



FIX CHILD SUPPORT

fixchildsupport.com.au

Lead Information Report





Opening

the black box

of child support

**Shining a light on how
financial abuse is perpetrated**

Kay Cook, Adrienne Byrt, Terese Edwards and Ashlea Coen

LAUNCH 7 OCTOBER 24

Women from across Australia came together to voice their experiences of a child support system that lets their children down and inflicts harm. These families are facing financial difficulties, with many having endured gender-based violence.

Entering Parliament House was a new, and empowering experience.



Anouchka Sydney mother
Charisse Perth mother
Elysia Melbourne mother
Katrina Gold Coast mother
Rebecca Adelaide mother
Rosie Batty
Jess Hill
Terese Edwards SMFA CEO
Toni Wren SMFA Principal Adviser
Kay Cook, Ashlea Coen & Adrienne Byrt
Swinburne University colleagues

We acknowledge and appreciate the support of the Paul Ramsay Foundation.

Mothers lose almost half of the value of any child support paid through reductions to their family payment payments, which is unlike any other system worldwide.

Child support report card

Exemptions

D

Assessments

F

Collections

F

Compliance

F

Debt collections

F

Overall

F



Media 8 October

13 media outcomes.
Hosted on our [media hub](#)

'A tool of abuse': The critical flaws in Australia's child support system

A new report found that many domestic violence perpetrators minimise income and make false claims about time caring for their children to harm their former partners.



Politics Environment Climate crisis Indigenous Australia Immigration Media Business Health

Single parents in Australia are owed \$3.7bn in child support. Anne says no leader has been 'brave enough' to fix it

Anne*, who lived in poverty with her two sons, wrote to Scott Morrison, Alan Tudge and Christian Porter about the unfair system but never heard back

A screenshot from the myGov website. It features a blue banner with the text 'We're here to help' and 'myGov'. Below the banner is a video player with the title 'Urgent calls to reform child support system' and a play button. The video is dated 'Tue 8 Oct 2024 at 12:00pm' and has a duration of '4m 35s'. There is also a share icon.



Child support debts forcing mums to pursue violent exes

by Poppy Johnston and Jacob Shteyman

Updated October 8 2024 - 3:42pm, first published 3:35pm



OUR FORUM



Attendees

Senator Larissa Waters
Gillian Lewis, President -Professional Business Women
Louise Miller-Frost MP
Mary Linnell Professional Business Women
Zaneta Mascharenas MP
Ronnie Gurung Professional Business Women
Dr Andrew Charlton MP
Women's Legal Services Australia CEO Lara Friedan
Senator David Pocock
Women's Legal Services Tasmania CEO Yvette Cehtel
Alicia Payne MP
Women's Legal Services ACT CEO Elena Rosenman
Zali Steggall MP
Women's Legal Services Victoria CEO Claudia Fatone
Kate Chaney MP
Women's Legal Services WA CEO Jennie Gray
Tammy Tyrrell MP
Genevieve Bolton, Economic Justice Australia Chair
Lauren Power, Women's Adviser to Prime Minister
TEWLS CEO Caitlin Weatherby-Fell
Alice Morgan and Conor McCammon, adviser to Kylea Tink MP
Dina Bowman, Brotherhood of St Laurence
Micaela Cronin, DV Commissioner
Katherine Berney, CEO National Women's Safety Alliance
Kate Coleman, Safety adviser to Minister Rishworth
Leah Dwyer YWCA
Solange Handley, adviser to Senator Gallagher
Emeritus Professor Meredith Edwards AM, FASSA, FIPAA
Rochelle White Office for Women, PM & C
ACOSS President Hang Vo
Ben Peoples, DSS
ACOSS CEO Cass Goldie

PRESS CONFERENCE



Senator Larissa Waters



K, has a \$200,000 Debt
She lives with housing insecurity

MEETINGS WITH MINISTERS



Full Program
Running to the meeting.



Rosie Batty,
speaking to the report.



Women speaking of their lived
experience.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 Delink family payments from child support by eliminating the Maintenance Income Test. The separation of child support from family payments simplifies administrative work and system complexity, enhances system safety, and improves the certainty of social security.

This recommendation would be transformative; it would value unpaid care work, it would give certainty of Family Payments (social security assistance for raising children), provide women with choice. Moreover, women can decide if a child support agreement is culturally safe. It would also stop the system from being weaponised to produce a Robodebt for women caregivers.

Please see page 8 & 9 for more details.

2 Co-design family violence processes within the child support system to recognise the high rates of violence experienced by system users. The positioning of family violence as the norm rather than the exception within the system would ensure that perpetrators are not rewarded through exemptions or non payments and victim survivors are not re-victimised.

3 Move all child support collections back into the Australian Tax Office. The ATO is best positioned to collect child support payments, address the \$1.7 billion child support debt for Agency Collect alone, close assessment loopholes, and uphold the expectations of timely and paid-in full payment.

4 Make all payment debts owed to and enforced by the Commonwealth. The principle of the Commonwealth paying women first and pursuing non-compliance second is a superior policy approach and one that would create certainty of payments. When the government steps in child support gets paid.

E.g. Departure Prohibition Orders (preventing payers with a debt from overseas travel) recovered \$28 M in 2018-19 and \$25 M in 2019-20.



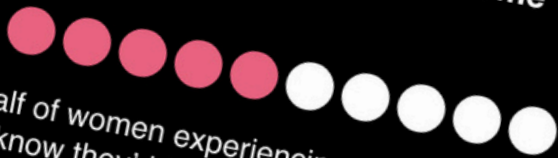
WHY DELINK CHILD SUPPORT FROM SOCIAL SECURITY

A single mother who doesn't take action to obtain child support will have **her family payments reduced** – known as “**failing the Maintenance Action Test**”

An agreement may not be culturally safe.

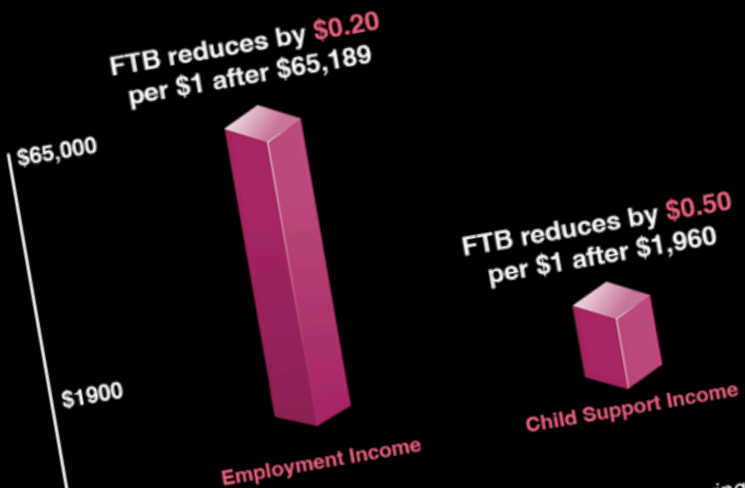
She may not know the rules, yet she is penalised.
Currently, 17% have failed.

Violence and Financial Penalties Enabled by the Child Support Scheme



Over half of women experiencing violence at separation didn't know they'd face a 70% cut to family payments without a child support agreement or exemption.[^]

The system treats unpaid caregiving differently from paid employment, affecting FTB and Child Support.



An Impossible Choice.

If a paying parent lodges their tax return years later, without having paid child support and with no child support even collected by CSA, it can still trigger a **robo-debt** due to backdated 'overpayment' of FTB.

WHY DELINK CHILD SUPPORT FROM SOCIAL SECURITY



If you think Robodebt is finished – think again.

Vexatious former partners can manipulate the system to deliberately create debts for single mother families.

How?

A former partner does not lodge a tax return, an incorrect or a provisional amount is accepted and without any time restrictions. Once he lodges a correct assessment, a single mother is deemed to have been paid too much in family payments. The government uses their levers to extract her 'overpayment' while she will most likely never collect the child support debt owed to her.



2 in 5 single mothers had a family payment debt owed to the government.



Half of payment debts were due to men who delayed (for years) lodging a tax return.



80% of women reported their ex-partner had replaced physical abuse with financial abuse via child support as a way to control them since they separated.[^]

OVER

28%

of payers are failing to lodge a tax return on time, reducing the accuracy of Child Support assessments in Australia.[^]

IS \$8 ENOUGH TO SUPPORT A CHILD?

45% of child support assessments result in either \$0 or the minimum of \$8 per week.[^]



“ Children growing up in single mother families face poverty rates of 33%, more than three times the rate of children growing up in couple families.

Recommendation 3 & 4

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Is there some good news?

Poverty in single mother families could be **REDUCED BY 21%** if child support was paid on time and in full.[^]

The time is now #Fix Child Support

Unpaid child support impacts all Australians.

Currently, \$1.7 billion is owed in unpaid child support through agency collect alone, with the debt owed through private collect being unknown.

With almost 200,000 paying parents failing to lodge a tax return in 5 years funds are reduced for essential services like roads, healthcare, and education. Child support avoidance is taxation avoidance.

Every child deserves the chance to grow up healthy, educated, and free from the stress of financial instability. By advocating for change, we can break the cycle of poverty and create a society where every child has the tools they need to succeed.

