

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) National President, Vittorio Cintio has called on the Federal Government to use the 2021/22 Budget to address poverty and inequality by taking long term action to create a society where it is possible for everyone to thrive and develop their full potential.

Mr Cintio said the Federal Government talks about 'giving everyone a go' but social workers witness the detrimental and avoidable, long term impacts of current Federal Government welfare policies on a daily basis.

"The Government's welfare policies stigmatise those not in the paid workforce and provide support payments so low that they have actually become a barrier to employment. A situation that has only been made worse by the devastating and enormously disruptive impact of COVID 19 on the lives of the most disadvantaged in our community."

"While the pandemic has affected all members of society the impacts are far worse for people from marginalised groups, highlighting the extent of the inequality and the precarious financial circumstances that are faced by so many people across Australia"

"The AASW commended the Federal Government for taking immediate action at the start of the pandemic by increasing Jobseeker and other payments but it was immediately clear that temporary increases fall short of the permanent and comprehensive policy response that was needed."

"The April 2021 cuts to Jobseeker and other payments have put millions of people at greater risk of poverty with Australia and now once again we have one of the lowest rates of unemployment payments in the OECD"

Mr Cintio said that last year the Government demonstrated that it is clearly possible to take urgent action against poverty and it is deeply disappointing to see these much needed reforms being wound back, even though the impacts of the global pandemic are far from over.

"The pandemic has highlighted the precarious nature of so many people's employment and while we recognise the Government's recent announcements in relation to reducing unemployment, we need to look at the much more pertinent issue of underemployment and how this disproportionately impacts women."

"While any reduction in the unemployment figure is an important step, it is also really critical to highlight that to be 'employed' according to the ABS a person needs to have worked as little one hour per week."

"Addressing unemployment requires a more comprehensive approach that looks at the type and location of work available, the needs and skills of people and making sure we are addressing the significant structural, historical and systemic barriers to employment. This must be a centrepiece of the upcoming Federal Budget."

The AASW has published its 2021-2022 Pre budget Submission where we call on the government to adopt a holistic, proactive approach to all dimensions of health and well-being encompassing income support, housing, family violence, mental health, aged care, disability, climate action and Reconciliation.

You can read the submission here <https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/13459>

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