

AASW – ONCE IN A CENTURY BUDGET INVESTMENT MISDIRECTED

Enormous spending proposed will fail to hit the target and not fix the root causes of societal inequality

Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) have welcomed the Federal Budget's multi-billion dollar, once in a century investment across social services, but believes the Government's approach and the enormous spending proposed will fail to hit the target and not fix the root causes of societal inequality.

AASW National President Vittorio Cintio said the Federal Government's planned investment (including \$2.3 billion in mental health services) and the intention of the Budget is appreciated, but how it will be delivered and where it will be spent shows a lack of understanding of the source of inequality.

"The Federal Government has once again allocated funds to a fragmented system that is based on a medicalised and individualised conception of mental health, but they have ignored the social determinants of health."

"Unfortunately, the enormous amounts of funding proposed in the Budget do little to overturn the underlying structural causes of inequality that contribute to ill-health, including mental ill-health."

"Health is a basic human right yet every day social workers see the damaging impact of poverty, disadvantage and abuse on the people we work with."

"We also see that no matter how many services there are, they are inaccessible to people whose basic needs of a stable income, housing and food that are necessary factors in contributing to health, just aren't being met."

"The AASW Budget submission outlined a vision of an Australian community in which everyone, even the most vulnerable, are supported to thrive and flourish as active participants in the economic and social life of their community.

"For example, there is still an urgent need to raise the level of JobSeeker. A strong social protection system is fundamental to people's health and wellbeing, and Australia currently does not have one. There are still too many people who cannot afford three meals a day, let alone the extra money required for mental health services."

"Last year showed us that the Government can do this, and more importantly, that it worked in temporarily lifting people out of destitution and that it boosted the economy."

"The Budget has also failed to deliver the Australian community a coherent set of policies to address the severe shortage of affordable permanent housing and a permanent extension of telehealth which at the moment is guaranteed only to the end of 2021," he said.

Mr Cintio said the AASW welcomed the Federal Government's investment in the caring workforce in aged care and child care and the benefits that it will bring for families, women, children and older people.

"We hope that the pandemic has taught us that women's caring needs to be valued highly and paid fairly. We acknowledge funding for women's services and are optimistically waiting for the implementation details to ensure they will make a tangible difference in the lives of marginalised people and women experiencing violence."

"As a key part of the mental health workforce, the AASW will be advocating for social workers, in particular, Accredited Mental Health Social Workers, to be included in the development and implementation of the initiatives and looks forward to working alongside the Government on their roll out," he said.

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