

Looking at the Federal Budget for National Families Week

National Families Week is an opportunity to promote issues relating to families and to increase knowledge of the social, economic and demographic policies affecting them. The 2018-19 Federal Budget contains a number of concerning measures likely to adversely affect Australian families.

Despite lack of rigorous evidence showing positive impact, the Cashless Debit Card Trials in Ceduna and East Kimberley have been extended until 30 June 2019. Following extensive criticism of the original evaluation, the government is now undertaking an additional independent evaluation. The costs of the trial extension and evaluation have not been released.

Newly arrived migrants will need to wait four years before being able to access certain benefits. How many families will struggle while trying to establish a regular source of income in a new country?

From 1 July 2021, the Department of Human Services will extend its controversial data matching activities with the Australian Taxation Office. This is despite the 2017 Senate Community Affairs References Committee finding that the Online Compliance Intervention program has had a profoundly negative impact on the lives of thousands of Australians.¹

The budget is silent on a range of issues that affect the wellbeing of children, young people and families. Newstart and other social security payments have not increased, despite 55 per cent of Newstart recipients living below the poverty line.²

At the same time as the government continues its freeze on the Newstart allowance, this budget hands big business an \$80 billion tax cut.

While the percentage of people receiving welfare benefits is said to be at its lowest level in 25 years, there has been little progress in addressing persistent disadvantage.³ Homelessness is increasing⁴ – exacerbated by a lack of affordable housing⁵ – and 731 300 children are living in poverty.⁶

Where are the initiatives to support – rather than judge and punish – our most vulnerable families? That so many of our children are living in poverty is a national disgrace.

¹ Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2017, Design, scope, cost-benefit analysis, contracts awarded and implementation associated with the Better Management of the Social Welfare System initiative, Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra.

² ACOSS, Poverty in Australia 2016, <https://www.acoss.org.au/poverty/>

³ CEDA, 2017, How unequal: Insights into inequality, <http://ceda.com.au/News-and-analysis/Media-releases/CEDA-report-inequality-levels-largely-unchanged-since-2007-but-new-risks-emerging>

⁴ Australian Homelessness Monitor 2018, Launch Housing, Collingwood, https://www.launchhousing.org.au/site/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/LaunchHousing_AHM2018_Report.pdf

⁵ Anglicare Australia 2018, Rental Affordability Snapshot 2018. Anglicare Australia: Canberra.

⁶ ACOSS, p.5.