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Federal Budget contains welcome investments but lifting income support must be an immediate priority: Jesuit Social Services

The Federal Budget 2022-23, delivered during a time of global economic uncertainty, contains some welcome investments that will make a positive difference to the lives of millions. But, with the Federal Government emphasising the importance of wellbeing for all Australians it also represents a missed opportunity to improve outcomes for some of the country's most marginalised people by failing to lift income support rates, says Jesuit Social Services.

“This Federal Budget has been delivered at a very challenging time, with rising inflation, soaring fuel and energy prices and increased cost-of-living pressures not only being experienced in Australia but around the world. Many of the key investments in this Budget, such as cheaper child care, extended parental leave and making medication cheaper, will benefit many at a time of unprecedented challenges,” says Jesuit Social Services CEO Julie Edwards.

“We also welcome the cross-Government accord to increase the supply of social and affordable housing across Australia. Through our programs we work every day with people who have experienced homelessness, inappropriate or unsafe housing, housing instability and stress, and we see the impact it has on all aspects of their lives. We hope that this initiative makes a tangible difference to the lives of people who need support,” says Ms Edwards.

Ms Edwards says that it is extremely disappointing there is no commitment to increase the Jobseeker payment and other related income support measures.

“It is concerning that Jobseeker recipients will continue to be forced to live in poverty and have to struggle to pay for everyday essentials. The Federal Budget needs to work for every Australian, not just some, and sadly there is not enough here to address rising inequality which has been exacerbated during the pandemic and natural disasters.”

Ms Edwards says the organisation is pleased to acknowledge the \$99 million First Nations Justice package, highlighted by additional funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and funding for up to 30 community-led justice reinvestment initiatives across Australia.

“Justice reinvestment means investing in communities of need to address the drivers of crime, prevent anti-social behaviour from occurring in the first place and keep people connected with education, employment and culture. Ultimately, this results in less crime, fewer victims and fewer people having contact with costly and ineffective prison systems,” says Ms Edwards.

“Our research into locational disadvantage conducted over more than 20 years including last year's *Dropping off the Edge 2021* report highlights that a small number of communities continue to experience entrenched and complex disadvantage. This research is a roadmap to the communities where justice reinvestment– and other targeted reforms - can make a genuine difference.”

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