

# **Social Security Legislation Amendment (Improved Support for Carers) Bill 2009**

## **Minority Report by Australian Greens**

The Australian Greens believe that support for carers in Australia needs to be considerably improved and therefore support the intent of this Bill. However, we remained concerned that a number of outstanding issues were raised during the committee inquiry, and believe the Bill should be further amended to ensure it better meet the needs of carers.

We acknowledge that the majority report articulated a number of the issues that were raised in submissions and by witnesses to the inquiry, but we are concerned the report failed to recommend legislative amendments to address these shortcomings.

### **Disability Care Load Assessment (Child)**

The Greens are concerned that peak carer organisations were not consulted in the development of the Disability Care Load Assessment (child) Assessment Tool. We are pleased to see that the draft of this assessment tool has now been publicly released, and we will be consulting peak organisations before making a final decision on this disallowable instrument.

Despite the recent release of the assessment tool, the inquiry raised a number of concerns with issues affecting its efficacy, such as psychological and emotional impacts on carers, geographical location, access to support services, changing care needs over time, and access to aids and equipment. The Australian Greens remain concerned that these important issues are not adequately considered in the assessment process, and believe that it would be worthwhile for the Government to consider how to address these oversights in assessment process before tabling the assessment tool.

The Greens are also concerned about the transition from Carer Payment (child) to Carer Payment (adult), and support calls from a number of witnesses and advocates for there to be better consistency and a smoother transition between the two payment and support systems.

### **Episodic Care**

The Greens support calls for the provisions in the Bill to be extended to carers of adults with mental illness, as the episodic nature of mental illness makes it very difficult for carers to cope under the existing conditions of income support.

We also support the call from Carers Victoria for the qualification period for episodic care to remain open for two years.

### **Exchange Care**

The Greens are particularly concerned that this provision does not effectively provide for carers of a single child. Parents sharing care of a single child find it extremely difficult to find jobs that provide them with the flexibility to care for a child with intense needs. We do not

believe that Centrelink can provide other assistance (as suggested by FaHSCIA's in evidence to the inquiry) when under the Welfare to Work regime only one parent can be determined as the Principle Carer. This effectively means that separated parents of a single child will not both be able to access carer payment, which contradicts the intent of the Family Law Act to provide for shared care.

### **Hospital**

The Greens strongly support the provisions removing the suspension of carer payment if a child is hospitalised for more than 63 days. However, we believe that this provision should be extended to carers of adults as well.

### **Recommendations**

#### **The Bill be amended to:**

- **Align Carer Payment (adult) assessment to Carer Payment (child) assessment**
- **Extend episodic care provisions to carers of adults with mental illness**
- **Enable qualification period for episodic and short term care to remain open for two years**
- **Allow exchange care provisions to be made available for carers of a single child**
- **Extend provisions removing the suspension of carer payment if a child is hospitalised for more than 63 days to carers of adults.**



Senator Rachel Siewert  
Australian Greens