# Anti-Poverty Week Briefing:
## guidance on how we talk or write about poverty[1]

### About Anti-Poverty Week

### Purpose Statement:
*Anti-Poverty Week supports the Australian community to have an increased understanding of poverty and to take action collectively to end it.*

We are a diverse network of individuals and organisations who share this purpose and we focus our activity each year in the week around the United Nations Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October. Our Purpose comes from our Theory of Change which in essence says:

- Poverty exists in Australia and around the world and those affected by it should be treated with respect and dignity.

- The world and Australia would be a better place for all of us if there was less poverty.

- Poverty can be reduced. Governments can and should play a role to alleviate poverty but so can all of us – we can all do our bit.

- If more Australians have a greater understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and achievable solutions that can end it; there will be greater action taken to help end it.

- Action taken collectively by the Australian community will help encourage decision-makers to take action to end poverty.

- Our key message is **Poverty exists. Poverty hurts us all. We can all do something about it.**

***Our overall message is one of hope not despair*** – one of our key messages is poverty can be ended not that it is inevitable but that there are solutions and they are achievable. This approach conveys a can do attitude, that we have the ability to solve poverty, otherwise it is seen as overwhelming and unsolvable and our audience will turn away.

*Australia's income support system system was designed to help people when they are going through tough times so they do not slip into poverty. Raising the rate of unemployment payments will get our income support system working by allowing people to build on the skills they need to get a job, rather than struggling to survive.*

***Our tone is reasonable not argumentative*** – reasonable conveys a community approach and can-do attitude - the audience thinks about how to solve the problem and are not distracted by understanding the agenda of messenger.

*Visual images* should reflect this sense of hope not despair (and our new website reflects this). Note that close up evokes sympathy, wide-shot evokes systemic solutions. All visual images need to support the words, not contradict them. Do they help the viewer identify who is responsible for the problem and who is engaged in creating solutions?

**Don't restate negative myths** about poverty as it will only reinforce them. This is a common misconception but research shows that this makes people more familiar with the myth and more likely to accept it as true.

Always use **person first language** - *people experiencing poverty or homelessness*, *people with disability.*

**Appeal to sense of fairness, values and morals**

*As Australians, we believe in a fair go. We look out for one another and support each other. It's who we are as a nation. And as one of the wealthiest countries in the world, we can afford to look after everyone. But, right now, 3 million Australians are living in poverty and their opportunities are limited. One in six Australian children live in poverty and rely on food banks every week. Everybody has a right to a roof over their heads and food on the table and to live a dignified life. We all share a responsibility to make sure that everyone in our country has a decent standard of living and the same chances in life.*

**Illustrate the extent of poverty** by talking about the prevalence of poverty and people's experiences of poverty rather than data. Use data as a *character* in the story, rather than the story itself.

*Kids growing up in poverty too often go to bed or school hungry; they often feel isolated from other kids; left out if they can't afford to join a local sport team or go on school camps; they may be living in an overcrowded home where there's no quiet place to do homework and they worry about their parents.*

*"My mum struggles, she gets paid on Thursdays but struggles on the Wednesday. Me and my brother, if there is not food for school, we don't go to school at all. She has never sent us to school with no food."*[2]

*"It's always a focus on rent and food for me. I don't like to look like I'm struggling with money. You need to set aside money to buy a jacket for a job interview. That comes out of groceries. You have to compromise a lot. It can make you feel quite isolated because you can't go out with your friends and you're always worried about money…Things like Christmas and Easter and people's birthdays, you feel bad not being able to give someone a present. But it's just the way you live."* [3]

**Use metaphor - poverty as a trap**.  This offers a sense of what life is like for real people and conveys that economic conditions are a deliberate construct. Structures and traps are manufactured, not natural. This presents people not as failures, but rather as navigating impossible circumstances. UK research found that the metaphor of the economy that restricts and restrains was the most effective, it explains how the economy restricts and restrains people in poverty, or channels them into poverty. Australian research also supported this.  How poverty restricts and restrains, locks people in, limits their opportunities and choices; constrains people's opportunities and life's chances, traps people. Poverty as a current (out of an individual's control) is also productive.

*Our economy and welfare system is locking people in poverty. Low-paid, unstable jobs plus inadequate unemployment payments mean some people and families can't put food on the table. It is impossible to look for paid work if you are homeless and hungry with unemployment payments at less than $40 a day.  People living on unemployment payments are trapped in a daily struggle to make ends meet, unable to think about the future they aspire to. Unemployment payments need to be increased so it can truly be the start to finding a new job, not a brake on job searching.*

*Our economy creates powerful currents and rips that can pull people into poverty, like low wages, high housing costs and fewer entry entry-level jobs than there used to be.  Sometimes things happen that threaten to pull us under, like losing a job, coping with a disability or leaving our home to get out of an abusive relationship.*

**Spend as much time on solutions as the detail of the problem**.

We have the solutions, let's share them.  Put solution first, then go back to problem definition. We need to explain how the economy can be redesigned.  To avoid fatalism and that 'nothing can be done,' talk about the economy as a designed system and therefore one that we can redesign.

*We can afford to look after everyone.*

*Child poverty in Australia isn't inevitable – we made great strides in the 1990's when the former PM Bob Hawke and his government committed to end child poverty.  Poverty wasn't eliminated but it was reduced by 30 percent.  We can look to these solutions – investing in early years, increasing family payments, single parent payments and JobSeeker payments. More affordable housing and ensuring all parents complete Year 12 and have access to effective back to work schemes would also help a lot.*

*Our economy and welfare system are like a computer program. The impact it has on our lives is a result of the choices that are made in the design process. We need to redesign the system so the economy and welfare system work for everyone.*

**Make Public Services Visible and a Force for Good**

We all rely on publicly funded services and support systems like education, Medicare, roads and railways. Our public services are especially important to people who are struggling. We need to strengthen them to end poverty and make sure everyone has a decent life.

*We need to redesign the way our economy works – the choices we make - to free people from the constraints of poverty so they can live the life they aspire to.*

*We can solve poverty by loosening the constraints our economy places on people. Our social security system is a key part of freeing people from these constraints. A decent social security system should and can help.*

**How Reducing Poverty Benefits Us All**

As human beings, our wellbeing is linked to each other. Growing inequality is detrimental to economic growth and undermines social cohesion, increasing political and social tensions and, in some circumstances, driving instability and conflicts.[4]

Economic growth is not sufficient to reduce poverty if it is not inclusive and if it does not involve the three dimensions of sustainable development – economic, social and environmental.  Inequality threatens long-term social and economic development, harms poverty reduction and destroys people's sense of fulfilment and self-worth. This, in turn, can breed crime, disease and environmental degradation.[5]

There is a significant body of evidence that higher incomes for the unemployed and other groups who are disadvantaged may lead to better national outcomes on indicators such as health. That is, there are many additional social costs involved with entrenched disadvantage, and those costs are alleviated as the cycle of disadvantage is broken.[6]

"*The evidence is clear that by investing in helping kids get off to a good start, the costs to the community in areas such as healthcare, homelessness and unemployment can be massively reduced.*"[7]

Anti-Poverty Week and many others warmly welcomed the Federal Government's introduction of the $550 per fortnight Coronavirus Supplement to income support payments including Job Seeker in March 2020.  More than 3.3.million Australians (including 1.1.million or 1 in 5 children) have been protected from poverty.  That has been documented by research conducted by Ben Phillips and colleagues at the Australian National University as well as numerous surveys of recipients. Going back to the old rate would cost the economy $31.3 billion and 145,000 full-time jobs over the next two years, Deloitte Access Economics has found.[8]

[1] Anti-Poverty Week greatly acknowledges Anglicare Australia State of the Family 2018 and How to Talk about Poverty in the UK, FrameWorks Institute, April 2018 for their insights in informing this briefing. Read these reports and see also A24 Engagement Project and FrameWorks Institute and Joseph Rowntree Trust  How to Talk about Poverty in the UK Toolkit, March 2019 for more.

[2] Billie aged 14, cited in Redmond, G., Skattebol, J., Saunders, P., Lietz, P., Zizzo, G., O'Grady, E., Tobin, M., Thomson, S., Maurici, V., Huynh, J., Moffat, A., Wong, M., Bradbury, B. and Roberts, K. (2016), *Are the Kids Alright? Young Australians in their Middle Years*, Final Report of the Australian Child Well-Being Project, Flinders University, University of New South Wales and Australian Council for Educational Research.

[3] Quote provided by Anglicare Tasmania as cited in Anglicare Australia State of the Family 2018.

[4] Why it matters, UN Social Development Goal 1: End Poverty

[5] Why it matters, UN Social Development Goal 10: Reduce Inequality

[6] Deloitte Economics report at: "Analysis of the impact of raising benefit rates", 4 September 2018

[7] ARACY Board Chair Elaine Henry OAM cited in Sollis, K. (2019). *Measuring Child Deprivation and Opportunity in Australia: Applying the Nest framework to develop a measure of deprivation and opportunity for children using the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.* Canberra: ARACY.  Summary report: To Have and To Have Not - Measuring child deprivation and opportunity in Australia, 2019.

[8] Deloitte Access Economics Report for ACOSS, 15/9/20.