

MEDIA RELEASE

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Proposed DSP changes affect most vulnerable members of community

WESTERN Australia's peak body for community mental health, the Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) has serious concerns about the Federal Government's proposed changes to remove access to Disability Support Pension (DSP) payments for people detained in prisons and psychiatric institutions under mental impairment legislation.

This DSP change, which surfaced following the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, would remove entitlement to access the payment on the basis of there being no conviction due to mental impairment; and undertaking a course of rehabilitation.

These payments provide for the living expenses of people under the Criminal Law Mentally Impaired Accused (CLMIA) Act and similar legislation in other states and territories, who are on leave of absence or similar orders, and transitioning back into the community.

WAAMH president Alison Xamon said while she recognised the importance of simplifying the welfare system, it was imperative that the most vulnerable members of our society who most needed help, were not unfairly affected.

"The Federal Government's proposal to cut off some of the most disadvantaged members of the community who are most in need of mental health support and community integration, is simply not acceptable," Ms Xamon said.

"This proposal further highlights how people with mental health issues, particularly people under the CLMIA Act, experience significant breaches of human rights."

WAAMH is working with the Aboriginal Disability Justice Campaign and other organisations at a national level to attempt to ensure the proposal does not proceed.

"WAAMH is aware of individuals in WA who previously, without access to this payment, were not able to purchase necessities such as food, clothing, and mental health medications, resulting in a significant barrier to their being able to transition back into the community," Ms Xamon said.

"We are concerned that this change removes the previous right to a payment appropriate to unconvicted persons that supports their safe transition to the community."

The Federal Government has introduced a range of changes to social security payments since the 2014-15 budget. Cutting welfare costs is one of the ways the government intends to return the budget to surplus.

"We are concerned that this proposal pre-empts the government's response to the Review of Australia's Welfare System (the McClure Review)," Ms Xamon said.

"We call for welfare reforms which reduce inequality and increase community inclusion and participation. This change targets some of the most vulnerable members of our community and is a significant diminution of rights for some of our most disadvantaged citizens."



WAAMH

Western Australian Association
for Mental Health

About WAAMH

The Western Australian Association for Mental Health (WAAMH) has been engaged in the mental health sector for more than 50 years. WAAMH is the peak body representing the community-managed mental health sector in WA, with around 100 organisational and individual members. Our vision is to lead the way in supporting and promoting the human rights of people with mental illness, their families and carers, through the provision of inclusive, well-governed community-based services, focused on recovery. WAAMH advocates for effective public policy on mental health issues, delivers workforce training and sector development, and promotes positive mental health and wellbeing. Further information can be found at <http://www.waamh.org.au>

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