



Elton Humphery
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Re: Questions raised during the Inquiry into Social Security Legislation Amendment (Improved Support for Carers) Bill hearing held 28 April 2009

Dear Mr. Humphery,

I would like to provide you with the following response to questions raised by the committee at this week's hearing. Please pass on my comments to the committee members as required.

In answer to the question regarding carers who may be able to transfer from other income support payments to Carer Payment (child) (discussed on pg.2 of our submission), the most common situations would involve a parent who is currently receiving Parenting Payment or Newstart Allowance. They would be receiving these payments because they have been unable to find work or qualify under the current Carer Payment (child) assessment criteria. Sole parent carers in particular often receive other payments such as the Parenting Payment and the Carer Allowance, and it should be noted that this does not provide them with equal recognition of their caring role.

Take for example, the scenario provided under the government's Budget 2008-09 Paper:

Laura's son Andrew is blind, deaf and unable to speak, he cannot walk and cannot use his hands. Under the current rules, Andrew is not classed as a 'profoundly disabled child' because his condition did not meet three of the required conditions on the medical report. As a result, Laura is not eligible for Carer Payment even though she spends all day, every day, looking after Andrew, which makes it impossible for her to gain employment. The Government's changes to the assessment process for Carer Payment (child) will ensure that carers like Laura are not denied support through such rigid medical criteria.¹

Given Laura's inability to work, she may currently be receiving Parenting Payment for Andrew in order to support them. This is particularly likely if she is a sole parent, and Andrew is under the age of 8. If Laura is partnered, it is possible that the partner would provide the family's income. However, the family could also receive Parenting Payment if Andrew is not yet 6 years old and providing that they meet the income test requirements. In either case, Laura may become eligible for Carer Payment under the new changes, dependant on the flexibility of criteria under the Disability Care Load Assessment.

¹ Budget 2008-09, Paper no.2, accessible at http://www.budget.gov.au/2008-09/content/overview2/html/overview_25.htm

The ease of transfer from another payment to Carer Payment is a process issue, which will require policy and service delivery to support carers should they choose to apply for Carer Payment (child). We would hope that any transitions are as smooth as possible and would not result in carers being disadvantaged in the process.

I was also asked about the probability of carers reassessing their current situation given the economic climate including the possible loss of work and income. We have had no word from our members that this is happening. Further, given that the Carer Payment (child) assessment still intends to measure an individual's ability to work, carers who are able to engage in substantial work would not be able to access the payment.

Finally I would like to provide confirmation that Carers Australia was not involved in the consultation process for the new Disability Care Load Assessment Tool however we have been asked by FaHSCIA today to provide comment on the legislative instrument.

I would like to thank the members of the committee for their questions, and for their professionalism and genuine interest in ensuring that this bill will support carers. If the committee has any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "J. A. Hughes".

JOAN HUGHES

Chief Executive Officer

7 May 2009