



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

ANDREW FISHER BUILDING
ONE NATIONAL CIRCUIT
BARTON

Reference: MS25-000009

Kate Sanderson
Coroner's Registrar, Coroners Support Services
Coroners Court of Victoria
cpuresponses@coronerscourt.vic.gov.au

Dear Registrar

Thank you for your letter of 16 October 2024 regarding the Coroners Court of Victoria's investigation into the death of Bekkie-Rae Curren (reference number: COR 2019 006509).

On behalf of the Australian Government, I extend my sincere condolences to the family of Bekkie-Rae Curren for their loss. I also thank Coroner Judge Cain for his findings and recommendations.

I acknowledge that recommendation (a) of the Finding into Death without Inquest recommends the Government review the rates for Australian income support payments, with a particular focus on the needs of women and children experiencing family violence.

The Australian Government is committed to ending the national crisis of gender-based violence, and will continue to implement measures, together with the states and territories, that accelerate action to end gender-based violence in a generation.

While the Commonwealth reserves its position on whether it is bound by section 72(3) of the *Coroners Act 2008* (Vic) (Coroners Act), noting and recognising the important role of the Coroners Court of Victoria in investigating and preventing deaths, the Government provides the following response to recommendation (a).

I hope this response is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Walter', written in a cursive style.

Andrew Walter
First Assistant Secretary, Government Division
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
13 January 2025

COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT RESPONSE
INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEATH OF BEKKIE-RAE CURREN

RECOMMENDATION (a)

In line with the recommendations of the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee 2024 report, the Commonwealth Government should review rates for Australian income support payments, with a particular focus on the needs of women and children experiencing family violence.

RESPONSE

The Government has committed to consider the rates of income support payments at every Budget update.

The Government has made significant investments to increase the rate of income support payments. In the 2023-24 Budget, the Government committed \$4.9 billion to increase the base rate of working age and student payments by \$40 per fortnight and extend eligibility for the existing higher single JobSeeker Payment rate to recipients aged 55 and over who have been on payment for nine or more continuous months. Additionally, the Government announced \$1.9 billion to expand the eligibility for the Parenting Payment (Single) to single principal carers with a youngest dependent child aged under 14 years old (previously 8 years old).

As part of the 2024-25 Budget, the Government announced an additional \$41.2 million over five years from 2023-24 to extend eligibility for the existing higher rate of JobSeeker Payment to single recipients with an assessed partial capacity to work of less than 15 hours per week. This change commenced on 20 September 2024.

The Government has also increased the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by a further 10 per cent on 20 September 2024 to help relieve rental pressures, building on the 15 per cent increase on 20 September 2023 which (combined with indexation) takes maximum rates around 45 per cent higher than in May 2022. This further increase to rent assistance will have a positive impact on single women, who make up around 51 per cent of Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipient households who are eligible for the maximum payment rate.

Income support payment recipients who have recently experienced family and domestic violence and are in severe financial hardship may also receive a Crisis Payment equal to one week of their income support payment at the maximum basic rate. The payment provides immediate financial assistance to a person who, because of family and domestic violence, is forced to leave their home and establish a new home, or remains in their home following the removal of the perpetrator who is a family member.

The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* (the National Plan) is a joint Commonwealth, state and territory government commitment to be a country free of gender-based violence. The National Plan is supported by the dedicated *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-25*, the *First Action Plan 2023-2027*, *Activities Addendum to the First Action Plan*, and the *Outcomes Framework*.

Implementation of the National Plan is underway with a broad suite of collaborative and locally-based projects already being implemented to build primary prevention and early intervention capacity, enhance service delivery, strengthen justice responses and build the evidence-base.

Measures are also being employed to address violence against women beyond community, family law and family violence service systems. This includes protective measures such as improving women's economic independence and security, easier access to early childhood education and care, and improved access to medical support; and response activities such as access to affordable housing, social security payments, and greater access to legal support.

The Government has committed \$1 billion for the National Housing Infrastructure Facility for housing for women and children impacted by violence and for young people.

The Government is also investing \$3.9 billion in support for frontline legal assistance services to be delivered through a new National Access to Justice Partnership, alongside further funding from the states and territories. This will provide a critical uplift of almost \$800 million in funding over five years from 2025-26 to the legal assistance sector, with a focus on legal services responding to gender-based violence, including First Nations women.