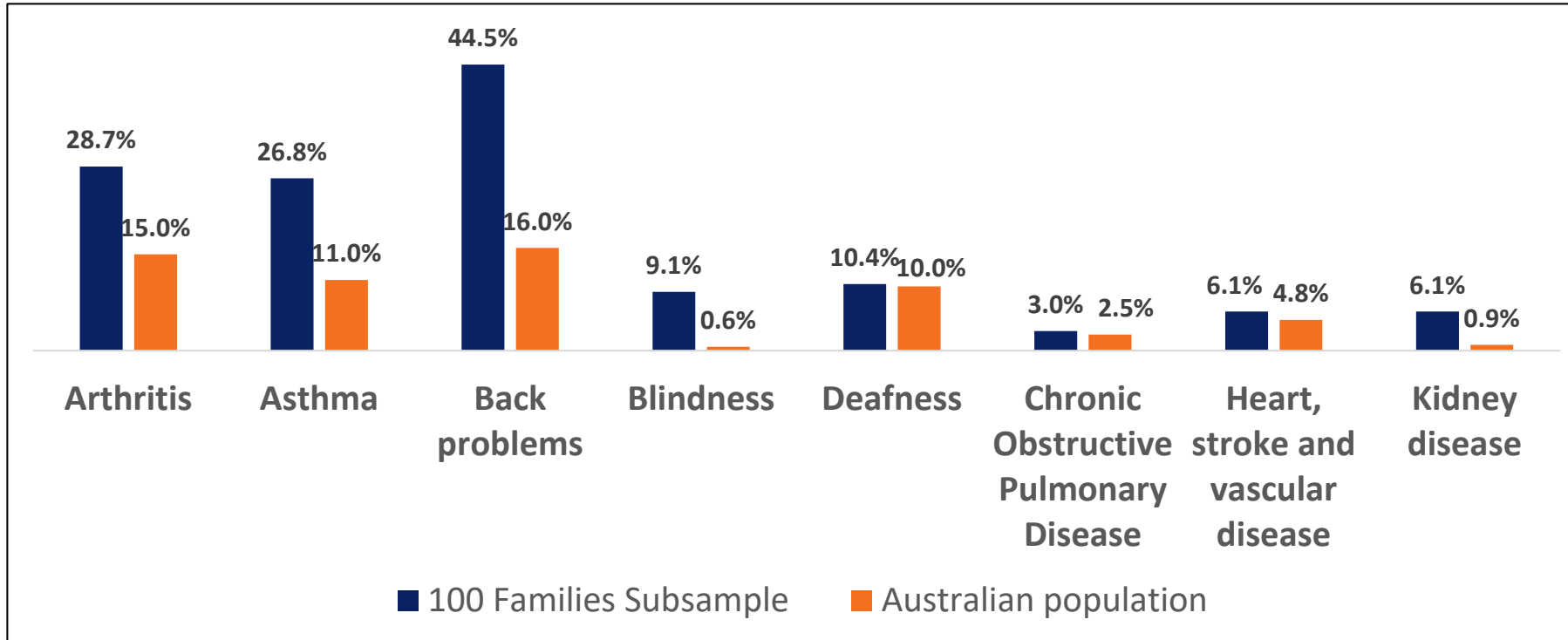
Also Abstudy, Sickness Allowance, Special Benefit, Widow Allowance, and Crisis Payment



# Health issues



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**DASS 21**  
 The mean anxiety score was 5.99 compared with an Australian population-representative mean of 1.74, and the mean stress score was 7.54 compared with 3.99 among Australians more generally

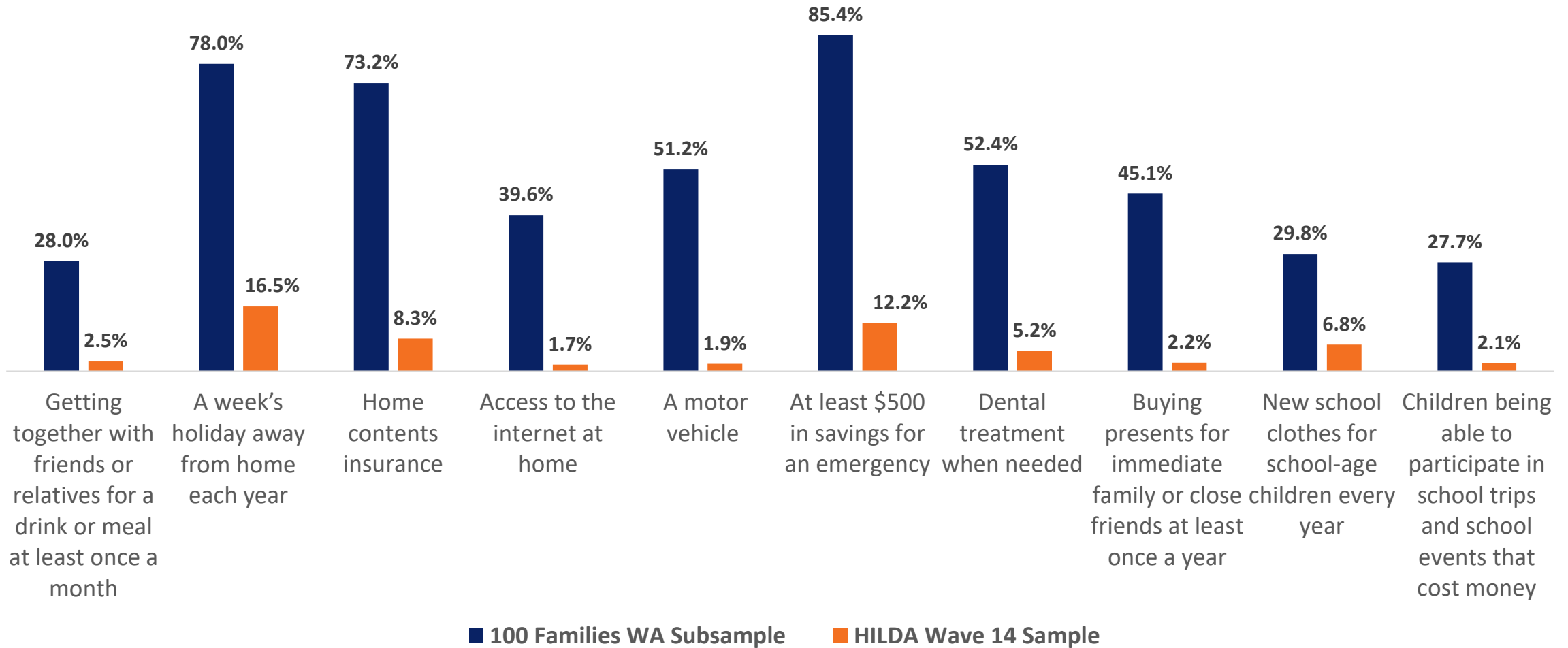
Almost **one in five** (18.3%) of family members in the group report having a **permanent physical disability** that limits mobility and **over three quarters** (76.2%) reported that they had been **diagnosed by a medical professional with at least one mental health condition**; **64%** had been diagnosed with **2 or more mental health conditions**.



# Direct poverty impacts



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# Employment barriers



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Barrier	Proportion of 100 Families WA subsample (n=164)
Illness/disability	46.3%
Discrimination	29.3%
Not enough jobs available	35.4%
Child care responsibilities	17.1%
Other caring responsibilities	8.5%
Lack of help in finding employment	24.4%
Lack of help in maintaining employment	18.9%
Wrong/not enough educational qualifications	28.0%
Difficulty accessing skills training and education	22.6%
Lack of available, accessible transport to the workplace	23.8%
Difficulty accessing flexible work arrangements	26.2%

# Employment barriers



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*“I am a single parent and I do not [have] family support, so it is difficult for me to find hours that will work with my childcare responsibilities, particularly because after school care is so expensive”*

*“The job agency does not keep to their responsibilities in assisting me to get the training and qualifications I need as I can no longer work as I used to due to my back injury”,*

*“I don't have a driver's licence and I can't afford public transport all, or most, of the time”*

*“My experiences getting work have been affected by my criminal record even for minor things that haven't been paid.”*

*“I don't have a driver's licence and I can't afford public transport all, or most, of the time”,*

*“Not having stable accommodation and access to transport makes it difficult to get a job”*

*“It's not just about qualifications, I have qualifications, they all want experience or you to volunteer to get experience with no guarantee of a job. No incentive. My employment service put me in a job which was good but then my hours got reduced until they didn't need me which was frustrating and disheartening”*

# A fortnightly budget on Centrelink payments



Colleen Fisher and Sue Young

Income		Expenditure			
Centrelink	<b>708</b>		Alinta	30	
Rent	400	Unofficial renter	Synergy	70	Power disconnected, raised from 25 pf to 70 pf
			Rent	700	(often doesn't pay full rent)
			Fuel	21	
			Cigarettes	40	
Usual total	1108				
This fortnight					
Car sale	250	Owes Dept transport non return of plates*			
			4 tablets@ 7 per tablet	28	for treatment for rheumatoid arthritis
Total this fortnight	1358		Motor bike repayment	100	Bought new motor bike (300), old one was unregistered and not in good repair
			Motor bike registration (3 months)	105	Still has to pay transfer fees
				<b>1094</b>	This fortnight 264 for all other expenses – without the car sale would be 14 remaining

‘\$20,000. that’s all I got last year. That’s what some people take on holiday.’

C lost her phone, so didn’t respond to Synergy about the next payment. So the next payment instead of being \$25 went up to \$70 per fortnight

‘I haven’t got the \$200 for the plates, the system now makes you into a criminal’ (referring to returning the plates)

‘If I didn’t have my folks, it’d be crap – it would be a downward spiral’

# Disconnections – a case study

## *G has just moved into a Homeswest house*



### **Gas**

Cut off

1<sup>st</sup> phone call G to Alinta: I pay Centrepay, why has my gas been cut off?

Alinta: somebody went round to the address and couldn't find anybody, but yes we can see you do, it will be reconnected in 2/3 days

G: it shouldn't have been cut off

2<sup>nd</sup> phone call to Alinta:

G: what's happening with my gas?

Alinta: the account has not been properly transferred into your name, and it will be put back on in 2/3 days

3<sup>rd</sup> phone call to Alinta:

G: there is always someone at the house (partner is invalid), no letter was left 'I can't have emailed accounts, sometimes I have no data, so I insist on paper', and 'Neighbours tell me sometimes the mail goes missing'

Alinta: the gas will be reconnected today

### **Electricity**

Cut off

G: 'this time I understand why. Every time you open an account whatever was owing on the previous bill follows you'

Synergy: For the \$1000 arrears half needs to be paid up front for the electricity to be reconnected

G: 'I'm lucky if I have \$150 a week after I pay everything out of my pension'

Synergy: The Keep and Connect option is to pay \$122 per fortnight.

G: 'so that'll mean I have to find \$60 per week out of my \$150 a week, which will leave me with \$90 a week for everything. Why can't you just send it all to debt collectors and I deal with it that way?'

Synergy: because we'll have to disconnect your power

G: 'it's small enough money anyway, how the hell am I meant to catch up with it?'

The poverty trap:

From a financial side of things, life is crap



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‘I’ve got to wait six months before I can apply for HUGS after being on [Alinta’s] plan’

‘The same with power, I’ve got to be with them 6 months before I can apply for HUGS’

‘That’s six months with having to find the money to pay for things before I can get government assistance to pay half the bill’

‘If you miss one payment you have to start back at the beginning’