

## **The Council of Single Mothers and their Children Victoria Inc**

### **Federal Government Election 2016: Questions for political parties on single mother policy**

**1. What will your party do to ensure that the single parent families are raised out of poverty, regardless of their source of income?**

Since 2013, Labor has fought to protect the interests of families – particularly single parents - from the harsh and unfair cuts imposed by the Liberals. Labor has successfully blocked cuts to Family Tax Benefits and cuts to Paid Parental Leave. Had these cuts got through, single parent families would have had their Family Tax Benefit B reduced and their Family Tax Benefit Supplements abolished. Some single parent families would have been as much as \$5,000 a year worse off. Some new mums would also have lost up to \$11,800 in Paid Parental Leave. In total, Labor is currently blocking around \$5 billion in cuts to families, including cuts to single parents.

If the Liberals get another chance, they will try to make these cuts again. Labor fights these cuts every step of the way.

Under Labor, single parents will continue to receive FTB at the current rate, as well as paid parental leave. Under the Liberals, single parents face a significant reduction in their income that will make it harder for them to raise happy and healthy children.

**2. When will your party raise the level of Newstart Allowance, Principal Carer, to the same level of payment and conditions as Parenting Payment Single?**

Labor understands that life for parents on the Newstart Allowance is far from easy. The current rate of Newstart is so low that it makes it very difficult for families to afford the necessities of life. As the Business Council of Australia has said, *“the rate of Newstart for jobseekers no longer meets a reasonable community standard of adequacy, and may now be so low as to represent a barrier to employment.”*

The recent Labor report *Growing Together – Labor’s Agenda for Tackling Inequality* recommended that a comprehensive review be undertaken into the adequacy of the Newstart Allowance, including its appropriateness for families. Labor will have more to say about this in the lead up to the election. You can read the report here: [www.alp.org.au/growing\\_together](http://www.alp.org.au/growing_together)

**3. What will your party do to increase the number of secure family friendly jobs with predictable working hours?**

Labor understands that it is difficult for parents and carers to find suitable work that allows them to manage their work and family responsibilities. That is why Labor introduced Australia’s first ever

Paid Parental Leave scheme, it is why Labor invested record amounts in child care, and improved supports for dads through the introduction of Dad and Partner Pay. These policies are designed to help families manage work and care. The recent report *Growing Together – Labor’s Agenda for Tackling Inequality* acknowledged the significant difficulties faced by families in this area, devoting an entire chapter to policies to support work and care. Labor will have more to say on these issues in the lead up to the election.

**4. How will your party guarantee that all children can participate fully in education, through ensuring that all aspects of schooling - including uniforms, fees and school activities, camps and excursions – are affordable?**

Labor’s plan for Australian schools: *Your Child. Our Future* is a \$37 billion commitment over 10 years to deliver the needs-based Gonski reforms on time and in full; to reverse the Government’s \$30 billion cut to education; and to provide the resources needed to drive permanent improvement in our schools. With Labor’s *Your Child. Our Future* plan, every student, in every school will get the support they need to achieve their potential, no matter their background or what schools they go to.

Labor’s school funding model will ensure that additional resources in our classrooms are targeted at those who need it most – children with disability, from low-socio-economic backgrounds, from non-English speaking backgrounds, in regional and remote schools, and Indigenous students.

We know that many schools in disadvantaged areas are using the additional funding already flowing from Labor’s investment in the Gonski reforms that were made when in Government to support struggling families with extra-curricular expenses such as uniforms, and waiving school fees and fees for camps and excursions.

This is all at risk under the Turnbull Government’s plan to abandon the Gonski funding reforms and cut \$30 billion from all Australian schools.

When in Government Labor introduced the Schoolkids Bonus, to assist with the cost of education. The Liberals have abolished the Schoolkids Bonus. Labor fought hard to stop this cut, but we were unable to block the legislation. Because of the Liberals, families will receive their last Schoolkids Bonus in July.

In addition, the Liberals also want to make further cuts to family payments that will make it harder for single parents to meet the costs of their children’s schooling – including phasing out the end of year supplements of \$726 for every child receiving FTB-A and \$354 for every family receiving FTB-B. Labor will fight these cuts.

**5. What will your party do to assist single mothers to study and train for careers that offer secure and predictable employment?**

Labor will legislate a student funding guarantee for universities. This will ensure that all Australians, particularly single parents, will continue to be able to access a university education without \$100,000 degrees.

Under our *Higher Education Growth and Access Strategy*, Labor will continue to support pathways for people from a range of backgrounds to go to university including single mothers, people who are

first in their family to go to university and those who are seeking to create a second chance for themselves.

Labor will work with the States and Territories to develop a *National Priority Plan for TAFE* including a TAFE guarantee which places it squarely as the public provider within the VET sector and will ensure TAFE's viability and strength into the future.

These measures will ensure that single mothers will have access to training to get the opportunities and skills they need to help them establish good careers and secure stable employment. TAFE needs to be protected to ensure that it can continue to provide second chance education to many people, including single mothers.

## **6. How does your party plan to increase the availability of affordable, secure housing for single mother families?**

Labor recognises that housing affordability is of increasing concern across Australia, including single mother families.

A Shorten Labor Government will reform the capital gains tax discount and limit negative gearing to new housing effective from 1 July 2017. This policy will see a boost in new housing and will take pressure off inner city housing markets that are predominantly made up of existing dwellings.

Labor acknowledges that single women with caring responsibilities face particular pressures when it comes to housing costs. Our plans to reform taxation arrangements on housing are the first step in tilting the balance towards first home buyers. Labor will have more to say on housing affordability before the election.

## **7. What will your party do to increase the amount of flexible and affordable childcare?**

All children deserve access to quality early education and Labor knows how important child care is for single parents to balance work and family.

This is why Labor is concerned about the impacts of Turnbull Government's proposed child care changes.

Mr Turnbull has made investment in early childhood conditional on Family Tax Benefit cuts that will hurt single parents.

Independent analysis by the Australian National University shows one in three families will be worse off due to a complex and harsh work test that will remove automatic access to two days a week subsidised care.

This will make it particularly difficult for many single parents, casual workers and parents transitioning back to the work force to access child care support at all - they will be left in the ultimate catch 22, unable to access child care without work, and unable to work without child care.

Under Mr Turnbull's plan, vulnerable and disadvantaged children will have their access to early education cut in half, or will be pushed out of the system altogether.

Labor's position has been consistent: any changes to the child care system must be focused on providing Australian families with quality, flexible and accessible child care that is more affordable.

Labor has committed to increased investment in child care, without cutting the Family Tax Benefit.

Labor will target this investment to support those families and children that need it most - including single parents. Early education and care should be good for workforce participation and good for children's development - it shouldn't be an either or.

Labor will have more to say on this during the election campaign.

#### **8. When will legal aid funding be increased to ensure that women have access to legal representation for the full extent of their family law proceedings?**

Labor understands how important it is to provide access to justice for all Australians, including women involved in family court proceedings. While Labor has always fought to increase funding for legal service providers such as Legal Aid, Community Legal Centres and Family Violence Prevention Legal Centres, the Liberals have been cutting their funding, even in the face of increasing demand for their vital services.

Labor has already committed over \$47 million to improve legal support to those dealing with family violence, much of which will go to women who need legal assistance. However, even with this additional funding Labor recognises that our legal service providers will struggle to meet demand, including in the family law area. If elected, Labor will continue to look for ways to increase support to legal assistance services as well as other reforms to improve access to justice.

#### **9. What will your party do to protect women and children experiencing family violence?**

Bill Shorten and Labor have committed to immediately implementing measures to assist people in family violence situations. Labor's package comprises more than \$70 million in measures including:

- approximately \$50 million to frontline legal services, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services to ensure people experiencing family violence get legal support and do not have to go to court alone;
- an initial investment of \$15 million in Safe at Home grants to help people affected by family violence stay safe in their own home and communities; and
- \$8.4 million investment to better understand perpetrator behaviour including mapping perpetrator interactions across family violence, law enforcement, justice, child protection and related systems to identify ways to prevent violence through information sharing and risk assessment.

A Shorten Labor Government will make domestic and family violence leave a universal workplace right, to further support those suffering family and domestic violence in our community. This would provide for five days paid domestic and family violence leave in the National Employment Standards (NES).

Federal Labor will have more to say on family and domestic violence in the lead up to the election.

**10. How will your party ensure that Child Support payments are collected in full and on time?**

Labor will have more to say on this during the election campaign.

**11. The government conducted an Inquiry into the Child Support Program: from conflict to cooperation, which made its report in July 2015. If you gain government when will you respond to and implement the recommendations of this inquiry?**

Labor will consider the recommendations of the inquiry in Government.

**12. When will your party establish a ministerial reference group to ensure that the issues facing single mother families are represented in policy development that affects them?**

Single parents are one of the groups most likely to experience poverty and disadvantage in our community. Because they have sole responsibility for their children, single parents face additional costs of parenting and potentially challenges to participating in the workforce, study or training, and other activities. Labor is aware of these challenges and will assess the impact of all policy decisions on single parent families. Labor will ensure that single parents have the support they need to raise happy and healthy children.