

Thursday, 13 September 2007

Senator Troeth  
Chair  
Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
Via email to: [EET.Sen@aph.gov.au](mailto:EET.Sen@aph.gov.au)

Dear Senator Troeth

**Inquiry into the Social Security Amendment (2007 Measures No. 2) Bill 2007**

**National Council on Intellectual Disability** (NCID) was established over 30 years ago by parents and friends in an endeavour to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disability and to fill the need for national unity and information.

The Council is the recognised national peak body with the single focus on intellectual disability, ie, our actions and priorities centre on issues that affect the lives of people with intellectual disability and their families. Our mission is to work to make the Australian community one in which people with intellectual disability are involved and accepted as equal participating members.

NCID has over 5,000 members representing all 8 States and Territories. In addition to having people with intellectual disability on its Board, NCID receives policy advice from Our Voice. Our Voice is a committee the membership of which is exclusively people with intellectual disability representing all States and Territories.

**NCID's comments relate to extending the circumstances where a principal carer might be exempted from participation requirements; an addition to the current amendment.**

**Recommendation: Parents who are Principal Carers of Children aged from 6 – 15 who are in receipt of the Carer Allowance (child) are added to the Automatic Exemption list.**

The current eligibility criteria can be restrictive in assisting parents/carers who care for a child with a moderate intellectual disability. Although they do not have the diagnosis of "profound disability" in line with the legislative definition, the need for frequent individual care can be as disruptive and demanding as a child requiring continuous personal care. Due to the nature of their disability, some children with moderate intellectual disability need to have one-on-one care twenty-four hours a day to ensure their own or others' personal safety.

NCID has received a number of inquiries of concern regarding the situation of sole parents who have a son or daughter with a disability post 1 July 2007.

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NCID's understanding of the situation as of 1 July 2007 is:

1. A parent who is a sole parent (including widowed and divorced) after the 1 July 2007, whose youngest child has turned 6 and who has a child with a disability, will be put onto the Newstart Allowance (Principal Carer), not the Parenting Payment Single (PPS).
2. As the parent has a child with a disability they can apply for an exemption to the Newstart Allowance Activity Test, which may or not be granted and, if granted, will be only for a 12 month period.
3. As this exemption is not in the automatic category the sole parent will not be eligible for the Newstart Allowance (Principal Carer) supplement.
4. There is an approx 11% negative difference between the Newstart Allowance and the PPS.
5. Newstart Allowance taper rate is less than the taper rate for the PPS (by 50%) and that the consumer price index and tax offset are also both less for the Newstart Allowance than for the PPS.

The concerns that have been expressed to NCID are set out below.

Families of children with disability are concerned that the government does not appreciate the time and effort it takes to support children with disability during their school years, particularly where there are health issues.

For a family to be eligible for the Carer Allowance (child) they must fulfill the following condition; "(A) person may get Carer Allowance (child) if they look after a child with a disability or severe medical condition who requires a lot of additional care or attention in their own home".

There is inconsistency between the two policies for Carer Allowance (child) and Newstart Allowance (Principle Carer). The question is: what changes when a child turns six; are their support needs in any way diminished? The child does go to school, but for many families this means an increase in the support, care and attention that they have to give to their son or daughter, in preparing for, in travelling to and from, in being available for crisis call-in and in assisting the child to readjust to home routine after school. The inclusion of children with disability into school is not easy and it requires the constant attention of their parent, often to a significantly greater extent than is required for a child without a disability.

A single parent is clearly disadvantaged as they have to take on the full responsibility for the additional care and support of their son or daughter with a disability. To add activity requirements and then expect the mother (it is usually the mother who is the sole parent) to juggle both the needs of her child with a disability and the bureaucratic requirements of Centrelink appears to many people to be both perverse and cruel.

Foster Carers are provided with an automatic exemption from activity requirements. This is good policy, as foster carers often care for children who have additional emotional support needs so it takes time and effort to ensure these children are included at school and in the life of their community. But this is the same for children with disabilities, and yet their support needs are not acknowledged! Why does this incongruity exist?

As you would appreciate, for many families this does not make sense. Also, it raises questions about the government's commitment to families with disability and whether it is the government's future intention to axe the Carer Allowance (child). In support of this uncertainty, families have reminded NCID of changes to the Carer Allowance made some years ago, since reversed, which had a detrimental effect on families with disability.

A second important issue is the reduction in income for those who are on the Newstart Allowance

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(Principal Carer) and who do not have an automatic exemption; ie; not entitled to the supplement. The difference is currently \$60.00 (approx) per fortnight. For a single parent, this is a significant reduction; for a family that also has to meet the additional costs of disability this is catastrophic. (The Carer Allowance (child) does assist with the additional costs of having a disability, but it does not meet the full cost by a wide margin, for some families.)

Families are bewildered as to how this bread-and-butter issue was not taken into consideration when the policy was being formulated. Recently, the Prime Minister expressed sympathy on Melbourne radio for a family with disability in dire financial circumstances, and made a good response in terms of 'family friendly' policy. Again, we have an inconsistency and the burden is again placed on families to 'make do' while poor policy is slowly unwound.

**Recommendations:**

**That Sole Parents who are Principal Carers of Children aged from 6 – 15 who are in receipt of the Carer Allowance (child) should be put onto the Carer Payment Single or the Parenting Payment Single (PPS) not the Newstart Allowance (Principal Carer).**

**That Parents who are Principal Carers of Children aged from 6 – 15 who are in receipt of the Carer Allowance (child) are added to the Automatic Exemption list.**

**That the exemption to the Newstart Allowance Activity Test not be limited to a 12-month period.**

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Pattison', written in a cursive style.

Mark Pattison  
Executive Director

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