

## Increasing income support would have made a better Budget than tax cuts, say Australian social workers

The projected Budget surplus has been delivered off the backs of Australia's most vulnerable, according to the Australian Association of Social Workers. The AASW welcomes the establishment of the National Centre for the Prevention of Child Sexual Abuse, as recommended by the Royal Commission, as well as funding for the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. However, there is much more that can and should be done in the next financial year. AASW National President Christine Craik said, "The projected surplus is not a measure of a good Budget, when we have three million people in our country who are living in poverty. "The surplus calculation is nothing to be proud of when it is the direct result of an underspend on the NDIS and when it increases inequality in Australia. Supporting our most vulnerable should have been prioritised over tax cuts. This should have included a substantial increase in Newstart and Youth Allowance and no further roll-out of the Cashless Debit Card, which the government's own evaluation shows doesn't work. "Furthermore, family violence is a major national emergency, with one woman a week being killed by a perpetrator. This year's commitment pales in comparison to the years of neglect. We need comprehensive and continuous funding to seriously address Australia's real security threat at a structural level. "In this Budget, the government has outlined that trying to win the next election through tax cuts is more important than distributing wealth in way that creates a fair and just Australia for all." Most households in the lowest income bracket will get no benefit from tax cuts and those on Newstart will also miss out on the one-off \$75 (single) \$125 (couple) energy assistance payment. Ms Craik said, "The Budget should be measured by how much it is addressing the causes of poverty and making sure that everyone has access to the support they need to improve their lives, which will also have long-term benefits to our country. "To deliver lasting change to Australians, you need to start by ensuring that the Budget makes allocations that will address the causes of poverty and inequality. "These allocations should be considered an investment in our country's people, not a deficit that is to be avoided at all costs. "As it stands, this Budget surplus has been calculated at a real human cost." During the 2019-2020 Budget submission, the AASW called for: Lifting the amount of income support payments to the level of the Minimum Income for Healthy Living, which is \$866.00 per fortnight for a single person, up from the current amount of \$555.70 Replacing the current punitive policies on unemployed people with initiatives that have been proven to create pathways into work, including a thorough review of the cashless welfare debit card before there is a further roll-out Ensuring that the services and programs within the Close the Gap initiative are planned, implemented, evaluated and governed by Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCOs) Increasing access to rural and remote mental health services Providing for a national housing affordability and homelessness strategy Providing for the full price of services within the NDIS as recommended by the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS Guaranteeing continuous funding for a full range of prevention, early intervention and crisis programs to prevent and respond to family violence Providing an undertaking to implement all recommendations that will be made by the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety. Read our 2019-2020 Budget submission. Christine Craik is available for interview.

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