



26 July 2021

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
By e-mail: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee,

Social Services Legislation Amendment (Consistent Waiting Periods for New Migrants) Bill 2021 (the Bill)

The Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) thanks the Committee for their invitation to provide a submission in relation to the Bill.

QCOSS is Queensland's peak body for the social service sector. Our vision is to achieve equality, opportunity, and wellbeing for every person, in every community.

QCOSS undertakes research each year to examine cost of living pressures for low-income households in Queensland and produces a Living Affordability Report detailing our findings. This work is guided by our member organisations through the QCOSS Living Affordability Policy Network. This submission draws on findings from our living affordability research.

The amendments to the Bill will increase waiting periods for new migrants accessing the following income support payments in the following ways:

- Carer payment, parental leave pay (PLP) and dad and partner pay (DaPP), from two years to four years
- Carer allowance and family tax benefit (FTB) part A, from one year to four years
- Low-income health care card and Commonwealth seniors health card, from two years to four years and
- Family tax benefit part B, a new four-year waiting period.

QCOSS does not support the proposed amendments to the Bill.

We disagree with the assessment that four years is a reasonable period to expect migrants to support themselves and their families before accessing most Australian welfare payments. We also disagree with the portrayal of these amendments as beneficial to new migrants, or that implementing them would make the system 'simpler' or 'easier'.

The Bill will only serve to increase hardship and poverty for migrants by creating additional barriers to accessing support. We direct the Committee to the following evidence from the QCOSS Living Affordability research:

- Single parent migrant families are some of the most economically disadvantaged people in Queensland as they are not eligible to receive JobSeeker or Parenting payments. Our modelling shows that these families do not have sufficient income to afford the necessities of life. They experience high levels of financial stress and are forced to accrue high levels of debt to meet day-to-day expenses.
- Most people affected by these amendments will be women and children, as the impacted payments are those provided to people providing care.¹ Growing up in low-income households has been found to be the strongest predictor of disadvantage in later life.² Implementing these amendments will create entrenched disadvantage for children in migrant households.
- Many migrants are already vulnerable to widespread job insecurity, wage theft and poor working conditions, which are commonly not reported for the fear of losing visa status.³ Secondly, migrants will often be forced to accept the first job they can find to support themselves. Therefore, widespread skills mismatch and underemployment are serious unintended consequences of withholding timely income support for migrants.⁴ This indicates that current policy settings do not give migrants the best chance of achieving their full potential in the Australian labour market. Regardless of these limitations, permanent skilled migrants are estimated to contribute \$7 billion to the Federal Budget.⁵

QCOSS recommends:

1. These amendments be rejected as they will increase hardship and undermine economic security and development outcomes for the most vulnerable groups of migrants, especially women, children and carers.
2. The government does not apply a narrow fiscal and budget savings lens to a complex policy issue. This approach will damage long-term economic and social outcomes for migrants and their families, while increasing expenses on emergency relief and support programs provided by the government.
3. The government recognise these amendments treat migrants as 'less than' even though migrants should enjoy the same human rights protections as all Australians and they make valuable contributions to the economy and society.
4. The federal government reduce the current waiting period required of migrant households to access all benefits to six months, considering most migrants already live and work in Australia for several years before they are eligible to access support. This will ensure that the system is made simpler, fairer, and easier to understand.

¹ Australian Council of Social Service. Why parliament must oppose the Newly Arrived Resident budget cut. Accessed 21/07/2021. <https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Briefing-note-four-year-wait-for-migrants.pdf>

² Vera-Toscano. Esperanza WR. Does poverty in childhood beget poverty in adulthood in Australia? 2020. Accessed 29/05/2021. https://melbourneinstitute.unimelb.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/3522482/Breaking-Down-Barriers-Report-1-October-2020.pdf

³ Farbenblum B, Berg, Laurie. International student and wage theft in Australia. 2020. Accessed 20/05/2021. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/593f6d9fe4fcb5c458624206/t/5ef01b321f1bd30702bfcae4/1592793915138/Wage+Theft+and+International+Students+2020.pdf>

⁴ Committee for Economic Development of Australia. A good match: Optimising Australia's permanent skilled migration. 2021. Accessed 21/07/2021. <https://cedakenticomedia.blob.core.windows.net/cedamediacontainer/kentico/media/researchcataloguedocuments/recent%20research/pdfs/ceda-migration-report-26-march-2021-final.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

Thank you again for the invitation to provide a submission to the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Aimee McVeigh
Chief Executive Officer