

# Red Tape

SSRV Newsletter



**Social  
Security  
Rights  
Victoria Inc.**

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## ***Social Security Issues and the Federal Election***

Australians will go to the polls on 7 September 2013 to decide who will lead the country for the next electoral cycle. We encourage people to consider social security issues when they are considering who to vote for.

The "Australia's welfare 2013" report, recently, released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (a federal government agency), highlights that while overall Australians are better educated, working longer and living longer, a large number of people continue to experience social and economic disadvantage. Significantly disadvantaged groups include older people, younger people, Indigenous Australians, people with disabilities, carers and people living outside major cities.

Welfare is a substantial issue in Australia, with the latest available figures showing that in 2010-11 the Australian governments (state and federal) spent \$119 billion on welfare services, \$90 billion of this in payments and \$29.4 billion on welfare services. Welfare services spending in the 2010-11 year was nearly 30% more than the \$90.1 billion (Australian) governments spent on health care in that year (AIHW 8/8/2013).

With such a significant level of Government expenditure outlaid on welfare, one would think it would be an area of major importance for the election. However neither of the major political party's platforms makes any substantial reference to social security. While the smaller parties (such as the Greens) have significant social security policies, they will struggle to influence major policy decisions unless they are able to gain enough seats to hold the balance of power, particularly in the Senate. (Continued on page 2.)

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## **SSRV's 12/13 AGM**

SSRV's 20012-13 Annual General Meeting details:

**Date:** Tuesday, 29 October 2013

**Time:** 6pm

**Location:** Neighbourhood Justice Centre, 241 Wellington St Collingwood Vic 3066.

Melways Reference: 2C F8 (next door to the 'Tote' Hotel, just meters from Johnston St).

**Keynote Speaker: John Falzon,** CEO St Vincent de Paul Society (Australia). See back page for more information about our speaker.

**All SSRV friends, supporters and members are welcome.**

Refreshments provided, we would love to see you there!

*Note - A number of proposed amendments to SSRV's Constitution that will be voted on at this meeting. Proposed amendments will be provided to all SSRV Members in advance of the AGM.*

A classic example of this was in the late 1990s when Brian Harradine (Tasmanian) agreed to allow the Coalition Government to sell parts of Telstra in return for reinstating automatic independent status to married students for Youth Allowance (which had previously been struck down in an equal rights case).

### **Liberal Party**

The Liberal Party's 12 point plan does not include a reference to social security.

### **Labor Party**

Whilst there are some reference to social security on the Australian Labor Party's website, it only references to things that are already in existence, such as the 'schoolkid's bonus' (which replaces the dependent child study tax rebate) and the Household Assistance Package (the offset for the Carbon tax). Needless to say the ALPs information effectively warns that the alternative may not be as appreciative of these as they are.

In the lead-up to the election neither major parties are addressing issues that impact on a significant number of vulnerable and disadvantaged and largely voiceless Australians. In 2009, 13% of Australian population was classified as being in relative income poverty and the main source of income for 1 in 4 households was government pensions and allowances (AIHW 8/8/2013).

In one sense, the lack of discussion could be a positive thing as there is rarely discussion in politics of those things both sides take for granted, for example, military spending. Further, Ross Gittens reminds us that in any case most electoral promises are likely to be broken (The Age, 7/8/13).

### **National Welfare Rights Network (NWRN)**

SSRV as part of the NWRN calls on the Australian electorate to embrace the following issues:

- Increasing NewStart and Youth Allowance by \$50 per week
- Increase job subsidies and major assistance for jobseekers
- Keeping the status quo on Disability Support Pensions
- Voluntary Income Management only
- Increase Rent Assistance by 30%
- Increasing the tax base to generate the required monies to pay for these things

- Improving Centrelink's services, particularly processing and debt avoidance

However social security is an expensive issue in the Australian context and is likely to be scrutinized, particularly if the "surprising" economic news arrives after the election that there is not enough money in the kitty as a government had hoped or assumed.

The lack of public debate leading up to the election is concerning particularly as once the election has passed, without debate on these issues or promises, it leaves the government of the day unaccountable to the vulnerable and often voiceless Australian people left behind.

### **Deborah Itzkowic & Peter Horbury**

#### Footnotes

*"Aussies living and working longer, but some doing it tough", Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, Australia, Media Release, 8/8/13*

*"Election Promises Destined to be broken", Gittens, R (7/8/13) The Age.*

*Editorial comment in Red Tape is authorised by Deborah Itzkowic, Director Social Security Rights Victoria Inc.*

### **Income Management Scheme**

### **Expanded to include Greater**

### **Shepparton**

#### ***Background***

Red Tape featured an article of Income Management back in August of 2012 which explained that as of 1 July 2012, Income Management scheme was expanded to 5 locations across Australia, including Greater Shepparton in Victoria. People can be placed on income management by a Centrelink Social worker if they are vulnerable and/or at risk of being vulnerable and would benefit from income management.

The government sought expert opinion to justify the 'roll out' of income management. Deloitte Access Economics, commissioned by Fahcsia prepared the following as a part of their executive summary:

The purpose of PBIM [Place Based Income Management, eg Greater Shepparton] is to provide people with the financial stability needed to increase their social and economic participation and to encourage welfare recipients to spend Income Support Payments in the best interests of children and families. The scheme directs a proportion of Income Support Payments for expenditure on priority items including food, housing, clothing and utilities. Income managed funds cannot be spent on alcohol, tobacco, pornographic material or gambling products. It is designed to be especially useful for people who are vulnerable to financial crisis or have alcohol abuse or mental health issues which affect their ability to budget.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these well-meaning gestures of ‘top down’ governance, understandably we remain critical of any program that undermines people’s ability to advocate their own needs, or use existing pathways of support.

For our income managed clients, it means that 50% of an income managed entitlement will be quarantined to pay for priority needs, these include food, rent, clothing, bills, education and health care.<sup>2</sup>

### ***New changes affecting young people in Greater Shepparton***

What is further problematic for SSRV clients is that from 1 July 2013, income management has expanded and specifically targets young people in Greater Shepparton.<sup>3</sup>

- Young people (15-24) who are granted the Unreasonable To Live At Home (UTLAH) rate of payment by a Centrelink social worker;
- Young people who are under the age of 16 and are granted a Special Benefit payment by a Centrelink social worker; and
- Young people who are under the age of 25 and receive a crisis payment after release from prison.<sup>4</sup>

Young people in those categories will automatically be placed on income management (subject to a few exceptions).

### ***Review***

At any stage a young person can seek review by a Centrelink social worker to identify whether continued income management is required. The other pathways of review common to other Centrelink entitlements remain (see 11.4.4 Review & Appeal Process under the Vulnerable Welfare Payment Recipient Measure, of the Guide).<sup>5</sup>

**At SSRV we continue to monitor the introduction of income management with partner agencies. In particular we are seeking young people who have been impacted by income management. Please ring Graham Wells, Senior Lawyer/Clinical Supervisor on 1800 094 164 or 9481 0355.**

<sup>1</sup> Fahcsia Evaluation Framework —Place Based Income Management, 20 August 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Victoria Legal Aid, Income Management for under 25, Fact Sheet, at 13 August 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Indy Media Australia, <http://indymedia.org.au/2013/07/02/new-income-management-will-target-vulnerable-youth-across-australia>, as at 20 August 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Paula Grogan, VCOSS Voice 11 July 2013, <http://vcoss.org.au/blog/income-management-now-targeting-vulnerable-young-people/>, as at 20 August 2013  
<sup>5</sup> [http://guidesacts.fahcsia.gov.au/guides\\_acts/ssg/ssguide-11/ssguide-11.4/ssguide-11.4.4.html](http://guidesacts.fahcsia.gov.au/guides_acts/ssg/ssguide-11/ssguide-11.4/ssguide-11.4.4.html), as at 20 August 2013.

## **SSRV AGM – Further information**

**Keynote speaker: Dr John Falzon** a political sociologist, poet and author of *The language of the unheard* (2012). He is Chief Executive Officer of the St Vincent Paul Society National Council of Australia and has written and spoken widely on the structural causes of exclusion and inequality. He has worked in academia, in research and advocacy with NGOs, and in community development in large public housing estates and he has served on a number of government advisory boards including the Australian Social Inclusion Board.

Dr Falzon will be speaking on the topic of **“The language of the unheard”**: *New passions are coming to the surface in societies around the globe. Popular uprisings and social critiques are emerging in response to disempowerment, exclusion and the dismantling of public services and disinvestment in public goods. Martin Luther King once observed that: “a riot is, at bottom, the language of the unheard.” Change does not come from above. The history of social justice and social change has been written by social movements. The truth spoken by the people who are forced onto the margins of society will always speak louder than the lies told about them.*

**SSRV: 9481 0355 or 1800 094 164**

[info@ssrv.org.au](mailto:info@ssrv.org.au) / [www.ssrv.org.au](http://www.ssrv.org.au) (our new website is now operating!)

## **Farwell to Dale Nelson**

Dale Nelson, SSRV’s long standing Community Legal Education and Policy Worker recently finished up at SSRV. Over the past twenty years, Dale has provided a massive contribution to SSRV’s clients and the community by educating groups across Victoria and wrote a number of publications including *“Blood from Stone”* which was published in 2002. Dale had a particular focus on disability issues and represented the National Welfare Rights Network on a number of disability working groups within Centrelink. Significantly he was one of the persons who advised on the updated tables for impairment for DSP. SSRV was enriched by Dale’s work over this extended period and we wish him well in the future.

## **Welcome to new staff:**

### **Graham Wells, Senior Lawyer/Clinical Supervisor**

Graham joins SSRV with extensive experience in the community legal sector. He is charged with undertaking casework for SSRV’s clients and overseeing SSRV’s Clinical Legal Education Pilot Program in collaboration with The University of Melbourne Law School.

### **Sarah Holloway, Project Manager**

Sarah joins SSRV to manage the implementation of an exciting new project called “Jobseeker Opinion”. The project will provide a platform for job seekers on Centrelink benefits to share their stories about their return-to-work experience and their experience being assisted by Job Network Providers.