

MEDIA RELEASE – 07.10.14

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Poverty of students a government policy

Anti-Poverty Week (12-18 October) should serve as an important reminder that students are among those suffering the effects of poverty, according to the Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW).

Research conducted by the AASW in August indicated that nearly two thirds of its student members were struggling to pay for food and clothing while trying to complete their courses.

The findings were consistent with a Universities Australia 2013 study that indicated two thirds of students had incomes below \$20,000 and one fifth had incomes below \$10,000.

Most of this poverty is caused by the low rate of allowances which eligible students depend on to survive, and the overly stringent eligibility criteria that results in a significant number of students in need missing out.

Currently the rate for a single student on Youth Allowance living away from home with no dependents is just \$29.60 per day.

Deakin University student Pauline Acworth says she is struggling to keep up with rising food, fuel and medical costs, and that a “tangible” allowance increase would provide financial independence.

“The difference to my lifestyle would be such that I would not be so incredibly pressured, and exhausted - this as a result of being a ‘needy student financially’,” Ms Acworth says.

“Having financial equity would benefit me both professionally personally and would give me the ability to finish my degree within the set time frame, which then affords me the opportunity to be actively engaged within my profession as a social worker and contribute to the workforce.”

President of the AASW Professor Karen Healy says the allowance rate is acting as an obstacle for students.

“Education is one of the ways people hope to better their lives - however this government, as a matter of policy, is putting obstacles in the way,” Professor Healy says.

“Raising allowances to above the poverty line would not only lift people directly out of poverty, but would help ensure less reliance on welfare into the future. The more highly educated a person, the less likelihood that they will require welfare benefits.”

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