

What Women Want

Press release

(EMBARGOED until 9am Tuesday 23rd of August)

Representatives of 64 national women's organisations met in Canberra in July to discuss the proposed changes to the industrial relations laws and the income support payments and examined their impact on women, particularly on women of working age with a low income.

The key concerns raised were:

- Women may well have less income security, lesser work stability;
- Women have a greater reliance on award rates of pay, penalty rates and other award-based conditions and so will be disproportionately affected;
- Women generally have a lower capacity to engage in workplace negotiations and will be disproportionately affected with lower standards of living;
- Newstart and other allowances under associated income support programs do not recognise the role of women with school age children and the impact the changes will have on their ability to undertake work;
- Existing mechanisms to assist people move from welfare to work will not be able to cope with the increased demand as people's rights to income support diminish and so many will be left without sufficient income to look after their children or themselves if disabled; and
- It will be harder under the new rules for sole parents or disabled women to undertake study and so improve their economic wellbeing.

The organisations come from the non-profit sector, are non-political and are motivated by the potential impacts of these policy proposals on women and their families. They represent a broad cross-section of women's organisations, concerned about the potential for disadvantage to women and their families from changes to industrial relations, income security changes and the compounding effects of these changes.

The organisers of the forum in Canberra have now forwarded the recommendations to the Prime Minister and the Ministers with responsibility for handling these changes to ensure that those women and their families are not disadvantaged by any changes to the laws.

The participants at the workshop endorsed the principle of government assistance for women with disabilities and those supporting children on their own to enter the workforce and improve their economic wellbeing. However, they feel the government does not fully understand all the issues involved and that some of the policy proposals are likely to adversely impact on women. Fear was expressed that the changes, without adequate safeguards, may increase the level of poverty in the community amongst its most vulnerable members.

Emphasizing the intentions of the group Marie Coleman states, "We wish to contribute to policy formation, monitoring and review to ensure that women and families are protected and we are also committed to ensuring that women are well informed of the impact of any changes upon them".

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