

5th April 2018

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

*Submission to
Senate
Standing*

*Committees on
Community
Affairs*

*Social Services
Legislation
Amendment
(Drug Testing
Trial) Bill 2018*

Dear Committee Secretary;

I wish to make a brief submission to the committee on the proposed changes & amendments to the Social Security Act 1991. I practice as a social worker in addiction services around central Sydney. I have held a number of positions in the last fifteen years where my clients have been recipients of various Centrelink payments, including working for small churches, NGOs and public health services.

From Kings Cross to Kogarah, I've supported Centrelink clients who are in study, who are looking for work, and who will struggle to find or retain a job for the rest of their working life. I have found there are two near-universal truths about people in these situations. They are under stress, and interacting with Centrelink is always hard. As reference, I am an experienced social worker, and I find Centrelink a difficult organisation to engage with.

I often see my clients drop out of their reporting obligations due to existing reporting requirements and red tape. By enforcing testing, these amendments will create further bureaucratic hurdles for people to clear before receiving the meagre rate of pay that Newstart affords. Not receiving a Centrelink payment prevents an unemployed person from secure tenancies or participating in community, and increases the risk of homelessness and long term unemployment.

We know that people receiving Centrelink may use substances, sometimes in abusive patterns. Research shows that alcohol is the most widely abused substance in Australia, yet that will not be included in the testing regime. Having read the proposed changes, I do not believe that directing people to treatment will have effective outcomes for participants. Effective referral into treatment needs to be more than a threat of a ceased or reduced payment, it requires integrated care, interagency cooperation and collaboration with clients.

I would welcome increased funding for treatment & support of substance abuse, and for supporting people with low job prospects, however I am very concerned that these amendments are the not the way to achieve this.

Sincerely,

James Clarke

*James Clarke
Social Worker
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