

Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services: ParentsNext – yourtown's advocacy submission



What is it about?

The Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services is inquiring into the implementation, performance, and appropriateness of employment services in Australia.

Why is it important?

The first major component of the Committee's inquiry is consideration of the ParentsNext program, and the role it plays in providing early intervention services to parents and carers of young children as part of the employment services system. The Committee's focus on ParentsNext responds to a request from the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations, the Hon Tony Burke MP. The Committee will make key recommendations in relation to ParentsNext in February 2023.

Some of yourtown's key messages:

1. ParentsNext should be retained but re-designed from a human-centred design approach as a specialist support service delivering pre-employment support for disadvantaged parents, and operate through the prism of support and engagement, not a compliance and punishment regime.

Re-calibrating the ParentsNext program to reflect a human-centred design approach, and shifting from being a punitive compliance regime, to a flexible pre-employment support model for parents with complex needs will improve the program as a whole.

2. Targeted training and support should be provided to Centrelink and provider staff to better understand and engage with ParentsNext clients, and equip them with the essential and specialist skills needed to engage participants in the ParentsNext program

As part of the human-centred design approach, Centrelink and provider staff need to be equipped with an understanding of the complexities and challenges that participants face, and the skills to positively engage participants in the program.

3. Access to place-based funding and resources should be provided to support clients to overcome activity cost access issues (particularly in rural and remote locations)

Parents in regional areas face additional barriers to those in urban settings including lack of affordable and/or accessible transport to attend appointments and activities. The logistics of travel are often exacerbated by not having licences, access to a car, and/or reliable, safe, and affordable childcare. Tailoring appointments and activities to suit the clients' circumstances will help to improve engagement and build positive outcomes.

4. Ensuring flexibility in the program design to support tailored client plans, expanded exemptions and encourage voluntary participation as far as possible

There should be flexibility within the program to exempt extraordinary individual situations that may arise and are not anticipated.



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