

Where to for social security reform?

Some reflections following the 2019 Federal Election

Emma Dawson

NTCOSS Conference 2019

percapita
FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

Social Security system

- Our Social Security system is broken
- All people have the right to a safe, secure life, free from poverty
- Australia is, per capita, the wealthiest country on earth
- Yet we have amongst the most punitive programs for those in need of support, and amongst the lowest payments in income support in the OECD
- Keeping people in poverty is a choice governments make



The “welfare burden” narrative

Eight out of 10 income taxpayers go to work every single day, and that just pays the welfare bill. Now, that is \$A150 billion a year. We need to ensure that we’re getting more people on employers’ payrolls and not on the taxpayers’ payroll for welfare.

Scott Morrison, then-Minister for Social Services

Sky News, March 29, 2015.

The logo for percapita, featuring the word "percapita" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. The "per" is in a dark teal color, and "capita" is in a lighter teal. Below the main text, the tagline "FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA" is written in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font. The logo is contained within a white circle with a thin gold border.

percapita
FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

Ad closed by

Stop seeing this ad



JUST IN

NEWS

SPORT

LIFESTYLE

COMMUNITY

JOBS

MOTORING



Picture: Lauren Smit

NEWS

You work for 14 years to pay for one 'dole bludger'

by Renee Viellaris





Average Australian forks out \$83 a week to pay the nation's growing welfare bills and government debt

- **Australians are paying \$83 a week in taxes to social security and healthcare**
- **Working residents also pay \$9 a week just to cover the interest on debt**
- **Government debt has risen to \$531 billion since debt ceiling removed in 2013**



Pushing back

Support The Guardian Available for everyone, funded by readers

Sign in

Contribute → Subscribe →

News Opinion Sport Culture Lifestyle More ▾

Australia World **AU politics** Environment Football Indigenous Australia Immigration Media Business Science Tech

Opinion
Welfare

Celebrated by the tabloids, the welfare bill punishes those already doing it tough

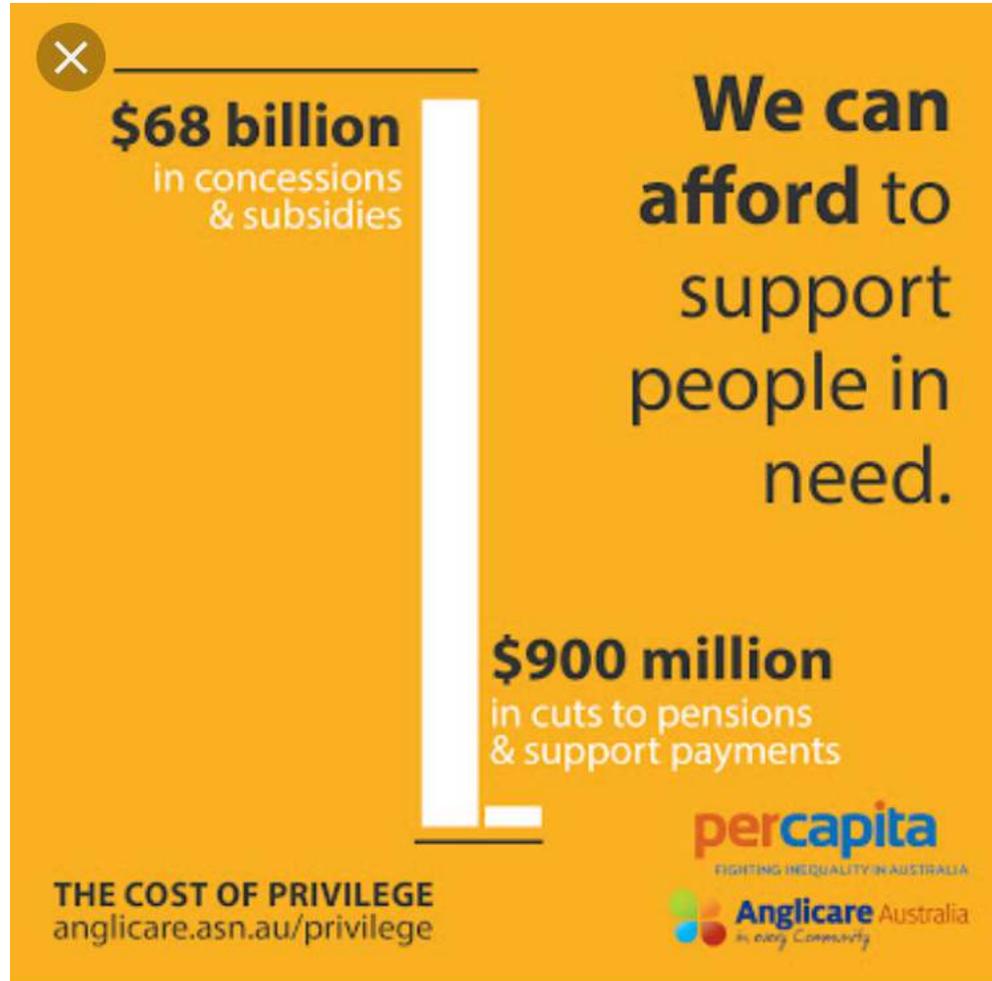
Emma Dawson

[@DawsonEJ](#)
Tue 3 Apr 2018 13.29 AEST

The average taxpayer gives more to wealthy Australians than Newstart recipients but the government demonises the latter

percapita
FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

Pushing back



Election 2019 – what was lost?

- Government review into the rate of Newstart and associated payments
- Abolition of Community Development Program
- Genuine reform of employment services
- Lifting of the staff cap for NDIS



Social Security – reform priorities

- Raise the rate of Newstart and related payments
- Abolish Community Development Program
- Overhaul ParentsNext and Work For The Dole
- Repeal Robodebt
- Adequacy of the Age Pension
- Sustainable funding and staffing for NDIS
- Adequacy of Commonwealth Rent Assistance



#RaiseTheRate

- Increase to Newstart is now ALP policy
- Senate Inquiry, established by Labor and the Greens, underway by Community Affairs Committee
- Strong and broad terms of reference
- Submissions due 13 September



Community Development Program

- Election result means CDP continues as is
- Costs \$360million per year
- Around 30,000 people in 1000 communities
- 25 hours a week, 5 hours a day - \$11 per hour
- Often on cashless welfare card
- No working rights, no super, no workers compensation
- >10% are placed in a job for +6 months each year
- Racist, ineffective, punitive, corrupted



ParentsNext & WFTD

- Despite calls from participants, and from Senate Inquiry, no plans to change ParentsNext
- Similarly, no intention to fix WFTD
- Programs are an expensive failure
- Entire *JobActive* system is in crisis



SEPTEMBER 2018

WORKING IT OUT:

*Employment Services
in Australia*

BY Owen Bennett, Emma Dawson,
Abigail Lewis, David O'Halloran
and Warwick Smith

percapita
FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

AUWU Australian
Unemployed
Workers' Union



percapita
FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

Avenues for JobActive reform

- Terms of reference for Newstart Inquiry are broad enough to encompass some consideration of CDP, ParentsNext and WFTD
- But meaningful reform of *JobActive* appears to be on hold
- This work must be pursued outside the machinery of government



RoboDebt

- Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry into “Centrelink Compliance Program”
- Broad terms of reference
- Submissions due by 20 September



The Adequacy of the Age Pension in Australia

An assessment of pensioner living standards



benevolent SOCIETY

THE LONGEVITY
INNOVATION HUB

percapita
IDEAS FOR A FAIR AUSTRALIA

Age pension

- Government has announced a Retirement Incomes Review
- Will focus on superannuation
- Push to weaken compulsory super
- Opportunity to re-examine adequacy of age pension



NDIS

- \$1.6 billion underspend in most recent federal budget
- Coalition has promised to address waiting times around planning, reviews and eligibility
- Staffing cap needs to be removed
- More broadly, significant problems with privatisation of some services under the NDIS model



Commonwealth Rent Assistance

- Probably the best immediate measure to help those living in poverty
- CRA increase helps recipients of all forms of social security
- Should be tied to cost of rent



Causes for hope

- #RaiseTheRate is now front and centre of the public debate
- This is having a broader impact in raising awareness of other issues in our social security system
- Independents in the House of Representatives and the cross-bench in the Senate are broadly sympathetic to fixing social security

But...



Exclusive Welfare crackdown on lazy jobseekers

BLUDGERS BEWARE

RENEE VIELLARIS

DELIBERATE bludgers who sabotage their own job applications so they can stay on the dole – such as applying for doctor roles without the education – face losing their welfare payments under a Turnbull Government crackdown.

REPORT PS

DOLE BLUDGERS BEWARE

Crackdown on jobseekers sabotaging job applications

NRL: BULLDOGS FACE INVESTIGATION AFTER TRAINER SLEDGES REFEREE



6.44

percapita
FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

Job snobs 'are leaving bosses in the lurch'

EXCLUSIVE

By **GEOFF CHAMBERS**
FEDERAL POLITICAL
CORRESPONDENT
Follow [@Chambersgc](#)

12:00AM AUGUST 5, 2019

 322 COMMENTS



'Finding good staff ... is really, really hard at the moment,' says Rory Fitzpatrick, manager at Eliza Food and Wine in Darlinghurst, Sydney. Picture: Britta Carnion

percapita
FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA



Tweet



Nine News Sydney

@9NewsSyd



#EXCLUSIVE: Nine News has uncovered major flaws in the rollout of controlled cashless welfare cards, allowing cheats to access alcohol, drugs and even gamble.

[@RMorrison9](#)



percapita
FIGHTING INEQUALITY IN AUSTRALIA

Where to from here?

- Critical to engage with Senate Committee Inquiries
- Continue to keep pressure on the ALP to push for real change
- Engage constantly with cross-bench
- Facts matter – push back against the constant narrative about the “undeserving poor”
- Allies in unexpected places – has worked for #RaiseTheRate



Thank you

www.percapita.org.au

