

Submission to the Australian Treasury

2021-22 Pre-budget Submission

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AASW

.....
Australian Association
of Social Workers

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The Australian Association of Social Workers

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the professional body representing more than 12,000 social workers throughout Australia. We set the benchmark for professional education and practice in social work, and advocate on matters of human rights, discrimination, and matters that influence people's quality of life.

The social work profession

Social work is a tertiary qualified profession recognised internationally that pursues social justice and human rights. Social workers aim to enhance the quality of life of every member of society and empower them to develop their full potential. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversity are central to the profession, and are underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and Indigenous knowledges. Professional social workers consider the relationship between biological, psychological, social and cultural factors and how they influence a person's health, wellbeing and development. Social workers work with individuals, families, groups and communities. They maintain a dual focus on improving human wellbeing; and identifying and addressing any external issues (known as systemic or structural issues) that detract from wellbeing, such as inequality, injustice and discrimination.

Our submission

Our vision is for a cohesive, inclusive and just society in which it is possible for everyone to thrive, flourish and develop their full potential. Due to pandemics and natural disasters, 2020 has provided lessons for the whole community, especially official decision makers in what is required to ensure this outcome. The AASW believes that these lessons show that all aspects of our well-being are deeply intertwined, and that we can no longer ignore the connections between our economic success, the strength of our communities, our responses to inequality and the health of our

environment. This means that Australia needs to adopt a holistic, proactive approach to all dimensions of health and well-being encompassing income levels, housing, safety from violence, mental health, climate action and Reconciliation.

Our recommendations address the following topics, in no particular order:

- Climate Action and Environmental Change
- Income Support
- Reconciliation
- Mental Health
- Housing
- Disability and the NDIS
- Family Violence
- Aged Care
- Health and well-being in regional rural and remote communities.

Climate Action and Environmental Change

Our Government must act urgently to address environmental change and reduce future risks of repeating the 2019-2020 drought, bushfire and floods, which devastated so many Australians' lives. Australia requires strong laws to reinstate a robust, biodiverse ecosystem to ensure continued provision of essential ecosystem services such as clean water, air and fertile soil. Immediate support of regenerative farming is also required to secure sustainable and affordable local food production into the future.

The AASW also calls for specific programs to address the social inequality arising from climate change. Although climate change affects everyone, the economic and social burden falls most heavily on marginalised and disenfranchised groups. People with low incomes have less capacity to move away from areas prone to natural disaster and spend a larger proportion of their budget on heating and cooling to cope with increasing weather extremes. Storm surges and sea level rises are depriving Torres Strait Islander people of homes, infrastructure and important ancestral sites, causing poor health, homelessness and cultural destruction. Government needs to create policy to address this inequity through measures such as subsidies and benefits to retrofit rented homes with insulation and solar power.

The AASW is part of the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) and supports their policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to realise public health benefits. People living in unpolluted environments with access to green space experience lower rates of respiratory problems like asthma and COPD, lower prevalence of life-style diseases like diabetes and cardio-vascular obstructions and better mental health. Countries with reduced emissions are forecast to enjoy strong economic, environmental, social and health benefits.

The Australian government must take immediate action to reverse the continued decline in our achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Planning and providing resources for the SDGs is a mechanism to address some of the biggest national and global challenges of the present while also improving human rights and social justice. The Australian government must show leadership and act to ensure we have a healthy, clean and sustainable environment as without this, fixing the economy is meaningless.

Recommendations:

That in the next Budget the Government:

- Immediately invest and act to achieve strong emissions reductions to reduce the current and future health impacts and risks associated with increasing global temperature, sea level rise, and food and water insecurity,
- Recognise that an urgent transition from fossil fuels to clean renewable energy is needed to achieve a zero emissions stationary energy supply,
- Develop and fund effective and sustainable adaptation responses by communities to the full range of health impacts linked to climate change,
- Encourage business to participate in environmental solutions by recognising organisations that make profit to fund environmental and socially beneficial activity, create incentives to move to a circular economy and ensure all government contracts and grants include evaluation of environmental and social benefits,
- Fund and adopt a climate change policy which ensures that the costs associated with a changing climate are distributed equitably,
- Adopt a coordinated, whole of government approach towards achieving the SDGs,
- Update building codes to adopt and ensure sustainable and carbon neutral (or negative) design and materials,
- Provide incentive for local communities to coordinate local needs including use of micro-gridding, community farms and other localised systems,
- As in the United Kingdom, develop plans to ban the sale of all new petrol- and diesel-powered vehicles by 2030,
- Legislate that organisations must achieve a 1% per year decrease in waste to landfill and 1% decrease in carbon emissions every year.

Natural Disaster Response and Recovery

Australians on the path to recovery from devastating, drought, bushfires and floods have had their progress interrupted by the global COVID-19 pandemic. A changing climate will increase the frequency and prevalence of disease and natural disasters. The government must develop ongoing support for individuals and communities to adapt and increase resilience to such challenges alongside action to reduce environmental degradation by moving the nation's economy towards environmental sustainability.

Socioeconomic factors and an individual's health history can result in significantly different experiences of recovery after the experience of a disaster. Greater investment is needed in long term community-based support that recognises the ways that natural disasters can contribute to

family violence, trauma, homelessness, unemployment, drug and alcohol use and solastalgia, which is distress caused by environmental change. The short- and long-term effects of trauma, grief and loss are considerable in these situations and greater mental health funding is required. We must not overlook the multitude of issues people are dealing with as they rebuild their lives.

Adaptation also requires a reduction in income inequality and the development of environmentally sustainable jobs such as renewable energy, design and retrofitting to create energy efficient housing, regenerative agriculture and aqua-culture, reclamation and recycling of resources and the protection and preservation of diverse ecosystems. Investment is also needed to future proof vital public infrastructure, such as relocating water and sewerage treatment plants out of areas at risk of flooding from raised sea levels.

Australia cannot afford to deny the reality of climate change and must take immediate action to mitigate or minimise its devastating consequences. We need strong political leadership on the issue and immediate action to secure the future for individuals, groups and communities.

Recommendations:

That in the next Budget, the Government:

- Increase federal funding to community-based approaches to mental health, family violence, housing, drug and alcohol and support services to enhance the recovery and resilience of individuals and communities across Australia,
- Allocate resources to a major review of the eligibility for people affected by natural disaster to receive government payments and the requirements placed upon people receiving such payments, particularly the compulsory imposition of the Indue cashless welfare card and the power of private providers to breach recipients.
- Create schemes to help individuals and communities develop resilience to natural disasters and small local business to transition towards environmentally sustainable activity.

Income Support

An adequate level of support for people looking for work

Having participated in the longstanding and broadly based campaign to increase the rate of NewStart, the AASW welcomed the increase to income support payments and suspension of compliance regime that was announced in March 2020. As predicted, these measures were instrumental in both lifting people out of poverty and in stimulating the economy, and the community sector provided extensive documentation of the secondary benefits for families and communities that flowed from the increase¹. Since then, the government has been steadily decreasing the rates of payment, supposedly to ensure that the availability of income support does not prevent people

¹ ACOSS, Next steps for Income support, briefing paper, July 2020, [https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Social-security-next-steps-JUL-UPDATED-2-9 .pdf](https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Social-security-next-steps-JUL-UPDATED-2-9.pdf), accessed 18/1/21

from finding paid work. The rate of JobSeeker is now similar to the previous level which was so low that it was inadequate to supply three meals a day and prevented people from finding or applying for work.

Once again, the federal government has the opportunity for a policy decision which will achieve social as well as economic benefits. There is no argument in favour of a return to the previous harsh, counterproductive and shameful level of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payment. Instead, the level of income support payments for these people should be at the same level as the age pension.

Recommendation

- That in the next Budget the Government permanently raises income support payments for people on JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and Parenting Payment to equal that of the Age Pension.

Ending punishment of people in communities without opportunities for paid work

The recent debate about the Cashless Debit Card in Federal Parliament has publicly demonstrated what its users have repeatedly told evaluators; compulsory income management has existed in the Northern Territory for more than a decade without improving the lives of the people it was intended to help. Nevertheless, the problem with this scheme is more serious than merely proving to be ineffective. The current imposition of income management without participants' consent is harmful, humiliating, and expensive. It disproportionately targets Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, denying them the same right to make decisions about their daily lives that are taken for granted by other people. Its imposition is in direct conflict with the Closing the Gap Agreement. The Cashless Debit Card is an abuse of human rights for which there is no countervailing benefit.

Recommendation

- That in the next Budget the Government abolish the Cashless Debit Card with immediate effect.

Reconciliation

Self Determination

The Uluru Statement from the Heart represents the results of a year of consultations and discussion conducted by the referendum council at the request of the then Prime Minister. On this basis it presented a unanimous recommendation for a formal advisory body. At the time, the AASW condemned the instantaneous dismissal of the proposal by the then Prime Minister. Since then, the level of support for formal Reconciliation processes among members of the general community has increased substantially. The 2021 Reconciliation Australia report recommends that “Australia is at a tipping point’ in terms of addressing structural issues, underlying racism and discrimination; and is ready for “brave” action rather than “safe” action². An Indigenous Voice to Parliament is clearly the first step in taking any action, whether ‘safe’ or ‘brave’, and a budgetary allocation sufficient to fund its implementation is needed to ensure that it leads to meaningful progress towards reconciliation.

Recommendation

- That in the next Budget the Government allocate resources to create a Voice to Parliament as described in the Uluru Statement from The Heart.

Closing the Gap

The latest Close the Gap progress report demonstrates that staggering levels of inequality persist across many areas including health, education and employment outcomes. The AASW welcomes the recent expansion of the Closing the Gap targets in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.³ Central to achieving these targets will be the implementation principles, which are: shared decision making, place-based responses, evidence and accountability, targeted investment, and integrated systems⁴. The most recent COAG statement pointed out that the previous Closing the Gap strategy perpetuated a deficit-based view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples instead of promoting the strength and agency within indigenous communities. The AASW shares this view and submits that the most effective method of demonstrating the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to implement change is to ensure the initiatives are adequately funded.

Recommendations:

- That in the next Budget the Government allocate resources for effective implementation of the action plans required under Closing the Gap Refresh, detailing how they conform with the implementation principles.

² Livingston, A. Reconciliation report calls for concrete steps beyond just raising awareness, SMH, 19/1/21

³ <https://www.coag.gov.au/sites/default/files/communique/coag-statement-closing-the-gap-refresh.pdf>

⁴ ibid

Mental Health

The pandemic had immediate mental health impacts on the Australian population that will be felt for months if not years to come. The initial period of crisis was characterised by a fear, anxiety and general sense of panic about the coming events. The uncertainty as to the severity of the pandemic manifested itself in many ways, including most notably the mass buying and hoarding events that best reflect the collective sense of fear that gripped Australia during that initial period. This event also highlighted the unequal nature of crisis response given so many Australians did not have the means to buy food and key resources weeks in advance.

It is important to recognise that the pandemic occurred after a very challenging summer due to the drought and the bushfires, contributing to an already pre-existing state of anxiety and emotional exhaustion. For many Australians, the pandemic occurred just as they were looking towards recovery from losing loved ones and having their homes and communities devastated because of the fires. Communities throughout it all have shown great resilience and solidarity; for many their wellbeing will improve as the crisis lessens, but for many others the crisis is a major trauma event and will have long term impacts that will need to be supported.

We know that there are many consequences of living through an event where individuals and families struggle to regain control and balance in so many aspects of their day-to-day life. The government's response needs to be guided by a trauma informed approach as we prepare for the less visible, but all-important recovery stage, including ongoing mental health, grief and loss and trauma responses. In terms of mental health specifically, common consequences of disease outbreaks include anxiety and panic, depression, anger, confusion and uncertainty, and financial stress, with estimates of between 25% to 33% of the community experiencing high levels of worry and anxiety during similar pandemics.

People with pre-existing mental health issues are at risk of experiencing higher anxiety levels during the COVID-19 outbreak and may require more support or access to mental health treatment during this period. This means we will likely see higher rates of accessing mental health treatments and supports in the future, as the pandemic crisis reduces, although given concerns about attending in person, many people may be looking to get support in different ways. Trauma and Mental health is experienced differently by people and at different times. If we understand this is a trauma response, then it is more likely that we will see the increase in months if not years to come. This can occur due to other significant life events and how they compound the underlying trauma. It is pivotal that government provides supports in a manner that are consistent with evidence-based trauma practice so people have access to appropriate support when they need it.

More broadly, the AASW takes a human rights approach to mental health and emphasises the social determinants of health, and we therefore welcomed the Productivity Commission's report on the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health. This report recognises the damaging

effects of socio-economic disadvantage, discrimination and the current income support compliance regime on people's mental health. It outlines a vision for a person-centred mental system that:

- prevents ill health,
- intervenes early,
- delivers the full spectrum of clinical services and community supports that people need to recover and lead healthy, fulfilling lives.

To do this, supports and services need to be:

- accessible whenever and wherever people need them,
- culturally appropriate,
- delivered by a skilled multidisciplinary workforce,
- supported by comprehensive governance arrangements.

The report follows a comprehensive review of all aspects of the current service system. It presents a strong economic argument and costings for an evolutionary process of reform, along with 'action items', and 'high priority action items' for immediate implementation.

Since the report was released the National Federation Reform council has announced that it will adopt a key recommendation of the report and develop a new National Agreement on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention. While the AASW recognises that this agreement is an important first step in implementing all the report's recommendations, it must not become a replacement for the actual reforms that are needed to the whole system to achieve the reforms envisaged in the report.

Similarly, the scope and scale of the high priority action items must not prevent the other action items from receiving attention that they also require.

Recommendations

- That the next Budget contain funds adequate to the implementation of all the recommendations identified in the Productivity Commission's report into the Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health.
- That in the next Budget the Government provide a focus on a holistic approach to improving mental well being, by addressing the social and environmental determinants of health, particularly: adequate levels of income support, access to stable and secure housing, measures to mitigate the unequal consequences of climate change, stable and adequately paid employment, and absence of discriminatory and punitive government policies.
- That in the next Budget the Government fund mechanisms for collaborative design and delivery of programs to improve the wellbeing and reduce the ill-health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- That in the next Budget the Government fund prevention and early intervention services through perinatal, early childhood services and schools, at a level that ensures access for all children and young people. (i.e., one social worker for every 500 school students)
- That in the next Budget the Government fund the expansion of community based mental health support services, including team-based care options and psycho-social programs, at the level required to fill the current service gap between primary care and crisis support services as identified in the Productivity Commission report.

- That the above recommendations are implemented with a financial weighting to cover the extra costs of providing services in rural and remote communities to ensure equity of access for these communities.

Medicare

The AASW has participated in the MBS Review of Mental Health Items and welcomes both the release of the report and the opportunity to participate in the consultations on it. The review presents an opportunity for a person-centred, holistic, evidence-based, collaborative and systemic approach to MBS-funded mental health supports. The AASW would also like to see greater recognition and use of clinical social work services across all Medicare initiatives, combined with action to address pay parity for Accredited Mental Health Social Workers (AMHSWs), who are, inexplicably, paid less than psychologists for providing the same services. There are 2200 dedicated and highly qualified AMHSWs working in the mental health sector and the AASW will continue to advocate that they receive equitable representation under the Better Access program.

In our submission to the MBS Review of MH items, amongst several points, the AASW:

- Supported the recommendation to extend MBS Better Access clients who do not meet the full criteria for a mental health diagnosis but are at risk of developing a mental health condition.
- Supported the recommendation to increase the number of sessions to up to 40 per calendar year, taking into consideration complex need, not just mental health diagnosis.
- Supported the greater focus on group work and improved access to supports for family members and carers.
- Supported the recommendation that the list of approved therapies be reviewed and expanded.
- Supported the recommendation for inclusion of greater recognition of individual mental health support and therapy for residents in aged care facilities.
- Supported the expansion of digital mental health and telehealth services.

Recommendations:

- That in the next Budget the Government fund the roll out of MBS Review of Mental Health items such as increasing the number of sessions under the Better Access program to up to 40 per calendar year,
- That government policy acknowledges contributing factors to mental health such as the lack of affordable housing and inadequate income support payments, by increasing the investment in social and public housing, plus immediately increasing income support payments
- That in the next Budget the Government maintain funding to PHNs for another five years and from there, introduce five-year contracts to end funding uncertainty and allow for consistency of services.
- That in the next Budget the Government allocate funds to raise the level of payment that AMHSW'S receive for providing services under Better Access to equal the amount paid to psychologists for providing the same service.

Veterans' mental health

The AASW welcomed the appointment of the National Commissioner for Defence and Veteran Suicide Prevention in early 2020, as a positive step in addressing the alarming rates of suicide

amongst Veterans and serving members of the Defence force. Despite gains in funding and service provision Social workers, including Accredited Mental Health Social Workers, who are working with these groups and their families, have reported an overall increase in complexity of presentations during the year, which seem to be related to the bushfires crisis and COVID-19. They have also reported additional disclosures of trauma and distress from those in active service following the release of the Brereton Report. They conclude that more could be done to cement the importance of the Commissioner, including the implementation of a Royal Commission.

Recommendation:

- That in the next Budget the Government allocate funds for a Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide

Housing

Despite measures announced in the October 2020 Budget, Australia continues to experience a housing crisis and urgently requires more affordable housing to ensure that people on middle to low incomes have access to affordable and suitable housing. The Productivity Commission's report on government services has demonstrated that there has been no progress over the last decade in the key outcomes of housing policy. There has been a reduction in public housing stock, unmet need for homelessness services remains unchanged, and more than half of all low-income people who are renting are spending more than 30% of their income on rent. This includes people receiving rent assistance payments. Policies at both federal and state levels continue to contribute to this growing social problem: for example, as the Jobseeker supplement reduces in early 2021, the level of people who struggle to meet the costs of housing will continue to increase.

Social workers in the housing sector work with individuals and families to locate and retain secure and safe housing. Because homelessness and housing insecurity have flow-on effects in many areas of people's lives, social workers who are employed in other fields know the damage that is caused by the current housing crisis. Social workers in areas such as health, education, employment, mental health and family violence report that it is becoming increasingly difficult to improve outcomes in other areas of people's lives, because of their housing insecurity.

As Australia's economy recovers from the bushfires of 2019/2020 and the recession caused by COVID-19, governments have an opportunity to resolve two issues with a single initiative: to significantly increase the amount of affordable housing, and simultaneously stimulate the economy. Concentrating on social housing, as Victoria has outlined, will increase employment across many sectors of the economy while providing affordable housing for the many low income people who need it.

Recommendations:

That in the next Budget the Government:

- Immediately increase the maximum rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance and index it to match increases in median rent,
- Work with States and Territories to increase number of social and affordable housing options,
- Reform tax advantages for investors to improve housing affordability,
- Include people with a lived experience of homelessness in the design and planning of initiatives to address homelessness.

People living with disability and the NDIS

The NDIS

The AASW welcomes the NDIS as a rights-based approach that supports the independence and the social and economic participation of people with a permanent impairment or condition resulting in disability. Many social workers are employed throughout the NDIS, and social workers in all areas of the health and community services encounter participants in the NDIS, and AASW members have provided the AASW with broad and detailed information about its implementation. Repeatedly our members report they are concerned that there is a lack of capacity in key roles in the system impacting on participants achieving their goals. They draw attention to the importance of planners and support co-ordinators in this regard, both of which have been the subject of recent Parliamentary Inquiries, as has the nature of the NDIS workforce. The AASW has submitted evidence to each of these inquiries highlighting the importance of securing and maintaining appropriately qualified and skilled workers in these roles. Central to this is that the pricing structure and rates of remuneration need to be reformed to ensure that skilled and qualified professionals can provide the type, level and quality of services that participants need.

Recommendation

- That in the next Budget the Government allocate adequate funds to cover the reforms needed to ensure that key roles in the NDIS operate to maximise the outcomes of participants.

Psycho-social supports

Social workers in all areas of the health and community services encounter people living with a disability, and although many are participants in the NDIS, many people with complex psycho-social needs are not eligible for the NDIS. The provision of psychosocial supports outside of the NDIS has been negatively affected by the transfer of funding to the NDIS. The 2017 Productivity Commission report drew attention to the shortfall of funding in this area and proposed a review to assess the level of unmet need and ensure adequate services.⁵

Recommendation

⁵ Productivity Commission, *National Disability Insurance Scheme Costs*, Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2017

That in the next Budget the Government allocate funds to conduct an evidence-based review of the level of need for complex psych-social supports and an allocation to cover the identified gap in services.

Family Violence

Family violence is a gendered crime: it is most commonly perpetrated by men, against women; it also deeply affects children. The causes of family violence are complex and include factors that operate at the individual level as well as across the whole of society. Factors such as community attitudes towards women and gender inequality are experienced across all aspects of a woman's life, even if she is not directly subjected to violence against herself. Governments can address gender inequality by adequately funding primary, secondary and tertiary programs across a range of settings so that the work of preventing violence against women and supporting women who have experienced family violence is integrated into all levels of society.

A comprehensive guide to the reforms that are needed across the service system is contained in the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. These reforms include:

- Routine, comprehensive screening tool and procedure for all women presenting at hospital Emergency Departments,
- Mandatory training for staff in all community service organisations to identify and respond to family violence,
- Shared risk screening assessment framework and tools for the health, community services and legal sectors,
- Increased counselling and services for women and children whose experiences have not yet escalated to a crisis point.

The AASW draws the government's attention to the rise in family violence during the periods of lockdown in 2020. While calls for assistance were down during periods of lockdown across the country, with the easing of restrictions, social workers in family violence services have been reporting significant spikes in women needing assistance, and significant escalations in the severity of abuse that women are reporting. The limited funding for family violence specific counselling services means that many women are receiving counselling under the Better Access, Medicare rebated items. Although beneficial, this has the disadvantage that their abusers characterise them as having a mental illness, which then compounds the negative consequences they are already experiencing and, in some cases, escalates their mental health needs. This can be particularly damaging when it is used against them in parenting disputes in the Family Court. For that reason, the AASW has previously called for the creation of a Family Violence Counselling Medicare item. The budgetary impact of this would be minimal because the new claims under this Medicare item would consist of services diverted away from Medicare rebates currently funded under Better Access.

The AASW participated in the 2019 Review of the Family Law System, which also identified many reforms to the operations of the Family law which would combine to protect women and children from violence and limit the opportunities for perpetrators of family violence to benefit from their

abuse. The costs of implementing these reforms will be minimal compared with the long-term savings they will create throughout the service system.

Recommendations

- That in the next Budget the Government allocate resources for implementing the recommendations of the Australian Law Reform Commission's First Comprehensive Review of the Family Law Act.
- That the Budget contain sufficient funding for family violence services to enable the sector to undertake reforms modelled on the recommendations of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence.
- That in the next Budget the Government create and fund a separate Medicare rebated item for Family Violence counselling.

Aged Care

The flaws within the aged care system were exposed with devastating clarity during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the majority of deaths from COVID-19 occurring within federally funded and/or overseen aged care facilities. In addition to the poor systems in place, this speaks to the extent of ageism prevalent within Australian society. Older Australians deserve to live with dignity and respect and the aged care system needs to recognise this. With the final report from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety due in early 2021 the Government needs to address every concern that it will raise.

Recommendations:

- That in the next Budget the Government allocate resources to implement all recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety.

Extra Aged Care packages:

Although the AASW welcomed the recent allocation of \$80 million for 10,000 new Aged care packages, there remains, an estimated shortfall of 120,000 packages and people are still waiting for too long for packages for which they have already been approved.⁶ There is a stark need for an immediate increase in high care level packages. ACROSS have estimated the amount of funding required to be \$2.3 billion. This would largely be the cost of employing new workers and should be regarded as a job creation scheme based on the government's own priorities for employment growth areas.

Recommendations:

- That in the next Budget the Government invest funds to create another 100,000 aged care packages to enable people to avoid residential care, receive the level of care they need at home, and create jobs providing that care.

⁶ Chun R, *Thousands of Elderly wait more than 28 months for access to high-needs home care packages*, SMH January 20, 2021

Mental Health and well being of people in residential Aged Care

The AASW welcomes the creation of Medicare Benefits Schedule items for residents of aged care facilities, as part of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety's special report on COVID-19. The restrictions on family and social contact, caused by COVID-19 have particularly impacted the mental health of aged care residents.

Recommendations:

- That the efficacy of the new MBS items to provide mental Health support for residents of Aged Care Facilities is monitored and that funds are allocated to ensure their continuation

Elder Abuse of people in Residential Aged Care

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety has released its Research paper estimating the rates of elder abuse in Aged care facilities. It estimated that the most prevalent form of abuse is neglect and that it is experienced by as many as 30% of residents. The research paper provides the basis for further research into the prevalence of elder abuse in Residential Aged Care Facilities, and the measures that will be necessary to prevent and end this abuse.

Recommendation:

- That in the next Budget the Government allocate funds to cover research into the prevalence, prevention and eradication of abuse and neglect of residents of aged care facilities.

Conclusion

The AASW strongly believes that the wellbeing of all Australians needs to be the primary consideration of any Budget. Currently, there are many vulnerable people whose quality of life will be affected by measures that are within the control of this government. The AASW calls on the government to make provision for these measures and looks forward to working with the government to implement them.

Submitted by and on behalf of the Australian Association of Social Workers



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