

The mandatory drug testing of Newstart recipients, accompanied by a possible reduction in income support payments, is deeply unethical and does not understand the complex nature of addiction, said Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) National President Christine Craik. "There is absolutely no evidence that drug use is more prevalent among people who are unemployed, or that drug use is the most significant cause of unemployment. Furthermore, there is no evidence that mandatory drug testing of people living on income support payments is effective." she said. This is a punitive, vindictive and ideologically driven approach to policy that ignores evidence and punishes some of the most vulnerable members of society. Creating a national narrative that shifts the attention from the lack of assistance needed by vulnerable people, to blaming them for their vulnerability, is not a sign of a compassionate government. "People who are struggling with drug and alcohol use require treatment and support, and denying income support is not a form of treatment. If the government is seriously concerned with the impact of drug use then much greater attention needs to be paid to the availability and accessibility of drug treatment services. The sector is poorly resourced with huge waiting lists and this policy would only compound the problem" The income support system was originally developed as a commitment to fairness, equality and mutual responsibility. By contrast, both fairness and equality are missing from this policy that punishes people for being poor. "Denying people income support payments will lead to destitution, increased homelessness and ill-health among people who already experience poverty. The flow on impacts will also be significant and this policy lacks any consideration about how it will affect families, loved ones and communities, including the possible increases in family violence and other forms of abuse." "Social workers understand that meaningful supports and long term change comes from working in collaboration and empathy, not coercion" she said. Given that there is no relationship between drug use and employment, there can be no justification for testing people on the basis of their employment status.

AASW National President Christine Craik: Christine has worked as a social worker in family support, housing, community health and hospitals with a focus on domestic violence, sexual abuse and refugees for almost 3 decades. Christine holds a Master's degree in Social Policy and Management and is currently completing her PhD. Christine has been National Vice President of the AASW since 2011, and is currently Chair of the Finance, Audit, Compliance and Risk Committee. She has chaired many committees, including the Governance review of 2015/6. Christine currently lectures full time in the undergraduate and post graduate Social Work Degrees at RMIT University. To interview Christine Craik, please contact the Debra Parnell M. 0412014428

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