

macarthur **FUTURE FOOD** forum

Sector Connect
351 Welling Drive, Mt Annan, NSW, 2567
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www.sectorconnect.org.au

The Macarthur Future Food Forum was established in October 2008 to work in partnership on the issues of Food Access/ Production/ Education/ Urban Planning and Development through:

- Raising levels of awareness of food insecurity
- Connecting with services that provide healthy food in the area
- Encouraging an understanding of the importance of a range of food, in particular fruit and vegetables, to good health and the barriers to accessing food.
- Advocating for measured urban planning and development that encourages “healthy communities”

The Macarthur Future Food Forum is under the auspices of Sector Connect and membership includes non-government organisations, government departments, local councils and residents. Forum members meet bi-monthly, with a number of subcommittees formed to implement our action plan. We currently have 65 members on the mailing list.

Karin Vasquez

Chairperson

Macarthur Future Food Forum Working Group

1/8/2012

Macarthur Future Food Forum Submission to the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations References Committee Inquiry into:

The adequacy of the allowance payment system for jobseekers and others, the appropriateness of the allowance payment system as a support into work and the impact of the changing nature of the labour market.

Issue	Comment
New Start payments have dropped from 46% to 36 % of the median income between 1996-2010.	<p>Keeping people living well below the poverty line may be an added incentive to seek work; however this does not consider the costs of job seeking, alongside basic living costs. These costs are increasing.</p> <p>There is a presumption that there is work available and that recipients will only require short term support. However a significant number of people will be long term unemployed and living so far below the poverty line for extended periods will have very adverse impacts on health and wellbeing.</p>
Henry tax review has recommended the income support payments increase by \$50/week	MFFF supports the campaign by ACOSS's that \$35/ day is not enough to live and the recommendation of the Henry tax review to increase Newstart and other allowances by \$50 /week.
Loss of benefit due to earnings set to low (not even at level that Henry Tax review recommends as level of support required)	<p>The cuts to a recipient's benefits come into effect too quickly due to additional income. There is an urgent need to review income level that cuts to allowances come into effect.</p> <p>Also review 'banking' of income credits, perhaps the first \$3,000 that does not impact the allowance over a period of time.</p>
Affording shelter and paying for utilities (phone, electricity, water)	Living so far below the poverty line puts recipients at increased risk of housing stress. Private rental costs and utilities costs have risen dramatically in recent times leading to rising levels of homelessness amongst low income individuals and families. A month long study of the private rental market in Macarthur (South West Sydney) demonstrated very low availability of affordable rental properties in comparison to the number of people seeking affordable housing.

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	It is concerning also that there is no financial support for unemployed mortgagees increasing their risk of further indebtedness and loss of the house.
Ability to fund job searches	The current level of income support would make it difficult to fund costs associated with job seeking, eg, transport, computer access, printing, and child care.
Ability to present to work when newly employed	The current level of income support would make it difficult to fund costs associated with presenting to a new job, eg cost of transport, clothing, shoes, hair cut, child care). Public transport is also inadequate in many areas outside of the CBD of major cities, requiring job seekers to have access to a car for work.
Dignity and self respect	There has been no increase in income support allowance benefits since 1994. This is in effect decreasing the real level of income support over time. This is sending a message that unemployed people are not valued in community.
Adequacy for those with limited employment opportunities and long term reliance on income support.	It has been well documented in Australia and internationally that living well below the poverty line, year after year, has very adverse outcomes for individuals and families. As recognised in the JSA framework, there are barriers due to employment such as lack of skills, limited or no work experience, psychological issues, lack of accommodation, mental health concerns, limited or no support networks. These barriers mean that people are very vulnerable and have limited capacity, therefore need intensive support, incentive and skills development to find work as well as adequate income support during their term of unemployment.
Constant knock back reduces self esteem	Need to provide greater assistance to get long term unemployed into the workforce, through expanding subsidised and supported work placements assistance.
Affording food - food insecurity	The Australian Cancer Council found that the average cost of a healthy food basket for a family on low income is up to 56% of their income, versus 22% for those on average income. Income support well below the poverty line will result in increased risk of food insecurity amongst recipients. Poverty is a leading cause of food insecurity in Australia.
Cost of health care	The rising costs associated with health care in Australia

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	<p>mean that more Australians living below the poverty line are missing out on the health care they require. Costs include co-payment for prescriptions and gap fees to attend GPs and Medical Specialists. This increases the risk that that some are not taking vital medicine and not following up on required treatment.</p>
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