

# A strong social security system can help us through this crisis

**30 March 2020**

These are truly unprecedented times, and for those who were already struggling to get by, the coronavirus crisis will only add to hardship. That is why we need a swift and compassionate response from government that supports all people receiving social security payments both now and during the recovery phase.

The Treating Families Fairly Alliance welcomes the following government announcements:

- A coronavirus supplement of \$275 per week on top of existing payments including Jobseeker Payment,<sup>1</sup> Parenting Payment and others from 27 April for a period of six months
- A \$750 Economic Support Payment for all people receiving social security payments on 31 March, and a second \$750 Economic Support Payment from 13 July for those who will not receive the coronavirus supplement
- A temporary suspension of all mutual obligations, including appointments, activities and reporting for jobseekers, from 23 March to 27 April
- Introduction of flexible arrangements for meeting mutual obligations after 27 April, including online and phone appointments and a reduction in job search activities to four per month
- Introduction of exemptions from mutual obligations for those with caring responsibilities or who need to self-isolate, without the need for medical evidence
- Automatic fulfilment of mutual obligations for sole traders who become eligible for Jobseeker payment and continue to develop and sustain their business
- Suspension of mandatory participation requirements for people in the ParentsNext program for the duration of the pandemic
- Suspension of Work for the Dole and other group activities that cannot be delivered online
- A temporary pause on new Cashless Debit Card trial participants.

However we are concerned that:

- The coronavirus supplement does not commence until 27 April – this is far too late for people already struggling with significant challenges
- Carers and people with disability are excluded from the coronavirus supplement
- Centrelink will not have adequate capacity to process claims in a timely manner
- The relaxation of mutual obligations does not go far enough or last for long enough.

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<sup>1</sup> Jobseeker payment is the new name for Newstart payment.

We are calling on government to:

- Bring forward the coronavirus supplement commencement date to 31 March
- Extend the coronavirus supplement to people receiving Carer Payment and Disability Support Pension
- Continue to build the capacity of Centrelink to process claims, respond to enquiries and provide support
- Suspend *all* mutual obligations for the duration of the pandemic (at minimum, for six months). People must not be at risk of payment suspensions during this highly stressful time.

It is vitally important that we provide support to those who need it, when they need it. Not only will this support our community through the crisis, it will set people up for a return to work and everyday life when we come out the other side.

A strong social security system is central to a successful and stable economy.

### **Signatories**

Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare

FamilyCare

Financial Counselling Victoria

Council of Single Mothers and their Children

Kinship Carers Victoria

Grandparents Victoria