

UNITINGCARE AUSTRALIA – Answers to questions on notice taken at the hearing on 23 November 2005

1. Impact of stopping payment for 8 weeks on sole parents

The impact on sole parents could be catastrophic, from no food through to no money. UnitingCare service users who are sole parents have no reserves: no financial reserves, no food in the cupboard and no supports.

Our emergency relief and crisis services are already stretched beyond what they are now.

2. Penalties

The maximum penalty should be substantially less than the 8 weeks. Effective policy will focus on minimising breaches. Customised case management provides crucial support eg Personal Support Program. However, wrap-around individualised case management such as that provided in the FaCS funded Family Homelessness Prevention Pilot run through UnitingCare Burnside has been successful in addressing the complexity of issues that may otherwise result in breaches with respect to a graduated or progressive approach to penalties. We would like to see no penalties and a focus on re-engagement.

If the penalty regime is to stand however, penalties out be substantially less than 8 weeks and should never be 100 % of the benefit.