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Appendix C

CASE STUDY

Alex is a 51 yo man who is currently on Newstart and lives alone in a Public Housing property. He has had a lifelong struggle with his emotional health and well-being and has received treatment since he was child. He is fiercely independent and has worked hard to do the best that he can in life. He is religious about paying his rent as he knows that without an Office of Housing property, he would be unable to survive.

He was assessed as eligible for the Disability Support Pension in 1995 and remained on the pension until 2003. His condition had stabilised, and he felt able to re-enter the workforce, however it was difficult for him to sustain employment due to the fluctuating nature of his mental health difficulties and struggles with substance use. In 2009 he was again assessed as eligible for the Disability Support Pension. Once again, he felt able to enter the workforce in 2017 but was unable to sustain employment and reapplied for the Pension in 2018. His application was refused on the basis that his mental health is episodic and the Disability Support assessment tables no longer assess him as eligible for the DSP. A subsequent appeal also failed. Since April 2018 he has been on Newstart but due to his mental health condition has had a medical exemption ever since.

He was recently prescribed a medication by his psychiatrist which appeared to assist in lifting his However, the medication is not on the PBS and whilst the first script was free it will cost approximately $200 a month to continue. He has been unable to afford to purchase the medication and despite his hope that he had finally found a medication that works, he is unable to continue with it.

Alex describes the deep social impact of the inadequacy of Newstart and how it contributes to his social isolation, and depression. He is unable to participate in his community due to the lack of disposable income and he says, “it eats away at my emotional energy, just trying to get by”. His mental health has been extremely poor in the past eighteen months and he sees no way out for himself – ”I have no choices and live in fear of an impending disaster. No amount of financial counselling can solve the problems of an inadequate income.”

He has been trying to keep a car on the road, because like many people in Alice Springs, he wants to be able to visit family who live interstate. However, the car now needs repairs and whilst he has been able to get a Centrelink loan, it is not sufficient to meet the costs. And because he is on income management, he doesn’t have a choice because, though there is a cheaper option, that repairer is not registered for Centrepay.

He is in a dilemma. He can’t afford to keep the car on the road but without it, his capacity to be involved in his community and maintain connection with family interstate will be diminished. Last year his mother passed away in Victoria and he was unable to use his Basics Card to purchase fuel on the trip down to Melbourne, leaving him without any money at all fort that fortnight.

He would like to access residential rehabilitation, but he has a dog and cannot afford to put the dog in a kennel for the duration of the stay.

Alex lives in an NT town where the cost of food is at least 20% higher than the capital cities of the Eastern States. Fuel is also significantly more expensive than in a city environment. He is constantly having to make decisions about how to eke out his meagre income and his diet is impacted. He is often hungry but sees food as the one area he can cut back. This is not good for his health or his mental health, and his energy is low.

He is surrounded in his home by other people struggling in a similar manner, and he can see the toll on people’s health and the terrible situations living in long-term poverty is creating.



Alex cannot see himself ever being in a position of going back to work and the stress of living on Newstart is contributing to a decline in his mental health. He can see that his capacity to sustain a contributing life in the community is diminishing over time in part because of the inadequacy of his income and in part because of the effect this is having on his physical and emotional well-being.