

Minority Report

Australian Greens and Australian Democrats

Schedule 6 Carer Allowance Backdating Provisions

I am very concerned about this amendment, which will substantially reduce the maximum backdating period for carers of both children and adults (being from 52 weeks for children and 26 weeks for adults) down to 12 weeks. The Australian Greens believe this is unfair, uncaring and unreasonable.

The department's stated reason for this is that:

"The measure will standardise the backdating period available ..."

"The measure will rationalise ..."

The department also estimates that this will save \$107.6 million over four years.

A recent report by Access Economics concluded that carers annually contribute \$30.5 billion of care to the community.

They are often the most vulnerable and lowly paid in our community, either leaving work altogether or working reduced hours to enable them to carry out their carer responsibilities.

The back pay they receive is used to pay for things such as supporting the person being cared for, costs of diagnosis, transport, pharmaceuticals, nappies and necessary modifications to their homes.

The Government is proposing to standardise and rationalise payments at the expense of carers who provide so much selfless support and care for our communities most vulnerable members.

Carers organisations have condemned this amendment and believe it should be withdrawn.

Substantial evidence was provided to the Committee outlining the reasons why carers do not always immediately apply for carers allowance. These included:

- not immediately identifying as a carer,
- focussed on dealing with the crisis,
- coming to terms with the changed circumstances,
- lack of information of the allowance,
- overwhelming demands on ongoing care,
- delays with diagnoses,
- attempting to 'go it alone' until a financial crisis is reached.

As pointed out in the Carers Australia submission these proposed changes will:

"...further disadvantage and marginalise carers. The 2003 ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers indicates that carers are over-represented in the lower household income quintiles. These carers are identified as being at particular risk of low wellbeing in the Australian Wellbeing Index Survey 2005".

Recommendations:

- 1. That this amendment is withdrawn and that the current backdating provisions stand.**
- 2. Access to Carer Allowance should be streamlined, particularly for those under increased stress.**
- 3. More effort is made to ensure that carers are aware of financial assistance and resources that are available to assist them.**

Schedule 5 – Reducing allocation of child care places

While not opposing this particular amendment – there were issues raised during the committee hearing that Australian Greens believe need to be followed up.

We are concerned that FACS does not have an assessment of the needs of regional communities for child care places, nor do they have a robust method for acquiring that information.

There is no real demand assessment process for identifying demand in regional or outer metropolitan areas.

There is a need to focus more effort on understanding child care needs in regional areas.

Recommendations:

- 4. FACS develop an assessment process to allow them to model the future needs of regional communities for child care places.**
- 5. FACS institute a forward planning process designed to address the identified future needs.**

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