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Temporary Budget measures come at expense of plans to tackle rising inequality: Jesuit Social Services

The Federal Budget 2022-23, handed down last night, contains a range of spending measures to provide temporary relief around the current cost of living pressures being experienced by millions of Australians, but is ultimately a missed opportunity to make a sustainable difference to issues such as inequality, affordable housing and climate change, says Jesuit Social Services.

“This Federal Budget has been handed down only weeks away from a Federal Election, resulting in an unambitious Budget packed with short-term spending at a time when the nation needs long-term strategies and investments to tackle serious problems such as rising levels of poverty and inequality, climate change and housing affordability,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“These are key issues that will shape Australia for decades to come. Real action now would make a tangible positive difference for future generations, instead of just short-term investments such as a temporary cut to the fuel excise and a \$420 cost of living tax offset.”

Ms Edwards says that \$250 bonus payments to pensioners and people on income support allowances will not adequately address current cost of living pressures.

“People receiving income support are already living below the poverty line, and these one-off payments may help for a week or two, but will not support people to lead dignified lives. What we need to see from our Government is a commitment to create a fair social safety net that ensures recipients can afford an adequate standard of living,” she says.

“Concession card holders will again get access to a limited number of free Rapid Antigen Tests when they should be free and available to all Australians. Additionally, an end to the Pandemic Leave Disaster Payment will hurt low-income workers particularly when Australia is still recording tens of thousands of COVID-19 cases a day.

“We are also extremely disappointed that there is no real plan to tackle housing affordability, increase social housing or address climate change, at a time when we are seeing the devastating impact of the floods across New South Wales and Queensland.”

Ms Edwards says there are some welcome inclusions in the Budget, including a commitment to take in an additional 16,500 Afghan refugees, \$1.3 billion to implement recommendations made by the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, \$540.7 million in new mental health initiatives including regional initiatives to reduce suicides and a reduction in the safety net threshold for the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme, which will help income support recipients.

“Ultimately, this Budget a missed opportunity to address some of the most serious issues confronting Australia, such as poverty and inequality, climate change and affordable housing. With the Federal Election around the corner, we call on all political leaders to deliver plans to improve positive outcomes for all Australians, both now and for future generations.”

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