

## Social Services Legislation Amendment (Strengthening Income Support) Bill 2021

### Background

Founded in 2001, the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC) is a place and part of a movement. We are Australia's largest independent aid and advocacy organisation for people seeking asylum and refugees, supporting and empowering people at the most critical junctures of their journey.

In times of normalcy, we provide 30+ programs and services to 6,000 people seeking asylum in food and material aid, casework, housing supports, legal, advocacy, health, empowerment, employment and education.

### Current situation

People seeking asylum are one of the most vulnerable groups in our community, as many do not have access to Centrelink, Medicare and other social security benefits that allow them to live independently in the community.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed people to even great risk of destitution and loss. They are ineligible for any of the Federal Government's COVID-19 safety net and stimulus packages such as the JobSeeker payments, or other income support mechanisms available through Centrelink.

This ineligibility has resulted in unprecedented demand for the ASRC's program and services – across the organization we have seen a three-fold increase in requests for assistance. This is a consistent increase in demand in similar organisations across Australia.

Whilst this inquiry is not directly related to who is eligible for Centrelink payments such as JobSeeker, the ASRC would like to take this opportunity to raise the impact of excluding segments of our community from Federal Government funded support.

We have seen firsthand the devastating impact on people's wellbeing and ability to meet daily needs without access to Government funded supports.

The ASRC is also deeply concerned with the recent JobSeeker increase announcement that the lack of fair and adequate payment rates will force people into destitution and homelessness.

We welcome the opportunity to make a submission into this important inquiry.

### Recommendation

The ASRC supports the recommendations outlined in ACOSS' submission to this inquiry. Namely, urging *the government to ensure income support payments for working-age people do not return to below-poverty levels again. We also urge the government to retain important improvements in the system that will help people access income support quickly when they need it.*

- Adequate and fair payment rates
- Remove barriers to accessing payments

- Establish an independent mechanism to advise on income support payment settings