



## ***Anti-Poverty Week Briefing: guidance on how we talk or write about poverty, June 2022<sup>1</sup>***

### **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. We want to tap into the sentiments expressed in response to The Salvation Army [\*The Social Justice Stocktake – Taking Stock of Our Communities\*](#) published in early 2022:

*“I would like to see the community coming together to create positive and meaningful change.”*  
Queensland respondent

*“I want to participate, if I can, to help resolve these issues.”* NSW respondent

We suggest the following:

*Australia’s income support system system was designed to help people when they are going through tough times so they do not end up trapped in 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 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. 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.*

*Poverty affects far too many Australian children and families, diminishing their lives now and in the future. As one of the wealthiest countries in the world, it's just not right that 1 in 6 of our children grow up in poverty.<sup>2</sup>*

*"We are a wealthy country and our people should not have to struggle to feed their children and put a roof over their heads."<sup>3</sup>*

**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.*

*Growing up in poverty is simply bad for children. Children who grow up in poverty have more than three times the risk of living in poverty as an adult.<sup>4</sup>*



*Not having enough money to cover the necessities restricts daily life and crushes hope for the future. We've heard shocking stories of mothers pretending they've eaten dinner while cooking when in fact, there was not enough food to feed the whole family; of mothers forced to forego important medications and unable to maintain or fix their car. These all restrict their employment options. We've also heard of children telling their younger siblings to drink less milk and not even telling their parents about after school activities and excursions because they know the family cannot afford them.*

*"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."<sup>5</sup>*

### **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. Explain how poverty restricts and restrains, locks people in, limits and constrains people's opportunities and life's chances, traps people. Poverty as a current (out of an individual's control) is also productive. In 2021 APW used the phrase "increased income support and social housing are the **the keys to unlocking poverty.**"

*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 \$46 a day or less. 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.*

*Not having enough money to cover the basics including housing, restricts daily life and crushes hope for the future. It restricts their chance to prosper and thrive. Living in poverty is like living in permanent lockdown.*

*Our economy creates powerful currents and rips that can pull people into poverty, like low wages, high housing costs and fewer entry-level jobs. Sometimes things happen that threaten to pull us under, like losing a job, acquiring an illness or disability, or leaving our home to get away from an abusive relationship.*



## Spend as much time on solutions as the detail of the problem

The Salvation Army received over 15,500 responses from Australians across all States and Territories in late 2021 and concluded: “Overwhelmingly, people felt something needed to be done and wanted to be part of the solution but felt disempowered around finding or implementing solutions. We found that Australians care deeply about social injustice – but don’t always know what to do about it.”<sup>6</sup>

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 and that poverty can be solved. It’s a policy choice that can, and should, be made. To avoid fatalism and that ‘nothing can be done,’ talk about the economy and our budgets as a designed system and therefore one that we can redesign. In Australia we had the experiment of what would happen if we significantly increased income support payments such as JobSeeker Payment, parenting, student and other working age payments – it was spent on basic necessities and lifted many out of poverty.<sup>7</sup>

Use solution and metaphor together: *Together we can unlock poverty for all Australians.*

*Raising income support above the poverty line and government investment in social housing are the keys to unlocking poverty.*

*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.*

*The extra income provided through the Coronavirus Supplement to low-income families doing it tough during 2020 really made a difference. It meant they had enough to cover the basics like healthy food, warm clothes in winter and after school activities like sport and music. Importantly it relieved stress on parents and children which compounds hardship. For some it was the means to escape violence. The full Coronavirus Supplement saw poverty drop by more than half for the poorest families – those headed by single parents<sup>8</sup>. The 550 Reasons to Smile campaign captured the impact from families: “*This has helped pay the rent and feed my family. I’m a sole parent with no child support and multiple chronic illnesses. This money has given me breathing room.*” See more quotes from 550 Reasons to Smile [here](#).*

### Key one liners on child and family poverty:

*Income support and housing are the keys to unlocking poverty for families and children and all affected by poverty.*

*To treat all of Australia’s children fairly, we need to ensure every family has enough money to cover the basics and a secure roof over their head.<sup>9</sup>*

*Children can thrive and be healthy when they have what they need to develop well.<sup>10</sup>*



## Make Public Services Visible and a Force for Good

We all rely on publicly funded services and support systems like income support, education, Medicare, hospitals and roads. 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.

The ACOSS/UNSW Sydney Poverty and Inequality Partnership [\*Covid, inequality and poverty in 2020 & 2021\*](#) found that during the first 'Alpha' wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Australia halved poverty and significantly reduced income inequality.

- Between 2019 and the middle of 2020, the percentage of people in poverty fell from 11.8% to 9.9% *despite* the recession. It would have been twice as high (22.7%) without the COVID income supports.
- Among people in households on the JobSeeker Payment, *poverty fell by four-fifths, from 76% in 2019 to just 15% in June 2020*. Among sole parent families (both adults and children) poverty was reduced by almost half, from 34% to 19%.

But the reversal of this Federal Government support in 2021 saw poverty rates increase again. By April 2021 when the supplement was removed completely, and despite an increase of \$25pw to the lowest income support payments, the new rate of JobSeeker payment fell to approximately 30% below the poverty line.<sup>11</sup>

*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.*

## 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup>

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.<sup>14</sup>



*“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.”<sup>15</sup>*

The \$550 per fortnight Coronavirus Supplement to working age payments including Job Seeker in March 2020 introduced by the then Federal Government helped the Australian economy recover from the lockdown-induced recession as well as reducing poverty and inequality.<sup>16</sup> The majority of leading economists agreed the best way to aid the economic recovery in the October 2020 Federal Budget was to increase spending on social housing and JobSeeker and associated working age payments.<sup>17</sup>

*Reducing poverty is both the smart and right thing to do.*





## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> 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. Many of the children's messages are based on the extensive Australian research in collaboration with the FrameWorks Institute to create [The Core Story](#). See also research undertaken by Telethon Kids and others, including, FrameWorks Institute, [Moving Early Childhood up the Agenda](#), May 2020. 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.

<sup>2</sup> Davidson, P., Bradbury, B., Hill, T., and Wong, M. (2020), [Poverty in Australia 2020: Part 2 – Who is Affected?](#) ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 4, Sydney: ACOSS.

<sup>3</sup> Male aged 70, Metro Perth as cited by [Above the Line, Perceptions of Poverty in WA](#), August 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Melbourne University, [Does poverty in childhood beget poverty in adulthood in Australia?](#), October 2020.

<sup>5</sup> Quote provided by Anglicare Tasmania as cited in Anglicare Australia [State of the Family 2018](#).

<sup>6</sup> The Stocktake also includes the Salvation Army's policy responses to the issues raised. See their website pages [The Social Justice Stocktake – Taking Stock of Our Communities](#) for more detail on individual issues and State/Territory responses and also by Federal electorates.

<sup>7</sup> Paying household bills was reported to be the most common use of the Coronavirus Supplement (67%) according to the ABS Survey [Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey November 2020](#) published 14/12/20.

<sup>8</sup> According to [ANU research](#) commissioned by the Brotherhood of St Laurence and Social Ventures Australia, poverty rates for these families reduced from 39% to 17%.

<sup>9</sup> Derived from [The Core Story](#) and associated research.

<sup>10</sup> Derived from [The Core Story](#) and associated research.

<sup>11</sup> See also The Conversation, [Albanese has dropped Labor's pledge to boost Jobseeker. With unemployment low, is that actually fair enough?](#) Professor Peter Whiteford, ANU's Crawford School of Public Policy and Associate Professor Bruce Bradbury UNSW Social Policy Research Centre.

<sup>12</sup> [Why it matters, UN Social Development Goal 1: End Poverty](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Why it matters, UN Social Development Goal 10: Reduce Inequality](#)

<sup>14</sup> Deloitte Economics report at: "[Analysis of the impact of raising benefit rates](#)", 4 September 2018

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> ACOSS/UNSW Sydney Poverty and Inequality Partnership [Covid, inequality and poverty in 2020 & 2021](#)

<sup>17</sup> [Top economists back boosts to JobSeeker and social housing over tax cuts \(theconversation.com\)](#)