



Carers Australia Submission:

**Social Services Legislation Amendment
(Better Targeting Student Payments)
Bill 2017**

July 2017

AN AUSTRALIA THAT VALUES AND SUPPORTS ALL CARERS

ABOUT CARERS AUSTRALIA

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing the diversity of Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a:

- disability
- chronic condition
- mental illness or disorder
- drug or alcohol problem
- terminal illness
- or who are frail aged

Carers Australia believes all carers, regardless of their cultural and linguistic differences, age, disability, religion, socioeconomic status, gender identification and geographical location should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians.

They should be able to enjoy optimum health, social and economic wellbeing and participate in family, social and community life, employment and education.

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INTRODUCTION

Carers Australia thanks the Senate Community Affairs Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission to its Inquiry on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Better Targeting Student Payments) Bill 2017.

Carers Australia welcomes the reversal of the Government's policy to abolish the Education Entry Payment (EEP) and the Pensioner Education Supplement (PES). Both of these payments offer important help to carers to continue and maintain education, increasing their opportunities to (re)enter paid employment or advance their careers when their circumstances change. These payments can particularly help young carers continue in education and offer them opportunities for social and economic participation.

It is the view of Carers Australia, however, that reducing the amount of EEP and PES payments based on small changes in course loads, and suspending payments during semester breaks and holiday periods, as proposed in the Bill, will adversely affect the capacity of carers to continue their studies.

LEVELS OF STUDY

Carers Australia considers that the payment of EEP and PES at two rates – based around full time study and part time study – are appropriate and that introducing new levels of part time rates will both add extra complexity to the payment (and the social services system). When the Government proposed abolishing EEP and PES, its rationale included that the measure would be consistent with its aim to simplify the income support system.¹ This measure to introduce two new levels of payment, would add complexity, creating greater administrative and compliance requirements by both students and the Department of Human Services as study loads change, and create greater uncertainty for carers planning and changing their study patterns.

Introducing four payment levels of PES may also disadvantage carers and other income support recipients, who may have fixed costs of education that are not likely to be affected by small changes in their study loads. These costs can include some enrolment and other administrative fees, internet/data connections and usage, and subscription fees.

¹ Senate Community Affairs Committee, Answers to Estimates Questions on Notice, Social Services Portfolio, 2016-2017 Additional Estimates Hearings, Question No SQ17-000060, Hansard page 82

SEMESTER BREAKS AND HOLIDAY PERIODS

The measure to only provide PES during study terms and semesters was initially recommended by the National Commission of Audit (NCOA) in 2014. However, the NCOA did not offer reasons for its recommendation.²

Carers Australia considers that there is a very strong rationale for continuing PES payments during semester breaks and holiday periods, based on continued costs of education during at those times. Similarly to small differences in course loads, specific costs that may primarily be related to study, but that cannot be reduced or stopped during holiday periods, include:

- home broadband/NBN services
- home and mobile data plans, and
- organisation membership or publications directly related to the field of study.

In addition, many students use these breaks to participate in unpaid work placements related to their studies or to complete course assessments, assignments and other requirements. This can particularly apply to carers, whose responsibilities can limit the time available for study.

RECOMMENDATION

Carers Australia recommends that carers and other social security recipients continue to receive the Entry Education Payment and the Pensioner Education Supplement at current levels, with no interruption during semester breaks and holiday periods.

² National Commission of Audit, *Towards Responsible Government: Report of the National Commission of Audit, Phase 2*, March 2014, p 107-108, and National Commission of Audit, *Towards Responsible Government: Appendix to the Report of the National Commission of Audit, Volume 3*, March 2014, p 187