

# Inquiry into ParentsNext.

January 2019

**The National Council  
& of Single Mothers  
Their Children Inc.**



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## Who we are

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Incorporated (NCSMC) is an organisation dedicated to single mothers. The Council has become a platform whereby both the community and the Government can communicate. NCSMC can comment on policy and legislation and ensure that the *lived experience* is heard. NCSMC provides information, referrals and assistance to single mothers through our electronic platforms. In the past year we have responded to tens of thousands individual requests whilst our information post can reach up to 100,000+ per week. One of our greatest strengths is our expertise and commitment in working with and for the advancement of women and children who are affected by poverty, hardship and/or domestic violence.

## Senate Inquiry

We welcome a Government Inquiry into the Parentsnext Program and most importantly this inquiry provides an opportunity to hear either directly or via organisations the experience from the participants of that program.

In July 2018 the Federal Government expanded its pilot of ParentsNext, a program for parents with young children, that they might become 'employment-ready'. At a first glance this may seem a step-in-the-right-direction as we know that investing in families makes sound policy and economic sense. The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc (NCSMC) has always advocated for single mother families to have access to support and assistance that aids their family's financial security and provides the necessary stepping stones towards resilience and wellbeing.

However, we have continuously opposed this program which was expanded in July 2018 as it is underpinned by a 'compliance and penalty' framework. There are no circumstances in a single mother's life where the prospect of payment suspension, reduction and/or cessation adds strength or stability to their family unit or aids 'employment-ready'.

*There are no circumstances in a single mother's life where the prospect of payment suspension, reduction and/or cessation adds strength or stability to their family or aids 'employment-ready'.*

Our expertise is derived from our own research, collaboration with others and steeped in the rich experience of women who have sought our service, provided their wisdom and engaged in our surveys. It is from this unique but clear vantage point that we present our submission and recommendations.

## Our Recommendations

1. **Urgently remove compliance and penalty from the ParentsNext program.** This is to occur immediately along with the revoking of any suspension and or reduction of income support because of the program.
2. Funding saved through the removal of compliance, penalty, reporting and surveillance undertaken by the provider to be re-invested into practical and or financial assistance as requested by women.
3. Institute a trial of a 'support program' that is underpinned by 'encouragement and reward' and accompanied by a Productivity Payment.
4. Program design should commence with asking women 'what assistance' would and or could best aid their family's security and future resilience. Program design should be informed by the lived reality rather than flawed assumptions that is imposed from a top-down approach.
5. Undertake an analysis of how the participation fund has been used and ensure that it is in the best interest of the participant and not used as a quasi-wage supplement. The exploration should also include an analysis of the level of funds and assistance for participants to access child care.
6. Ensure participants of all Government programs have a plain English overview of their rights and protections. Best practice would incorporate co-design.
7. Women who have raised safety concerns and/or the trauma associated with domestic violence, receive an automatic exemption from compulsory participation of government employment programs. In the circumstances where women want to voluntary access a program, they are reassured that there is a streamlined policy and practice that supports clarifying the circumstances to a third party without the details, and or the need for them to repeat their situation.
8. Remove the ability for an organisation (providers) to have the power to institute, investigate and then determine the 'appropriateness' of their own sanctions.
9. Correct legislation that enables the Department of Human Services to refer participants to providers but does not have the legislative function that enables them to exit a participant from the program, even in the circumstances of an incorrect referral.
10. Review the referral and exiting process, establish remedies to address the practice of incorrect referrals as well as ensuring that women can exit the program. NCSMC has received and read conflicting information. At the time of writing this submission we are unclear on how to exit the program. The supplementary information is an email to the

National Referral Service Line which raises this matter on behalf of a woman and remains unanswered.

11. The period for an exemption is regulated. Currently, it's a case-by-case scenario determined by the provider. It is at best a 'part-exemption' as the provider still may require the participant to attend and or report. Women have reported sanctions during an exemption. Common-sense would dictate that women should not have to 'report' during their study year and that domestic violence exemptions for Parentsnext would reflect mutual obligations domestic violence exemptions which are already legislated by the Government.
  
12. Welfare conditionality with possible income reduction and/or suspension is at odds with Australia`s declared human rights obligations, most notably the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Committee to strengthen the human rights compatibility process as the current system is not adequate.
  
13. NCSMC has valued the engagement with the Department of Jobs and Small Business despite our fundamental difference regarding Parentsnext framework.

This submission also contains a summary document of the parentsnext survey and the 'information and tips' for parentsnext participants. Developed by the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc and the Council of Single Mothers (Victoria).

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## Parentsnext

In July 2018 the Federal Government expanded its pilot of ParentsNext, a program for parents with children under the age of 6 years, that they might become 'employment-ready'. At a first glance this may seem a step-in-the-right-direction as we know that investing in families makes sound policy and economic sense especially for sole parent families that also encounter safety, hardship and or financial disadvantage. The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc (NCSMC) has always advocated for single mother families to have access to support and assistance that aids their family's financial security and provides the necessary stepping stones to resilience and wellbeing.

However, NCSMC have continuously opposed this program which was extended in July 2018 as it is underpinned by an ever increasing 'compliance and penalty' framework. ParentsNext began in June 2016 in 10 rural and remote sites around Australia and from 1 July 2018 it has been expanded to reach all non-remote areas in the country. However, the program has its genesis in the 'young mothers' program which developed and became incorporated into the policy, Building Australia's Workforce (2011-12), we signal to the committee our extensive history in this policy and program design. NCSMC are dismayed that in each reiteration compliance and penalty are the enhanced features. Government support has continued and the program includes 73,000 parents of whom 96% are women and 10,000 are Indigenous, as stated by the [Explanatory Statement](#).

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc, unequivocally state that there are no circumstances in a single mother's life where the prospect of payment suspension, reduction and/or cessation adds strength or stability to their family unit or aids 'employment-ready'. Such punitive consequences are both patriarchal and patronising and is disruptive to the objective of 'employment-ready'.

**R**ecommendation

**1. Urgently remove compliance and penalty from the ParentsNext program.** This is to occur immediately along with the revoking of any suspension and or reduction of income support because of the program.

## The Inconvenience of Parenting

As a country we fail to value and acknowledge unpaid care. We never talk about the '[opportunity cost](#)', the '[care cost](#)' or the '[invisible labour](#)'. The skills, the time, the necessity of parenting is blatantly missing in policy formation and the economic contribution is elusive in Australian policy deliberations and decisions, especially with regards to sole-parenting. It is pushed to one side as it's falsely assumed that parenting is a non-quantifiable matter that can be squeezed and shaped to meet the requirements of imposed programs including ParentsNext. The demands of parenting are unrelenting, and needs can be unexpected, a childhood issue can often occur at the most 'inconvenient time'. If a parent is gainfully employed with preschool children, there may be some buffers in the form of leave entitlements or access to the financial resources or the established networks to help to juggle those competing demands which are heightened in a sole parent family. However, this is not the circumstance in which ParentsNext operates, as eligibility is determined by location, receipt of the parenting payment (within the last six months), no employment earnings during that same period, and a child under six years of age.

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc have continually asked why programs are not underpinned by encouragement and positive reward? Could a participation payment be more cost and outcome beneficial? Further to this, we are dismayed that the vast amount of money spent on the establishment of ParentsNext service providers could be used by parents to purchase the assistance they most need. This approach has a much greater chance to support 'employment ready' and future planning which will bring their children, and ultimately the Australian society, the greatest long-term benefits.

**R**ecommendations

2. Funding saved through the removal of compliance, penalty, reporting and surveillance undertaken by the provider to be re-invested into practical and or financial assistance as requested by the participant.
3. Institute a trial that is underpinned by 'encouragement and reward'. A Productivity Payment.

## Flawed Thinking

The program is another example of assuming that these parents are bereft of aspiration and lacking the ability to choose a path forward. It is imperative to reiterate key statistics to ensure an accurate understanding:

Australian Bureau of [Statistics](#) figures demonstrates the link between employment and parental responsibility: 56% of all single mothers with children or dependent students were employed in June 2016, compared with 69% of mothers in couple families. Employment participation is closely linked to the children's age: only 14% of single mothers with children under 4 years had a full-time job, with the rate lifting as children age – peaking at 45% for those with children above 15 years.

Employment and 'employment ready' are more aligned to opportunity, resources and or capacity of the primary carer and not due to an unwillingness to strive for the best for their family. Furthermore, investing into family friendly jobs would be a more productive and cost-effective use of funds.

# R

ecommendations

4. Revisit the program design. Commence with asking participants 'what assistance' would and or could best aid their family's security and future resilience. Program design should be informed by the lived reality rather than flawed assumptions that is imposed from a top-down approach.
5. Undertake an analysis of how the participation fund has been used and ensure that it is in the best interest of the participant and not used as a quasi-wage supplement. The exploration should also include an analysis of the level of funds and assistance for participants to access child care.

## Demerits & Penalties: Post-1 July 2018

Under the expanded ParentsNext program, participants are subjected to a significantly enhanced compliance framework. ParentsNext participants are now subject to sanctions, which goes beyond the already concerning practice of 'payment suspension' if they fail to meet a participation requirement without a 'reasonable excuse' as determine by the provider. If found by their provider to have had a 'reasonable excuse' for not meeting their requirement, their payment is resumed, and

their demerit is removed after they have fulfilled their outstanding requirement. The practicality and the consequence of this process should not be lost to the Committee.

*‘What a stuff up. I was sure that I told (~~provider’s name removed~~) that there was a change in the date. Bang, without knowing I was ‘non-compliant’. The stress of trying to understand what I did wrong was hard as my worker (parent next provider) worked part-time. No one really knew, or even believed that it was just a mess up regarding the dates. I spent three days stressed, heading into the weekend with my son’s who is 18 months old. I use up all of my phone credit and spent extra money in petrol whilst trying to remain calm. I survived that weekend by munching on the remaining dry biscuits. I was nervous about this program and now I hate it’.*

If found by the provider not to have a reasonable excuse for failing to meet their requirement, they are obliged to fulfil the requirement before their payment is made, and they accumulate one or more demerits. It’s important to note that the process of sanctions and reviewing ‘reasonable excuses’ now rest with the same body; the parentsnext provider. This is a flawed and concerning practice that denies due process and basic justice. This practice must be part of the Committee’s Inquiry.

**R**ecommendation

6. Remove the ability for an organisation to have the power to institute, investigate and then determined the appropriateness of their own sanctions.

## You’re not doing enough - Pension Education Supplement

The Pension Education Supplement (PES) is much valued assistance for a range of Australians who are in receipt of various income payments including the Parenting Payment and the Newstart Allowance (principle carer). Eligibility and approval are determined by the Department of Human Services and their [website](#) provides information regarding the types of courses, approved institutions and payment amounts. Pre-July 2018, a sensible practice occurred which provided an exemption for ‘compulsory participants’ who were in receipt of PES. However, this exemption no longer applied effective 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018. Subsequently, surveillance, reporting and possible sanctions could apply to women who are



surpassing the requirements of the program. If the provider determines that a participant is ‘capable’ of self-reporting their participation against the stated obligation, the participant could do this via the dashboard. However, reporting could be face-to-face, phone calls and or SMS. It is determined upon the provider.

NCSMC has uncertainty regarding the ‘age qualification’ of the child. Pre-July 2018 one of the eligibility requirements was based upon the youngest child age, six-months to six-years. However, the current website [states](#), “ have a youngest child under 6”. Due to the recurring reports from women that they are contacted by DHS, and that their child is younger than six months, NCSMC is uncertain if there is a sanctioned practice to contact participants with children under six-months of age or if there is policy confusion and or referral errors. There are a range of exemptions, under which ParentsNext compulsory participants are not required to meet their participation requirements for a period. ParentsNext providers are responsible for applying automatic exemptions (when provided with the required evidence) and determining when and for how long. Exemptions appear to be a ‘case-by-case’ exemptions. The Department of Human Services (DHS) is able to grant exemptions for temporary reprieve due to pregnancy/birth of a child for Intensive Stream participants. Under this exemption, participants are exempt from participation requirements from six weeks prior to and six months after the expected birth date. Essentially, the grounds of exemptions remain unchanged post July 2018 and they include, domestic violence, temporary incapacity as well as home-schooling. However, women continue to report to NCSMC that despite eligibility for an exemption, that DHS has the current and appropriate documentation they are still referred to a Parentsnext provider and its up to the participating to provide the duplicate information and hope that an exemption will be granted.

## R ecommendations

7. Correct legislation that enables the Department of Human Services to refer participants to providers but does not have the legislative function that enables them to exit a participant from the program, even in the circumstances of an incorrect referral.
8. Review referral processes and establish remedies to address the practice of incorrect referrals.
9. The period for an exemption is regulated, and that attending a program is ‘suspended’ during the period of the exemption. Common-sense would dictate that women should not have to report during their study year and that domestic violence exemptions for Parentsnext would reflect mutual obligations exemptions.

Below is the statement from a woman who is home-schooling her child. DHS have the records and she was incorrectly referred to a parents next provider.

*“Yesterday, they put me through to cl (DHS-CL), who was actually really kind and patient. He tried to exempt me, uploaded the home-school document, but suddenly he put me through to another person. Spoke with no less than 4 people there! They don't know how to exit me.*

**R**ecommendations

10. Ensure participants have a plain English overview of their rights and protections. Best practice would incorporate co-design.

11. Women who have raised safety concerns and/or the trauma associated with domestic violence, receive an automatic exemption from compulsory participation of government employment programs. In the circumstances where women want to voluntary access a program, they are reassured that there is a streamlined policy and practice that supports clarifying the circumstances to a third party without the details, and or the need for them to repeat their situation.

## Program Design: What we want

**Penalty and compliance to be replaced by voluntary participation, encouragement and reward. This needs to be an immediate and rapid response. It's plausible to assume that if the parentsnext providers are well-connected, skilled and offering a service that is consistent to the needs of participants that the removal of compulsory is not only progressive but an achievable outcome.** The immediate benefits would be witness in a reduction of the tension between the participant and the provider, the level of reporting by both the participant and the parentsnext provider as well as increasing flexibility and capacity to establish a more personally centred service based upon trust and mutual agreement. It is our view that it would lead to better outcomes as well as a less costly program. There is no data to support the notion that single mothers do not wish to engage in the labour market, but there is a reality regarding their capacity, the cost to engage, education levels and the lack of available and suitable jobs.

Employment services through reducing reporting and compliance costs are then positioned to use the funding to increase practical assistance. Practical assistance especially for families who straddle the poverty line is one of the most effective forms of assistance. Such assistance that would make a significant difference in seeking employment include:

- Financial assistance to gain required workplace certificates such as Police Clearance Certificates, Child Safety Certificates, OHS&W Training, Manual Handling.
- Financial assistance to gain required workplace licenses such as Forklift License, Responsible Service of Alcohol license as well as insurances such as comprehensive motor vehicle insurance and other associated insurances.
- Practical assistance to reduce and or to cover the cost of transport to attend interviews.
- Practical support be interview ready such as understanding the job market in the area, updating and/or writing a curriculum vitae.
- Assistance and support to secure appropriate interview clothing.
- Internet and/or phone coverage.
- Financial capacity to respond to outstanding health concerns.
- Financial assistance to assist with essential but costly child welfare matters that prohibit 'job ready' planning. One example is the stress related to the high cost of the Autism Assessment and Educational Assessments, which can be \$800. If it is suspected that the child has therapy requirements, the family focus would centre on connecting and enrolling in the appropriate services. This task can only occur after an assessment and it would take precedent over 'employment ready' activities. Assisting families through these processes can provide the very scarce 'thinking and planning time'.
- Encouragement and support for study that will lead to secure employment.

The above list is not a comprehensive, but they are the reality of what families can contend with when trying to gain a foothold in the labour market.

## Committee to Investigate

ParentsNext is an extension of government policies that include employment programs, mutual obligation and welfare conditionality. The intersection of these policies and the subsequent effect that has upon vulnerable women, especially against the powers of the system, should be reviewed and through the lens of the participant and how it affects their wellbeing. This should occur irrespective and in addition to recommendations and findings from the Senate Inquiry. NCSMC believes that lessons learnt can add knowledge with the aim to prevent future mistakes. Therefore, NCSMC would seek that the Committee asked the Ombudsman or another appropriate body with investigative powers to review the following:

The appropriateness of legislation that provides the Department of Human Services (DHS) the power to determine and refer participants to a government sanctioned program, in this circumstance it's the ParentsNext program, whilst not having the legislative power or policy functionality that can exit a participant, especially if the referral was an error made by DHS.

The appropriateness of a funded body, the ParentsNext provider, to have the power to determine and to impose sanctions as well as the body to review participants disagreement of such sanctions know as 'reasonable excuse'. This is a denial of due process.

Contacting of parents with children who are under the age of six-months. NCSMC has sought a review of this process as there is continued history of women who do not meet the stated 'eligibility' of programs but are still contacted by the relevant department. In this circumstance there appears no recourse for women who are incorrectly contacted and/or referred and then the onus is upon the women to seek out information, to determine if the referral is indeed incorrect and then what avenue or course of action that they can or must take. In our experience it is not usual for women to comply just so they don't lose their payment or have to manage another system. NCSMC refers to this a 'systemic fatigue'. This practice has again been displayed in the ParentsNext program, but we would wish for a determination or a finding that could institute protections for not only parentnext participants but to set guidelines and standards for other programs.

The appropriateness of referring vulnerable women, especially women affected by domestic violence to programs where they must again disclose their trauma, their safety concerns to services and/or providers which is bereft of voluntary, specialist domestic violence knowledge and an established relationship built on trust. The re-traumatising of women should be highlighted as a poor policy and guidelines instituted that prohibits this from occurring. Current practice is out of step with the principles of the National Plan to reduce Violence against Women and Children. The

Fourth Action [Plan](#) of the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children (2009-2020) was launched by the Government on 30 January 2019 following endorsement by state and territory Community Services Ministers across Australia.

Women are most protective of their privacy and are very aware of their circumstances in order to protect themselves and or their children.

We further seek that the Committee use the powers of investigation and questioning to seek knowledge regarding the following which directly relate to ParentsNext.

- a) Full disclosure for participants regarding their rights, we bring to the Committee's attention two examples such as the "10" thinking days" before signing the participation plan as well as the privacy waiver. It was disappointing but not surprising that 85% of survey respondents stated that they did NOT know they had a right to "10" thinking days" before signing the plan. This is the plan that contains the activity and therefore what is required for the participant to be deemed compliant. A significant element of the program and one that participant should be fully versed and informed about.
- b) NCSMC further points out that it was information directly sought from the Dept of Jobs & Small Business that gave clarity on the status of the privacy waiver, the information was received on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Until then, NCSMC could not provide clear direction or information to women regarding the status and possible ramification of signing or not signing the privacy waiver. NCSMC did not want to be party to any woman receiving a 'sanction' with the prospect of the non-signing affecting their very scarce and critical income payment. Conversely, we did not want to be part of a system that coerced women into practices that they objected and/or increased safety concerns.
- c) Furthermore, if there are safe-guards to protect families who are already contending with hardship from further financial hardship this needs to fully disclose to participants and implemented by the system. It was during the process of providing direct assistance to one woman who was in distress, and incorrectly referred to a ParentsNext provider, when she "stumbled across" pertinent information. Her original Parentsnext provider was 60km from her home and only after trying to exit from this program she was told the geographical distance meant that she could have had a choice of attending or not. NCSMC is not aware of such safe guards and would like to know how they can be accessed and that participants could be fully informed.
- d) NCSMC would further like the Committee to explore the access and use to the Participation Funds for participants. We note that findings from the survey, with a total of 87% *disagree*

(23.53%) and or *strongly disagree* (63.53%) with the statement that the provider 'has provided me with financial assistance to attend the activities' contrast this to 1.18% who *agree* with the statement and 0% *strongly agree*. Similarly, the survey identified that 84% stated that they did NOT receive any assistance from the provider to either access financial assistance for childcare or to locate childcare.

## Human Rights

Welfare conditionality is a key feature of the program that has generated fear from parents as it can and has led to the reduction and/or withdrawal of income support. A sanction may occur if parents fail to meet the compliance conditions as determined by the provider; there is no longer an 'independent body' that determines a 'reasonable excuse'. Forcing participation can lead to perverse results and a financial cost on the parents. One parent spoke about her need to drive 60kms to attend an appointment whilst another spoke about her provider telling her that the enrolment of her kindergarten days would need to be changed. In this circumstance, it was the woman's friend who contacted NCSMC as the woman was emotionally exhausted, she had worked hard to secure that enrolment as her child has additional needs, and there were limited opportunities. Other parents have reported that they missed work or study time to attend case meetings with their ParentsNext provider. There is no measurement of the cost imposed for participations, women who already manage a very tight weekly budget with little wriggle room.

The design of the program and the power of the provider can sabotage a parent becoming 'employment ready'. Requiring parents to work on resumes or job applications or to study further when they are already well-qualified goes beyond time-wasting; it's appears to be more about postcode compliance and penalty. The plans may also include activities for children that are not suitable for the individual child or accord with the choice and judgment of the parent eroding their parenting autonomy. Furthermore, it has the capacity to increase community stigma as the provider can 'call' a community group to 'check' that the parent has been attending. One such example was a mother who had already enrolled and attended local parent groups. Once, she became a 'participant' the provider phoned and sought third party verification that she was attending. This occurred despite her appointments with the provider and her online reporting. This action is allowed, and it not only served to embarrass the mother, but it reduced her confidence and willingness to attend further playgroups.

It is our view that the legislative regime that implements this program is not compatible with key rights and freedoms listed in the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) [Act 2011](#). The Human Rights (Parliamentary scrutiny) act of 2011 recognises declared international instruments including the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Australia is signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) which establishes social security as a Human Right. This is an entitlement provided by a society to its members who are in need due to a range of circumstances such as illness, disability, unemployment, old age and caring responsibilities. This right, as with others in the ICESCR, must be 'exercised without discrimination' including on the basis of sex, race, language and national or social origin. The program effectively limits the rights to receive social security and an adequate standard of living. Consequently, it is NCSMC's argument that the program unfairly burdens human rights in breach of the Australia's international convention obligations. It is the obligation of the state to create services that assist people not imposing social security conditions that remove people's agency, imposing welfare conditionality premised on the notion that single parenting and/or hardship equate to women's incapacity to plan for their future and to make 'employment ready' decisions that best fit them and their families circumstances. NCSMC seeks that the committee strongly requires a justify the necessity of suspension, reduction or cancellation of parenting payments in achieving the outcomes of the parentsnext program. NCSMC would argue that the postcode of disadvantage would be more aligned to increasing more support rather than a program that can withhold entitlements. Currently, the human rights analysis contained in Statements of Compatibility prepared by the Australian Government is [described](#) as 'often very poor'. There is scope to improve Government legislation and practices against our declared human rights obligations.

The vast majority of ParentsNext participants are women, reflecting the gender imbalance in providing the primary care responsibility in Australia. These women who accept the responsibility of being parents are facing discrimination in their access to social security due to their gender. Children in sole parent households also face unacceptable economic discrimination through the withdrawal of payments. NCSMC concern regarding such actions also extends to indigenous women and newly arrived migrants and refugees. It is our hope that these voices and experts are part of the inquiry. Australia is still to grapple with the concept that hardship is one of the biggest impairments to become 'employment-ready' and that issue should be central to the program design. It must be noted that the compliance and focus that these mothers undergo is much more severe and government sanctioned than the non-custodial father regarding their child support obligations. With a 1.5 billion

child-support [debt](#). The odds are stacked against low income single mother families. It's time to rebalance the fairness.

The United Nations has already 'registered' a complaint [lodged](#) by the National Council of single Mothers and their Children Inc and stated that they are 'writing to the state', January 2018. It is the first complaint that the United Nations has accepted under the optional protocol of The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. This complaint concerns Australia's treatment of single mothers which denies access to the Parenting Payment Single when the youngest child is eight years old. Prior to bipartisan policy decisions effective 1 July 2006 and 1 January 2013, accessing the parenting payment was available until the youngest child was 16 years.

The ParentsNext program design which includes punitive elements such as the prospect of payment suspension, reduction and control along with targeting indigenous locations, has the hallmarks of another backward and discriminatory program that questions Australia's stated commitments to its international Human Rights obligations. The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc have welcomed voices who oppose the 'compliance and penalty' nature of the program. We note public [commentary](#) by human rights experts, shared concern by various legal and human rights organisations, women's organisations and our colleagues who operate single mother services and support systems. We are appreciative of the grassroots advocates who are seeking social justice. Mostly, we wish to thank single mothers who are participants in the parentsnext program who have shared their experience and engaged in our survey.

We can - and must - do better than this.