

National Council of Women (NCWA) submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Consistent Waiting Periods for New Migrants) Bill 2021

National Council of Women (NCWA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a short submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee inquiry into the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Consistent Waiting Periods for New Migrants) Bill 2021.

NCWA is a voluntary membership not-for-profit organisation with Constituent Councils in all Australian States and the ACT working for the advancement of women and their families. It has an extensive membership of Affiliate organisations (all with sufficient membership numbers) and Associate members (women who join as an individual). NCWA also has a national membership of national organisations. The member organisations are very diverse and represent all sections of the community.

Submission:

NCWA understands this Bill is as a result of the measure announced in the 2021-2022 Federal Budget to provide a consistent four-year waiting period for newly arrived residents across welfare payments and concession cards. It reflects the expectation that skilled and family migrants who choose to come to Australia and remain in Australia will first be able to provide for their own financial support when they first become permanent residents.

The bill will bring into line the waiting period for new permanent residents across all payments. At present the waiting period varies depending on the payment however working age payments such as Jobseeker payment, parenting payment and youth allowance as well as concession cards already have a four-year waiting period. The bill will also ensure the existing four-year waiting period for concession cards applies equally to permanent visa holders and relevant temporary visa holders.

Migrant families will continue to have immediate access to childcare subsidies when they are working or studying or undertaking other approved activities. Some family payments will continue without a waiting period including stillborn baby payment. Low income families will still be able to access concessional benefits under Medicare, the PBS and access to the low income healthcare card. The changes will come into effect 1 January 2022 to people granted a permanent visa or relevant temporary visa after that date.

Permanent humanitarian entrants and their families will not see any changes and will continue to be exempt from all waiting periods for all payments and concessional cards. Carer visa holders who have come to Australia to care for an Australian resident will also continue to be exempt. Other exemptions such as single parents (those who become single once in Australia) and those who experience a significant change in their circumstances will continue to apply.

NCWWA supports the changes contained in the bill providing a consistent approach across all relevant payments. The changes encourage those coming to Australia in skilled and family visa streams to be self-sufficient. However vulnerable migrants especially those where significant changes occur to their circumstances after arriving in Australia still have the necessary safeguards and access to immediate assistance.

Robyn Nolan
President NCWA
18 July 2021