



Anti-Poverty Week Media Highlights 2022 – summary by theme

During Anti-Poverty Week, we elevated **poverty to centre stage in the media** – media analysis by iSentia (thanks to our lead sponsor the Brotherhood of St Laurence) found that there were over 300 mentions of Anti-Poverty Week from 14 to 23 October 2022 and that this coverage reached a cumulative potential reach of 5 million people. This included:

- Significant coverage on the eve of APW 14/10/22 with the **ACOSS/UNSW Poverty in Australia 2022 report** including ABC AM [A picture of Poverty in Australia](#) and The Guardian [Stage 3 tax cuts unconscionable](#).
- The Brisbane APW launch received coverage in Queensland radio and TV including Ten News [Brisbane Qld Anti-Poverty Week launch](#) which was also syndicated beyond Queensland, 16/10.
- The **Foodbank 2022 Hunger Report** launched on 17/10/22 with extensive coverage such as The Guardian [Inflation and inadequate welfare fuelling Australia's food insecurity crisis, Foodbank finds](#).
- The Monthly columnist Rachel Withers commented that “*The Anti-Poverty Week drops just keep coming, as advocates use the week to highlight the damning state of Australian society.*” [For Richer or poorer](#), 18/10/22.
- **Anglicare Australia's** emergency services report release and coverage included the Herald Sun [Anglicare Australia says emergency services at breaking point](#); The New Daily [Rising rent and food costs drive surging charity demand](#), 20/10/22. UnitingCare's report on financial vulnerability received extensive coverage on the ABC on 21/10/22 [Are you financially vulnerable? This calculator will reveal your level of risk - ABC News](#)
- RN Breakfast interview with Treasurer 20/10 “[It's poverty week Treasurer](#)” and an [Anti-Poverty Week Fiona Katauskas JobSeeker cartoon](#) featured on Insiders, 23/10/22.
- There was reporting in the Canberra press of Anti-Poverty Week ACT and Adelaide ABC Radio Afternoon Show ran daily interviews throughout the Week: Monday [Food Insecurity](#) - 5:16 mins, Tuesday [Cost of Living](#) - 6:23 mins, Wednesday [Housing and Homelessness](#) 9:19 mins, Thursday [Digital Poverty](#) - 8:02 mins, Friday [Addressing Poverty](#) - 21:03 mins, [Listen Back to Back](#) – 50:04 mins.
- A special poverty week [Newsletter edition from Melbourne Institute](#) sub-titled *Act on Poverty*, 21/10/22.

As we had intended, there was a strong focus on the unacceptably **high rates of child poverty** both before and during Anti-Poverty Week itself:

- Sydney Morning Herald and Age, [Child poverty: A problem Labor can and must solve](#), Sean Kelly 1/8/22.
- Toni Wren interview on [ABC RN Breakfast](#), 3/8/22.

- Sydney Morning Herald and Age, [Julia Gillard committed a terrible wrong. It's time for Albanese to right it](#), by Dr Chris Wallace, 4/8/22.
- The Australian “[Shame of one in six kids living in poverty says ACOSS](#),” 14/10/22.
- Flinders University, [1 in 6 younger Australians live in poverty - Why don't we care?](#), 18/10/22.
- Power to Persuade, [If we want our children to grow up free from poverty we must support those raising them, especially sole parents](#), by Prof Janeen Baxter and Dr Alice Campbell, 18/10/22.
- Mamamia.com, [Rental crisis in Australia: How it affects a single mum](#), 19/10/22.
- The Canberra Times and syndicated up to 100 Australian Community Media papers, including the Newcastle Herald, [While you're having lunch this Anti-Poverty Week, consider thousands going hungry](#), Rod Bowers, Op Ed, 19/10/22.
- 7 news ‘[I felt trapped’: Mum’s nightmare choice between violent partner and ‘terrifying’ poverty](#)’ 22/10/22.

During APW, we were able to focus on the **solution to child poverty and our call to action for parliamentarians to legislate to halve child poverty by 2030** (looking also at the NZ approach):

- The Australian, [Advocates call for new laws to enshrine goal of halving child poverty by 2030 m.au](#), 18/10.
- The Guardian [A third of single mothers in financial hardship due to welfare policies, analysis finds](#), 18/10.
- ABC Radio National Breakfast, [Call to halve child poverty by 2030](#), 18/10.
- Women’s Agenda, [Anti-Poverty Week calls on parliament to halve child poverty by 2030](#), 18/10.
- ABC 7.30 [Jim Chalmers has promised a wellbeing budget, what will it look like?](#) Laura Tingle report, incl NZ Child Poverty legislation, 18/10.
- Ten News First: Breakfast at 10, (~30 Channel 10 stations), [iv with Toni Wren](#), 20/10/22.
- ABC Radio National Big Ideas [Alleviating child poverty](#), 20/10/22.

Before Anti-Poverty Week itself we also had articles on rent assistance [Social housing stock barely changes as waiting lists blow out and rental stress rises across Australia](#), The Guardian 29/6/22 and in specialist education media about our teaching resources and the Pens against Poverty student writing competition. Education HQ, [Poverty Education resources available for Aussie teachers](#), 18/7/22 and Education Today, [Anti-Poverty Week to educate on disadvantage](#), 19/7/22.

We also registered our disappointment when the ALP announced it would no longer hold a review into JobSeeker and income support if it won the May 2022 election: [Labor drops plan to review Jobseeker rate](#), The Age/Sydney Morning Herald, 12/4/22 and [Welfare groups slam Labor’s lack of commitment to increase JobSeeker](#), The Australian, 13/4/2022.

'Legislate to halve child poverty'

STEPHEN LUNN
SOCIAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

Australia has a serious and little acknowledged problem with poverty and should follow New Zealand's lead to legislate to halve child poverty by 2030, advocates say.

Anti-Poverty Week executive director Toni Wren said poverty ripples across the country, finding its way into the homes of 760,000 children, and affecting women disproportionately.

With this week marking its 20th year, Ms Wren's organisation is calling on politicians to commit to the goal of halving child poverty by 2030, something that should be entirely possible "in a wealthy country like Australia".

"Our federal parliamentarians need to pass legislation to halve child poverty by 2030, with measurable targets and actions to achieve this goal," she said.

"The New Zealand government introduced such legislation in 2018 and they've made great progress so that fewer children live in poverty. Setting targets enshrined in legislation works and changes lives for the better."

Research released last week by the Australian Council of Social Service found one in eight people, including one in six children, more than 760,000, in Australia live below the poverty line, defined as 50 per cent of median after-tax household income after adjusting for household size.

New analysis by Queensland University researchers Janeen Baxter and Alice Campbell has found the risk of being in financial hardship is more than double for single mothers (34.4 per cent) compared to partnered mothers (14.5 per cent).

The proportion of single mothers in financial hardship has not fallen below 30 per cent since 2010, except for a brief respite during the Covid-19 pandemic when the Coronavirus Supplement was being paid, the researchers found.

One policy that particularly hurts single mothers is the loss of the parenting payment when a youngest child turns eight and they are moved on to the "punishingly low" Jobseeker payment, Ms Wren said.



The Politics, The Monthly, 18/10/22

For richer or poorer

By [Rachel Withers](#)



Treasurer Jim Chalmers during a press conference at Parliament House, October 17, 2022. Image © Lukas Coch / AAP Images

The government cannot end child poverty or gendered violence without acting on social security

The Anti-Poverty Week drops just keep coming, as advocates use the week to highlight the damning state of Australian society. After it was revealed last week that [one in eight Australians](#) are living in poverty, and yesterday that an estimated [500,000 households](#) are experiencing food insecurity on any given day, today's headlines show that a whopping [34 per cent of single mothers](#) live in financial hardship, thanks to successive governments' welfare policies – including the Gillard government's [infamous decision](#) to move single parents to the lower Newstart (now JobSeeker) rate when their youngest child turns eight. Advocates are demanding a [real increase](#) to JobSeeker, noting that the only recent time when we made any dent in poverty rates was when benefits were doubled in 2020 during the first stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile Anti-Poverty Week director Toni Wren is calling on politicians to commit to the goal of [halving child poverty by 2030](#), something that should be [entirely possible](#) “in a wealthy country like Australia”. So, will Anti-Poverty Week have any impact on next week's federal budget? And how can we go on living with these statistics, knowing that [skyrocketing inflation](#) is hitting those on welfare [the hardest](#)?

It's unlikely we'll see any real efforts to tackle poverty this year, with Treasurer Jim Chalmers this morning reiterating that his “bread and butter” budget won't contain [much cost-of-living relief](#), and warning of the inflationary impacts. (That should please *AFR* readers, seven in 10 of whom believe the treasurer should provide [no relief](#) on cost of living. Good for them.) The government has repeatedly refused to increase the rate

of JobSeeker in this budget (and, no, indexation [doesn't count](#)), with Social Services Minister Amanda Rishworth using today's webinar on poverty hosted by the Committee for Economic Development of Australia (CEDA) to again rule out a rise, [citing the debt](#). *Guardian Australia* inequality editor Luke Henriques-Gomes, who was watching the CEDA event, [noted](#) that the government didn't seem to have any plans to address poverty at all, even as advocates on the panel repeatedly pointed out that increasing the JobSeeker rate in 2020 had proven a success.

So much for yesterday's lofty [pledge](#) to "end gender-based violence in one generation". As feminist and writer Anne Summers found in her recent [research](#), single parenthood and domestic violence are deeply linked, with limited financial options forcing women to choose between [violence and poverty](#) in deciding whether to flee. (Summers recommended allowing single parents to stay on the parenting payment until their youngest turns 16, and abolishing mutual obligations for those with young children.) This, in turn, is contributing to child poverty rates, with children suffering as a result of the precarious position in which many mothers find themselves. Speaking on *RN Breakfast*, Wren said she was heartened by yesterday's new National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, noting that social security was explicitly mentioned. But when is the government going to be able to move on this? Not in this budget, it seems, or in the next, unless it finds some extra revenue streams.

Treasurer Chalmers is caught between a rock and a hard place when it comes to funding election commitments, keeping election promises and paying down the debt. (The floods [certainly haven't helped](#), contributing both to inflation *and* the costs this budget must cover.) But there is barely anyone doing it tougher than those living on welfare, many of whom are [skipping meals and showers](#), as the costs of essentials such as food and housing continue to rise even faster than the Consumer Price Index. Poverty, as welfare advocates keep pointing out, is a political choice, and it's one that our leaders look set to go on making in next week's federal budget. It says a lot about Australian society that many high-income voters seem [more interested](#) in hanging onto future tax cuts than in the fact that millions of their fellow citizens are struggling to afford enough to eat.



19 OCT, 2022

Food for thought in society perpetuating child poverty

Canberra Times, Canberra

Brotherhood
of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

Page 1 of 2

Food for thought in society perpetuating child poverty

ROD
BOWER



I TAKE lunch for granted.

Mostly, I pack my lunch for work, a salad with a little protein on the side, egg, perhaps some cold meat from the night before. Occasionally, if I can't be bothered making lunch, or just because I can and I enjoy it, I'll go to a local cafe. Every now and then I even "do" lunch.

Shockingly however, over three-quarters of a million Australian children and their families cannot take lunch for granted, nor any other meal for that matter.

This is the result of child poverty.

A recent survey found the top three things children, young people and families said they need to feel safe are: help with housing, mental health services, and basic needs, like food, clothing, transport and school supplies.

As I sat at my desk to write this article, I removes my fresh healthy salad from my briefcase. I opened it and viewed it with a new appreciation.

Today I do not take it for granted. I need to eat, and at my age I need to eat healthy food, so it is not guilt that I am feeling. The feeling that I am experiencing is moral injury.

It's right that I have a good lunch. It is not right that 750,000 children do not.

Moral injury is not a new concept. The term itself emerges from the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Psychiatrist Jonathan Shay argues that "moral injury is present when there has been a betrayal of "what's right" either by a person in legitimate authority or by oneself "in a high stakes situation".

I would add the betrayal of the vulnerable by the society in which we participate.

Moral injury is the curse of consciousness, but it can be turned into a blessing by allowing the discomfort it causes to compel us into action. To action that rights the wrongs we have participated in perpetuating simply

by being members of a society.

Many Australians experienced moral injury due to the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, many also through our lack of adequate response to global heating and Indigenous issues.

The moral waters of these issues are often muddled by different political ideologies but surely there is no partisan perspective that could validly argue that a society that allows children to go hungry can at its foundation be defined as good.

The welfare of its children is the most fundamental responsibility of any society.

The fact that so many children live with food insecurity in a society as affluent as ours is truly morally indictable.

Child poverty in Australia isn't inevitable - we made great strides following the famous quote by former prime minister Bob Hawke, who said: "By 1990, no Australian child will be living in poverty," and his government committed to end child poverty.

Child poverty wasn't eliminated but it was reduced by 30 per cent.

We can do it again, but we will not achieve this until, like Bob Hawke, we are courageous enough to bare the discomfort and to name the issue for what it is.

Child poverty.

It seems now that it is almost impossible to get a politician to utter the words, but unless we name it, we cannot deal with it.

Anti-Poverty Week runs from October 16-22 with the theme "Together we can halve child poverty by 2030".

We, as a society can take action by sending a message to government that we support an increase in JobSeeker and related payments.

We need to show that we support an increase in available social housing and an increase in rent assistance.

We know we can do this because during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Australia halved poverty and significantly reduced income inequality, thanks to a raft of Commonwealth government crisis



19 OCT, 2022

Food for thought in society perpetuating child poverty

Canberra Times, Canberra

Brotherhood
of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

Page 2 of 2

support payments introduced to help people survive the first lockdown.

The child support system is not working and the taxation system needs to be engaged in the recovery of debts owed to children, an amount conservatively estimated to be at least \$2 billion in 2022 alone.

We, as a society can take action by supporting not only tax reform, but the reform of our taxation culture from one of "what can I get" to one of "what can I provide".

The stage three tax cuts must be abandoned as they can only be paid for, in a moral sense, with funds stolen from the poor and in particular from children living in poverty.

We experience the disease of moral injury in the case of child poverty not only because we contribute to a society that contributes to child poverty but because we as a society are diminished by child poverty.

How was your lunch today?

|| The Venerable Canon Rod Bower the director of mission at Newcastle Anglican.



18 OCT, 2022

It's time to make poverty a thing of the past

Burnie Advocate, Burnie

Brotherhood
of St Laurence
Working for an Australia free of poverty

Page 1 of 1

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

It's time to make poverty a thing of the past

ONE VERY IMPORTANT WEEK

In Australia, 3.24 million people live below the poverty line, including one in six children - that's 774,000 kids.

For the people we serve at Mission Australia, we know how distressing it is trying to live on a low income - especially with the rising cost-of-living. Without enough to cover basics, people are going without food, missing out on medicine, and can't afford to pay rent.

This is why Mission Australia joins Anti-Poverty Week (October 16-22) every year. This year, we're urging the federal government to commit to halving child poverty by 2030 with measurable targets and actions to achieve this goal.

We're also calling on the federal government to permanently increase income support, so people who are relying on it don't have to live in poverty. The current JobSeeker rate of \$48 a day doesn't even allow people to pay for the basics, let alone support them to

get back to work on an income that doesn't leave enough to pay for petrol or public transport to get to a job interview.

Fair working conditions are important too - stable, secure, well-paid jobs that allow workers and their families to thrive. We all want to live in a country where everyone can access life's essentials, opportunities for education, quality employment and live in a safe and secure home in strong connected communities. Let's do everything we can so Australia is a place where everyone can thrive and no one is forced to live in poverty.

**Mychelle Curran, Mission Australia TAS/
SA state director**

Children often miss out as poverty strikes low-income families in high-earning Canberra

16 October 2022 | Katrina Condie

<https://the-riotact.com/children-often-miss-out-as-poverty-strikes-low-income-families-in-high-earning-canberra/601580>



Canberra children are often missing out because their families are struggling to make ends meet. Photo: File.

An estimated 9000 children are living below the poverty line in Canberra.

Despite the city having the highest average weekly earnings in Australia, the rising cost of living in Canberra means many families cannot afford the basics, such as housing, food, transport, health services, clothing and energy.

This year's Anti-Poverty Week, from 16 to 22 October, will shine a light on struggling families with the ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) urging all parliamentarians to legislate to halve child poverty in the Territory by 2030.

[Care Financial Counselling](#) research found a shortage of government housing, combined with a sharp rise in the cost of living, has severely impacted Canberra's low-income families.

CEO Carmel Franklin said Care looked at the cost of living for individuals, couples and families receiving Centrelink benefits, and found households living in government housing were, on average, in deficit \$15 a week. Canberra households living in private rentals, however, faced a shortfall of about \$100 a week.

"This proves if you're on any kind of Centrelink payment, you cannot afford to rent privately. You just can't," Ms Franklin said.

"Essentially, every single week these households have to decide what essential costs they will pay and what will have to miss out.

READ ALSO ACTCOSS wants reform to address 'shameful' child poverty rates in ACT

"Even if they're in government housing, making ends meet is very difficult. And it's impossible if they're in a private rental."

Ms Franklin said it was often the children who miss out on school excursions, after-school activities such as music, dance and sport, and family outings.

"Once households pay the essentials such as rent, food, electricity and fuel, there's just nothing left," she said.

"If they have unexpected medical or vet bills, their car or refrigerator breaks down, or they need clothing, often they're using Afterpay systems, going to Cash Converters or maxing out their credit card to meet the additional costs. The problem is, they can't afford to make the repayments, so it's a constant cycle of debt and stress."



Care CEO Carmel Franklin says more needs to be done to address poverty in Canberra. Photo: Care.

Ms Franklin says the Federal Government doesn't provide an adequate safety net for people receiving Centrelink payments, particularly those on Job Seeker. And at a Territory level, there needs to be a larger investment in social housing.

During its research, Care found one low-income Canberra family had a household budget surplus of \$18 a fortnight.

The father has a full-time job, the mother works three days a week and they have two young children, so receive Family Tax Benefit B.

"After their expenses, including a private rental, they have a tiny surplus that really isn't enough if they have any unexpected costs," Ms Franklin said.

"They are making it through each fortnight by making things really tight, but there's no capacity to build up a savings buffer in their bank.

"With rents so expensive and the cost of living going up, it's driving Canberra families on low incomes, as well as those on Centrelink payments, into more hardship and poverty."

She said any small expense could "tip them over the edge" and leave them with no money to pay their rent, putting them at higher risk of becoming homeless.

"Why have we still got people doing it so tough? It's hard for most people to understand, because poverty is hidden in Canberra," Ms Franklin said.

Another Care client, John, 56, lives in government housing and is "only just" surviving on Job Seeker. The former chef has diabetes and arthritis and is awaiting a hernia operation, so is unable to work.

He said the Centrelink payment wasn't enough and often found himself going without "proper food" with no savings for emergency costs. Despite using his heater as little as possible over winter, he was recently hit with a \$500 electricity bill.

ACTCOSS has welcomed the ACT Government's commitment to deliver an additional 400 public housing dwellings by 2025 and 600 more affordable housing dwellings by 2025-26. But it said the commitment fell well short of community needs.

Help raise awareness about the housing and cost of living crises by taking part in one of the [Anti-Poverty Week Events](#) across the ACT this month.



'Shame' of one in six kids living in poverty

More than 760,000 Australian children are living in poverty conditions, the nation's peak welfare advocacy group warns, a situation that brings 'great shame on our nation'.

2

THE AUSTRALIAN,
FRIDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2022
theaustralian.com.au

'National shame': One in six kids in poverty

STEPHEN LUNN
SOCIAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

The fact that one in eight people, including one in six children, live in poverty in a country as rich as Australia is a "national shame", a leading welfare advocate says.

Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) chief executive Cassandra Goldie says a clear answer to tackling the widening gap between the nation's rich and poor sits before policymakers, and has been tried already and shown to work.

"Almost doubling the Job-Seeker rate (during the pandemic) pulled 646,000 people out of poverty in 2020," Dr Goldie said. "The increased payments reduced child

poverty by a massive 5.3 per cent, giving 245,000 kids in Australia the chance of a better future."

A report by ACOSS and the University of NSW released on Friday assesses the level of poverty across Australia, finding 3.3 million people, including 761,000 children, sit below the poverty line, defined as 50 per cent of median after-tax household income after adjusting for household size.

"These figures should be a source of great shame for our nation," Dr Goldie said.

"We can and must do better."

The "poverty snapshot" uses the latest available Australian Bureau of Statistics data, which provides information only up to June 2020. It shows the onset of Covid-19 and government-im-

posed lockdowns initially drove up poverty, before extra welfare measures kicked in and reduced poverty to below pre-Covid levels.

In the first three months of 2020, as large parts of the economy shut down, the poverty rate climbed to 14.6 per cent, the report reveals. But the income support payments announced in April took the poverty rate down to a 17-year low of 12 per cent by June that year.

The child poverty rate reduced from 19 per cent in the March quarter of 2020 to 12 per cent by June – a 20-year low, with 245,000 children pushed back above the poverty line.

The temporary measures, subsequently removed, saw single adults receiving social security

payments move from \$134 a week below the poverty line in March to \$146 above it in June 2020, while couples with two children went from being \$187 below the poverty line to \$361 above it.

"The solutions to ending poverty in Australia are clear," Dr Goldie said. "Increasing Job-Seeker and related payments to at least \$73 a day is a crucial first step, as well as an increase to Commonwealth Rent Assistance and a substantial investment in social housing so that there are enough affordable homes for people on the lowest incomes. We must also invest in energy efficiency and solar retrofits for low-income homes."

The report notes the poverty gap has steadily increased over the past two decades.

Call for tax system to target child support avoidance

EXCLUSIVE

Shane Wright

Senior economics correspondent

Single parents are pressing the federal government to overhaul child support by bringing into the tax system tens of thousands of partners who are avoiding their obligations by failing to declare their real incomes.

There are about 1.2 million parents and one million children in the child support scheme. Almost \$4 billion a year is supposed to be transferred between parents to support their children, of which \$2 billion is through private agreements. Anti-Poverty Week estimates there is up to \$2 billion in outstanding child support debt.

While Services Australia can target non-payment of debt in cases of fraud or income minimisation, critics say there is a growing cottage industry around ways to arrange tax or income obligations to avoid child support.

Child support is determined largely by taxable income. If people do not have a taxable income, Services Australia will use a tax return for the previous year and adjust it for inflation or assume it is two-thirds of the male total average weekly earnings.

Data released in 2021 showed more than 16,000 parents had failed to lodge a tax return for at least a decade while 76,600 had gone five years without a return.

Terese Edwards, chief executive of the National Council of Single Mothers and Their Children, said in too many cases parents were dropping out of the tax system altogether or moving payments through trusts, partnerships or even members of extended family.

She said by avoiding the tax system, potentially billions of dollars worth of support was being stolen from children. Edwards said bring-

ing parents who were failing to honour their child payment responsibilities into the tax system improved the integrity of tax collection and ensured children were properly supported.

"The community should be very annoyed that there is such a high degree of illegal activity going on by people staying out of the tax system to avoid child support," she said.

"This is the most gender-neutral lever that could be pulled and should not attract ire from anyone."

Edwards said the introduction by the Howard government of orders that could stop a parent leaving the country if they had outstanding child support payments showed there were ways for a government to tighten the system.

In 2020-21, there were 922 departure prohibition orders issued to stop a parent who owed child support from leaving the country.

The action collected about \$21 million in outstanding payments.

An all-party parliamentary inquiry into the nation's family law system late last year was told the underpayment of support was akin to stealing from children.

It recommended the Family Law Act be amended to recognise the "persistent underpayment and/or non-payment of child support as relevant factors in determining the existence of abuse". It also recommended the government assess compliance rates of private collection arrangements.

Anti-Poverty Week executive director Toni Wren said more had to be done to address the problems affecting 1 million children.

She said 44 per cent of children in sole-parent families lived in poverty compared to 13 per cent for those children living with both parents.

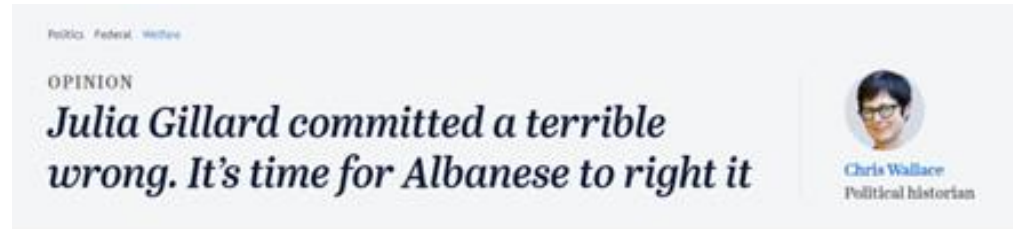
A spokesman for Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones declined to comment on the issue.

76,600

parents have gone five years without a return.

Sydney Morning Herald and Age– Opinion, Thursday 4 August, 2022

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/julia-gillard-committed-a-terrible-wrong-it-s-time-for-albanese-to-right-it-20220802-p5b6pj.html>



The theatre of politics in the first sitting fortnight of the new federal parliament had all the joy and pathos you'd expect when power changes hands.

The Albanese government was buoyant. The Coalition opposition, miserable – especially former prime minister Scott Morrison, who didn't turn up until parliament's second week.

Morrison seemed mentally absent during question times, a spent force barely going through the motions as he sat in parliament's back row.

It's going to be a long road back for Opposition Leader Peter Dutton, on a 25 per cent approval rating according to the latest polls.

But his challenge pales when compared to that of Treasurer Jim Chalmers. He has an economic shambles to fix.

It was symbolised this week by the [Reserve Bank's fourth interest rate increase](#) in as many months as RBA Governor Philip Lowe externalised onto Australians the cost of him hitting the brakes hard to make up for his earlier, protracted monetary policy laxness. For Chalmers, cleaning up the consequences of someone else's monetary policy missteps, and inheriting a trillion-dollar debt from an outgoing government is not going to be fun.

The pent-up demands are enormous. Everyone wants their policy suggestions funded. But there are some certainly more worthy than others.

[Sean Kelly wrote in](#) this masthead on Monday about Anti-Poverty Week executive director Toni Wren's existential worry that "Labor isn't talking about child poverty."

One in six Australian children live below the poverty line, Wren points out.

This has a deep and uncomfortable resonance for Labor people who recall former prime minister Bob Hawke's unfulfilled 1987 pledge that no child should live in poverty by 1990.

Wren among others is lobbying ministers to make child poverty a thing of the past. She was accompanied in her Canberra representations this week by Terese Edwards, CEO of the National Council for Single Mothers and their Children.

As Julia Gillard delivered her misogyny speech on October 9, 2012, Edwards led a protest on the lawns of Parliament House against a Gillard government bill shifting 85,000 single-parent families from the single-parent benefit onto the inadequate unemployment benefit. This left them between \$60 and \$100 a week worse off.

These were families “grandfathered” from the Howard government decision years earlier to move new applicants onto unemployment benefits once their youngest child turned eight.

Edwards and colleagues across the welfare sector were shocked Labor would compound the punitive policy move, and the protest was a last-ditch bid to stop it. The bill nevertheless passed in the Senate that afternoon.

Edwards cast around trying to find the Labor figure driving the decision. “Everyone ducked and blamed someone else,” she said, noting several key ministers had since disavowed the move, but not Gillard.

Gillard’s argument is that the best way out of poverty is to get a job. Of course it is, but living below the poverty line can drive families so low it becomes beyond a struggle to re-enter the workforce.

As incoming Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet secretary Glyn Davis wrote in his 2021 book *On Life’s Lottery*, the data shows that intergenerational poverty persists in Australia in the same way as intergenerational wealth. It’s not just the single parents being condemned to poverty through current policy – it’s their kids, then their grandkids.

Australian feminist writer Anne Summers is on the case now too.

Her report, *The Choice: Violence or Poverty*, lays out in graphic detail the Hobson’s choice faced by tens of thousands of mothers in violent marriages: to stay and cop the abuse in exchange for food and shelter, or to leave with your children and expose them to the alternative dangers of hunger and homelessness. Summers is relentless. Wren and Edwards are not going away. Nor is the remnant guilt in Labor ranks about the extent to which it indulged, and in this instance worsened, neoliberal welfare policies during the Rudd and Gillard governments.

The government’s priorities for the October budget are delivering on its election promises and beginning to tame the trillion-dollar debt.

A fundamental review and reset of Australia’s welfare system is needed but can’t be done between now and October.

Reversing the Howard and Gillard governments’ consignment of single-parent families to a crushing existence on unemployment benefits once the youngest child turns eight is a minimum first move, and should be done right away – not least to atone for that shocker of a decision in 2012.

Budget priorities can be arranged to accommodate this as an emergency measure in October rather than being held over pending a rethink of the entire welfare system.

It's in Albanese's and Chalmers' power to do this. The government is being rewarded with strong voter support for decisive action in other areas. They must right this shameful wrong.

Sydney Morning Herald and Age – Opinion, Monday 1 August, 2022

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/child-poverty-a-problem-labor-can-and-must-solve-20220728-p5b5f9.html>

OPINION

Child poverty: A problem Labor can and must solve



Sean Kelly
Columnist

A theme keeps re-appearing in commentary around the Albanese government. On this topic or that, we read sentences along the lines of, “This is a good first step. But across a range of areas, the jury’s still out.” I’ve done the same myself.

This is reasonable. In most areas, the government has moved about as quickly as you could hope; and in most areas, these moves are limited, preparatory rather than decisive. Where the government has acted – the [dismantling of the powers of the Building and Construction Commission](#), say – it is too early to judge the consequences. This conclusion is encouraged by the government, which kept on saying, last week, that it couldn’t turn around nine years of neglect in nine weeks.

But there is at least one group of people in Australia who have every right to judge the government already. That is because the Albanese government could act today to change their lives, and has so far chosen not to. Nor do we have much indication yet that it will do so any time soon.

Recently, Toni Wren, who advised Labor minister Peter Baldwin in the 1990s, was asked by a group of academics what kept her up at night. Her answer was simple: “The fact that Labor isn’t talking about child poverty.”

Wren, the Executive Director of Anti-Poverty Week, acknowledges this problem isn’t limited to Labor. The Coalition found various ways to avoid talking about poverty, including quibbling [over whether a precise definition was possible](#). And in recent weeks, as inflation has garnered more and more attention, it has been fascinating to watch so much of the media focused on mortgage repayments. We hear far, far less about those with little chance of ever getting a mortgage.

This silence in our national conversation is remarkable when you consider how common poverty actually is: of every six Australian kids, one lives below the poverty line. So, I say to Wren, that means their family is just keeping it together?

“It’s worse than that,” she says. “They are already in debt. Every week, they are juggling which bills they can fall behind on.”

You might think these are the children who have somehow slipped through the system, missing out on support they are entitled to. In fact, many of these kids are already receiving the maximum amount of support. Our government knows about them, helps their parents a bit, but has decided not to help them enough to keep them out of poverty.

During the pandemic, many of these families suddenly received an extra \$250 a week. Of that, perhaps \$150 went to the gap in their rent that the government’s rent assistance didn’t cover. That left \$100, which suddenly meant, says Wren, “you could buy your kids warm pyjamas, stock up on birthday presents so your kids could go to birthday parties.” Then the \$250 was cut back drastically, leaving those families pretty much back where they were: “mothers pretending to their kids that they already ate while they were cooking”.

Wren’s reference to “mothers” is not an accident. This is where the anti-poverty agenda meets the government’s concerns about gender and domestic violence. Women are more likely to suffer poverty. And if we zoom in on children, then, again, we see that while 80 per cent of single-parent families are headed by women, that rises to 95 per cent for the poorest single-parent families.

Then you have the fact that a significant number have left violent partners, and need income support, which is inadequate. The knowledge that the social safety net is – rather than catching you – “going to plunge you into poverty”, says Wren, means that mothers are often faced with a choice: violence or poverty.

In other words, an increase to payments like JobSeeker and rent assistance fits squarely within Labor’s existing aims: on gender, on childhood development, on domestic violence. Or, in the broadest sense, within what Anthony Albanese [told his caucus last week](#): Labor’s responsibility as the party “that seeks to change existing power relationships in society in favour of more equality and in favour of fairness”.

Ministers do get asked about JobSeeker from time to time. So far, the signs are not great. The Minister for Social Services, Amanda Rishworth, gets asked most often, and tends to refer to budgetary pressures, as well as what the government is already doing (social housing, bringing medicine prices down). The Treasurer, Jim Chalmers, emphasises budget constraints.

Frustratingly, the most urgent argument for increasing these payments – inflation, which is leaving poor people even poorer – can also become an argument against the increase. Won’t putting extra money into the economy add to inflation? The economist and former Labor adviser Angela Jackson acknowledges there is a balancing act. Adding to inflation is a factor, but that is

precisely why, rather than providing broad support, you have to target it to those who need it most. The most vulnerable need to be protected because they are not in any position to absorb the price hikes.

In the past few days, Albanese has begun in earnest his campaign for the Indigenous Voice to Parliament. It would have been easy enough to delay, given the various crises his government confronts. Instead, some of the Prime Minister's better qualities have been on display: an understanding that pressure for change often has to be built by government; his belief that more than one thing can be done at a time; and the mixed blessing of his rhetorical style, unlikely to make something sound inspiring but more than likely to make it sound like common sense.

These qualities could be used to justify an immediate increase to payments for those living in poverty. Or, at a minimum, they could be used to begin an honest national conversation about the child poverty in our midst. At least then we could say that Labor had taken a good first step. But so far, on this topic, we can't even say that much.