

The Hon Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
2020

3 August

Dear Prime Minister,

Open Letter - Ensuring every child can thrive

Our COVID response and the leadership demonstrated by Australian communities and governments has shown what can be achieved when we band together to realise a common goal. Now, as we move to the next phase of the COVID recovery we need to bring the same determination to nurturing our most precious asset – Australia’s children.

As a nation, the best way to ensure our long-term prosperity in these uncertain times is to invest in the future of our children, and their mums, dads and guardians. Our children’s best interests should be at the heart of our policy responses. We write today to support the Australian Council of Social Services’ (ACOSS) position that there should be a permanent and adequate increase to JobSeeker, Youth Allowance and related payments (such as the Parenting Payment) that ensures everyone can cover the basics. This includes single parents, who need a Single Parent Supplement to cover their additional costs, as well as restoration of wage indexation to the Family Tax Benefit.

We know that the early years shape the rest of a child’s life, with childhood poverty a significant risk factor for poorer outcomes in adulthood. Financial stress and hardship within a family environment can negatively disrupt multiple biological systems and significantly undermine a child’s physical, social and emotional development, as identified in a recent [study](#) from the Harvard University Centre for the Developing Child. These effects last a [lifetime](#), with some children impacted disproportionately, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and children with disability. However, well-targeted income support payments, such as those proposed, ensure families aren’t trapped in poverty. They give parents and guardians the opportunity to make choices that unleash their children’s potential and realise their aspirations as they grow up.

We have seen the striking difference that an adequate payment rate, through the Coronavirus Supplement, has made to children’s lives by enabling their parents and guardians to buy necessities, like [fresh fruit and vegetables, and access medical care](#). Every child in Australia should have access to these essentials throughout their childhood, not just during the current crisis.

In the interests of all Australia’s children, we urge you to make a significant investment in the upcoming budget to ensure Australia has a social security safety net that accounts for children’s developmental needs, including: access to safe and stable housing; nutritious food; educational supports; health care and medical supports; mental health and emotional wellbeing supports for children and caregivers; and family environments that have reduced levels of financial stress.

COVID has already affected children in some very negative ways. However, Australia has a window, with clear public appetite, to make structural changes in how we support our children into the future. Acting now would offer a very high return on investment, including [improved productivity and reduced government spending over decades to come](#). This is the time to put the supports in place for all Australian children to have the best chance to reach their potential.

cc: The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP; Senator the Hon Anne Ruston; The Hon Michelle Landry MP

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