

Dear

RE: UNWELCOME BUDGET SPECULATION

I refer to a speech to the Chamber of Commerce and Industry QLD, entitled 'Towards a Strong Economy', where the Leader of the Opposition Tony Abbott proposed: making Work for the Dole mandatory; income management for the long-term unemployed, creating a new benefit for people whose disabilities can be readily treated, and suspending the payment of young people's unemployment benefits in places where there are unfilled, unskilled jobs. This has been accompanied by a number of articles I have read in the papers recently about the proposed changes to welfare in the next Federal Budget, particularly for people living with disability.

I am writing as a concerned citizen to advise you that I do not support any cost cutting actions, whatever form these may take, that target the most vulnerable people in our community.

I do not accept that even in times of economic uncertainty and government debt, such actions can be justified. **To make cuts in these areas denies dignity to those in need and threatens to push individuals and families into poverty.** It will also lead to greater need for crisis and other social services, as people are left with inadequate income to support themselves and their families. As the Productivity Commission has stated: **'[p]eople with disabilities and their carers are among the most disadvantaged groups in Australian society'**.¹ A lack of other supports places added strain on these members of society.

The South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) has found that 'the cost of living for pensioners and welfare recipients rose faster than for the population as a whole over the last year.'² SACOSS notes that welfare recipients are generally forced to spend all of their income. In the past year, the cost of living has grown faster than the rate of Newstart Allowance.³ This leaves many people falling further behind.

Between 1999 and 2005, the Federal government imposed stringent tests and greater participation requirements for welfare applicants. I believe that to impose further restrictions on welfare recipients is to create further disadvantage for already vulnerable people.

I advocate for an adequate income for all, this means raising welfare. I join with Anglicare and other organisations to support those that call for system change to break down the barriers that prevent people with disabilities gaining an adequate education and meaningful employment, but not in any way that increases the vulnerability of people with disabilities

Yours sincerely

¹ Productivity Commission, *Disability Care and Support, Draft Report – Chapter 2 Why the Change is Needed* (February 2011), 2.1.

² This is based on calculations using the ABS's Analytical Living Cost Index (ALCI). See SACOSS, above n 5, 2.

³ Ibid.