Diary of Social Legislation and Policy 1995
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# Contents

## Introduction

### 1 Education

*Australian Council for Educational Research*

### 2 Employment and Training

*Centre for Labour Studies, University of Adelaide*

### 3 Family Law

*Australian Institute of Family Studies*

### 4 Health

*Social Policy Research Centre (UNSW)*

### 5 Housing

*Australian Institute of Health and Welfare*

### 6 Human Services

*Social Policy Research Centre (UNSW)*

### 7 Immigration

*Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research*

### 8 Social Security

*Social Policy Research Centre (UNSW)*

## Acronyms

101

## Index

103
Introduction

This edition of the annual *Diary of Social Legislation and Policy* records changes made during 1995 in Commonwealth Government social policy and legislation. It provides a ready reference for researchers and workers in government and service organisations as it draws together information from a range of sources relating to the development of new policy and legislation, funding of government programs, and recommendations for change in policy and legislation from reviews, inquiries and commissioned research.

The *Diary* originated in the diaries prepared by Helen Ferber and published in R.B. Scotton and Helen Ferber (eds), *Public Expenditure and Social Policy in Australia* (Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, two volumes, 1978 and 1980). The first *Diary* in the present series continued the original format and covered events for the calendar year 1980. Staff from the Social Policy Research Centre, the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the National Institute of Economic and Industry Research (NIEIR) established the joint project and supported it by contributing chapters, editorial and publishing expertise, and funds for printing. With the 1994 *Diary*, NIEIR withdrew from the project and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare was welcomed as a partner.

Information for the chapters in this issue of the *Diary* has been drawn from the following Commonwealth Government portfolios: Attorney-General's; Employment, Education and Training; Housing and Regional Development; Human Services and Health; Immigration and Ethnic Affairs; and Social Security. The main sources of information for entries are departmental and ministerial press releases, annual reports, government reports and reports commissioned by government, and Budget and Budget-related papers. Full details of government reports and other publications referred to are listed as References at the end of each chapter.
Legislation and policy developments covered in the *Diary* include: the establishment of the Youth Training Initiative and the Jobs Pathway Guarantee for school leavers, designed to assist young people to find employment; introduction of an Australian Vocational Training System; establishment of the Community Information Network, to provide public access to electronic networks; introduction of a new Maternity Allowance and Parenting Allowance; the release of Australia's report under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, reporting on the compliance of Australia's domestic legislation, policies and practices; reforms to the *Family Law Act 1975*; the introduction of a Carer Support Strategy; reforms to the Disability Services Program; reforms to the Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement; funding for a youth suicide prevention program; establishment of Health Australia, a program to reduce preventable disease and death; funding for the development of national standards for mental health services; funding for an Education Network Australia (EdNA); release of, and government response to, the Morris report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness; and expansion of the Business Migration program.

Chapters in this volume were compiled by staff from the Australian Council for Educational Research, the Centre for Labour Studies, University of Adelaide, the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Social Policy Research Centre, and the Australian Institute of Family Studies. Deborah Whithear and Ros Moye of the Australian Institute of Family Studies were responsible for the coordination, editing and desktop publishing of the project. All contributions are gratefully acknowledged.

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Budget

9 May
Budget initiatives for 1995-96 announced by the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Simon Crean, and the Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, Ross Free, will continue to meet the targets set in Working Nation (Keating 1994): to deliver a high quality and accessible higher education system; to promote a national vocational education and training system; to respond to the Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and to introduce tighter targeting of Austudy to those students and families in greatest need.

Legislation

1 December
Assent was given to the Higher Education Funding Amendment Act (No.1), Act No.135 of 1995. It addressed changes in the repayment of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme.

16 December
The Employment, Education and Training Amendment Act 1995, No.176 of 1995, was assented to. The Act contains amendments relating to the creation of the Australian Language and Literacy Council, to the creation of Councils by Instrument, to the Abolition of the Commonwealth/State Consultative Committee, to the appointment and functions of Board and Council members, and to an amendment to substitute a New Schedule of Higher Education Institutions.
Assent was given to the *Employment Services Amendment Act 1995*, No. 148 of 1995, relating to amendments to the CES Case Management System, Job Compact eligibility, amalgamation of Job Search Allowance and Newstart Allowance, and an amendment to the *Social Security Act 1991*.

**Higher Education**

*9 May*

Key features of the 1995-96 Budget were to provide for growth in student places, funds for research and research infrastructure (to be funded by the relocation of existing resources), and improvements to the operation of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS).

The budget allocated 16.5 billion to the higher education sector for the 1996-1998 funding triennium and established a new three-and-a-half year planning horizon for higher education.

An additional 5850 student places will be funded in areas of growing population and low participation in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia. The Government recognised the need for increased opportunities for young people in Queensland as a result of its rapidly changing demographic profile. Of the total new places available, Queensland will receive 1750 in 1996, 1500 in 1997 and 950 in 1998. Other places will go to growth areas in New South Wales (200 in 1996, 400 in 1997, 300 in 1998); and to Western Australia (400 in 1997 and 350 in 1998). Growth in other States or Territories will be addressed in 1999.

**Research Funding**

*9 May*

As announced in the Budget, funding for research will include: $109 million in addition to the existing $191 million for research infrastructure over the triennium, a funding increase of 57 per cent; additional funding for competitive research programs through the Australian Research Council (ARC), increasing by $7.5 million in 1996, $14.5 million in 1997 and $17.6 million in 1998 (these amounts are in addition to the $350 million already committed in the triennium); an increase of 100 Australian Postgraduate Awards for 1996 in addition to the 1600 already available; five new postdoctoral fellowships a year from 1996 in addition to the 50 already available.
Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS)

9 May
The following changes to HECS were announced: introduction in 1995-96 (beginning 1 January 1996) of a voluntary 2 per cent repayment of HECS debt, attracting a 10 per cent discount on the total debt, when taxable income reaches $20,000; introduction of intermediate thresholds between the existing thresholds (CPI adjusted) for the repayment of the HECS debt from 1996-97 and additional thresholds for high income earners; discount of 15 per cent on voluntary lump sum repayments of more than $500; HECS deferred payment option to be available only to Australian citizens and to permanent residents with not more than three years residence; removal of the HECS deferred payment option and the 25 per cent discount for up-front payments for New Zealand students studying in Australia and permanent residents of more than three years; removal of HECS exemption scholarships for professional development of teachers.

Student Places

15 May
In its annual Survey of Applicants for Undergraduate Higher Education Courses, the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (1995) announced that an estimated 23,200 people who were eligible for a university undergraduate place were unsuccessful. This represented a decrease of 23 per cent in the number of unsuccessful applicants compared to the 1994 figure of 31,000. The Executive Director, Mr Frank Hambly, said the drop in the number of unsuccessful applicants continued a trend begun in 1993 and that the principal reason for this trend appears to be continuing improvement in employment prospects for people leaving school.

School Education

9 May
Budget initiatives for the schools sector included extending the Early Literacy Component of the National Equity Program for Schools and the Commonwealth's quality schooling initiatives. The Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training announced further support for the dual system of education with funding for the coming year of more than $3 million to support schools in the government and non-government sectors.
29 November
The Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training announced a four-year package of 13.7 billion to guarantee funding stability for government and non-government schools from 1997-2000. To be confirmed by legislation when Parliament resumes, the Minister foreshadowed a more detailed statement on schools funding early next year. Features of the package would be consideration of funding for new schools and recent advice on accountability and improved measures for reporting education outcomes; information technology; capital, equity; and literacy needs of schools. (See also Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee.)

8 December
The report of a research study commissioned by the Department of Employment, Education and Training entitled, Socioeconomic Status and School Education (Ainley et al. 1995), outlines for the first time a common definition of socio-economic status across all education systems. Through a systematic review of the literature, an investigation of alternative approaches to measurement and a description of programs concerned with socio-economically disadvantaged school students, the study addresses these issues and seeks to inform educational policy and practice. An important part of the study outlines the ways government and non-government schools implement the Commonwealth's Disadvantaged Schools Component of the National Equity Program for Schools, providing details of the programs initiated at State level.

Quality Schooling Program
9 May
The Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training announced that the 1995-96 Budget will provide for the continuation of the Quality Schooling Program with funding of $1.5 million in 1995-96, rising to almost $2 million in 1998-99. The purpose of the program was to provide substantial support to the schooling sector in the key areas of school organisation reform, educational leadership, student welfare, teacher professionalism and parental involvement.

Curriculum Development Projects Program
9 May
The Government announced an increase in annual Curriculum Development projects program funding of $600,000 to a total annual funding of $1.3 million.
The extra funding is to provide support for teachers, schools and systems in using national curriculum profiles to assess and report on student progress.

**National Equity Program for Schools**

**9 May**

The Transition Support for Non-Government Special Schools with Residential Care programs will assist special schools with residential care in meeting the specific learning needs of secondary students with disabilities, focusing particularly on their integration into mainstream schools, training or employment. The Government will provide up to $3.6 million per year, for this initiative, to commence in 1996.

The Minister for Schools, Vocational Educational and Training announced the cessation of a number of programs which have established a solid base for future development. The 'seeding' nature of the Gifted and Talented Component of the National Equity Program for Schools (NEPS) has been successful in raising awareness of the special needs of these students, and can now be continued by the States and Territories.

The Gender Equity Component of NEPS had, as its goal, increased participation in higher mathematics and the applied sciences of girls from disadvantaged schools. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs has now established a Gender Equity Taskforce, which is in a better position to address initiatives on the diverse educational needs of both boys and girls.

**Literacy Development**

**28 June**

The Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training announced grants totalling more than $8.7 million for projects to support nationwide literacy development for children from low socio-economic backgrounds in the early years of school. The projects, to be developed and conducted by the States and Territories, will promote early literacy through the development of initiatives such as collaborative learning and associated classroom management strategies, professional development programs for early literacy teachers, including the implementation of CD-ROM packages, and the promotion of parent involvement in early literacy education.
The report of a study supported by DEET under the Australian Language and Literacy Policy, entitled Developing Partnerships: The Home, School and Community Interface (Cairney et al. 1995), was published. The study examined how the language and literacy learning of students from specific target groups is influenced by support from within their home and community, and assessed initiatives situated in a variety of community contexts designed to support school literacy learning through home support.

A final report from a project commissioned by DEET (Lokan et al. 1995) focused on the potential impact of competency-based approaches on literacy curricula and assessment in schools.

**Enterprise Education in Schools Program**

**9 May**

The Federal Government has committed $3.4 million over four years to support enterprise education in schools. Commonwealth funding will be used to develop and disseminate best practice and curricula materials on enterprise, encourage teachers through professional development, provide up-to-date information to students on career opportunities in small business, and support a community-based information campaign.

**Taskforce on Racism in Schools**

**8 December**

State and Territory Ministers agreed to a proposal of the Commonwealth Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training to establish a taskforce on racism in schools to address a problem which afflicts many school communities around Australia. The impetus for the taskforce came from a Commonwealth Parliamentary report, Sticks and Stones (Australia, House of Representatives 1994), which identified racism as a cause of violence in schools.

The role of the Taskforce, under the auspices of the Council of Education Ministers, will be to provide a mechanism for the exchange of information so that, firstly, possible solutions could be shared between schools, teachers, parents and students and, secondly, to provide an impetus for change.

**Accord with Teacher Unions**

**18 July**

An agreement made under the Accord Mark VIII between teacher unions and the Federal Government demonstrated both the continuing support by
the Federal Government and commitment by teacher unions to improving the quality and productivity of Australian schooling. In launching the agreement, the Minister for Employment, Education and Training said that a framework for fair and equitable salary outcomes for teachers in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia would result. Previously these States had not engaged in genuine and equitable enterprise bargaining which, according to the Minister, had undermined the quality of education services.

**Austudy**

**9 May**

Changes to Austudy announced in the 1995-96 Federal Budget were introduced to focus more sharply on those students most in need of assistance. Responding to concerns that Austudy income tests based on taxable income did not always reflect the whole picture of a family's financial situation, tighter targeting measures will require additional information from some students, particularly those with access to complex company or other financial structures. A further element of the targeting measures will withdraw Austudy from permanent residents who chose not to take out citizenship after three years of permanent residency. The new income-testing measures will come into effect on 1 January 1996 with expected savings to the Budget of $13.5 million in 1995-96, rising to around $29 million per year. (See also Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee.)

A further measure to target Austudy to needy students is the introduction of an 'At Home Rate' for independent students aged 22 to 24 years who, while exempt from Austudy parental income and family assets test on the ground of age, live at home with their parents. The new rate will be $20 a week less than the rate for independent students not living with their parents.

From 1 July 1996, the Family Payment received for 16 and 17 year old students will be transferred to a new Basic Student Payment to be paid by the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). Where secondary students aged 16 and 17 years are ineligible for Austudy because of income, their parents will receive an allowance of $500 per year as long as the parental income does not exceed the cut-off point for the basic Family Payment.
Vocational Education and Training

9 May
The Federal Budget announced that Australia's vocational education and training system is to receive an additional $70 million in funding each year from 1997, bringing the 1993-1997 Commonwealth contribution to $1.5 billion.

Also announced in the Budget was a further $23 million in 1996 towards implementation of the Australian Vocational Training System (AVTS), bringing to $47.6 million the Commonwealth contribution in 1995 and 1996 for AVTS transition costs. AVTS provides a wide range of education and training pathways to those entering the workforce, leading to the attainment of nationally recognised competency levels. States and Territories will be closely involved in providing resources for AVTS in schools.

28 August
Delivering the official opening address at the Jobs for Young Australians: Making the Future Work: International Conference, the Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Simon Crean said '... the Federal Government refuses to accept that youth unemployment is an intractable problem and remains committed to working with business, community and youth groups to get the level down'. The Minister stressed the importance of developing new school industry programs which allow young people in years 11 and 12 to combine school-based studies with work experience and off-the-job training, giving them easier access to employment.

3 September
The Minister for Employment, Education and Training, Simon Crean, announced funding of $2 million for a program under Working Nation to enable schools to offer 'job guarantee' for students who successfully complete their vocational studies in the final two years of high school.

Eight regions selected on the basis of persistently high youth unemployment and having schools in the region already offering vocational subjects in years 11 and 12 were selected to run the Job Offer Guarantee program. The program will build on the success of existing secondary school work experience placement arrangements by providing students with continuous workplace learning opportunities from year 11 through to their first full time paid jobs.

24 September
The Government committed $167,000 for a multimedia program to train young unemployed people. A pre-vocational training program developed
through Working Nation's Nettforce industry training company, 'Teame' (Training and Employment for Arts, Media and Entertainment Company Ltd), the program will initially provide training for 16 young people in Victoria to give them a basis in the skills needed to gain work in the multimedia, TV, video and radio production industry.

10 November
The Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training announced the allocation of $844.7 million in 1996 for the expansion and strengthening of vocational education and training. In 1996 it is expected that over 1.2 million people will be able to undertake training across the system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education
The National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People found that, despite some progress in the five years since the joint Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Education Policy was introduced, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still participate less and have lower outcomes in education than other Australians. In a budget statement, Mr Free, the Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, committed the Government to providing a comprehensive response to the National Review and to working with State and Territory governments to improve the education of Australia's indigenous people.

12 July
In an announcement by the Minister Mr Free, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working part-time on Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) will now be able to receive an Abstudy living allowance to assist them to further their education.

Civics and Citizenship Education

9 May
The Federal Budget announced a commitment of $20 million over four years to support a comprehensive, non-partisan program for civics and citizenship education in schools, TAFE, higher education and adult and community education. Materials for the schools sector will be developed by the Curriculum
Corporation, an agency co-owned by the States, Territories and Commonwealth. In the schools sector the development of curriculum materials and teacher professional development will be given priority.

**Education Network Australia**

*9 May*

Funding of $1.5 million in 1995-96 and $500,000 in subsequent years was announced for the development of an Education Network Australia (EdNA) as a service to link schools, TAFE colleges, universities and other education training providers. The initiative is part of a broader national strategy announced by the Prime Minister on April 6 to enable Australia to adopt new information and communication services and technologies.

EdNA will initially involve the development of a directory of educational services and interactive message facilities which can be accessed from education institutions and from the home. It will converge with other initiatives such as, the Open Learning Electronic Service, Open Net and Cooperative Multi-media Centres.

Key objectives of EdNA are to: stimulate the use of electronic networks across schools, TAFE and higher education by students, teachers and lecturers; encourage the development of educational services and high quality Australian content which can be made available via the network; provide a focus for a national collaborative approach to network development in the education and training services sectors; provide the nucleus of an Australian educational services industry and become a focal point both domestically and internationally for educational services and content developed in this country; provide a new publishing platform for the education and training services industry; and stimulate broader information technology industry development opportunities.

**International Education and Training**

*9 May*

The Federal Government will spend an additional $12 million in addition to the $55 million already provided over the next three years to increase Australia's share of the international education and training market, with
the establishment of the Australian Overseas Education and Training Program. The Program will support and complement the role of the Australian International Education Foundation established in November 1994. The Foundation’s role is to boost the numbers of overseas students studying in Australia, improve overseas study, research and career opportunities for Australians, and build opportunities for Australian institutions to establish links with institutions in other countries and to participate in offshore delivery of Australian education and training services.

The Australian Overseas Education and Training program will focus on support for Australia’s education and training agencies in North Asian countries, increasing the number of school exchange places for students from North Asian countries and assistance with the activities of Australian schools, TAFE colleges and skills centres in the South-East Asian region. Supporting projects to develop mutual recognition of professional qualifications and support for official links and exchanges with overseas countries are also priorities.

Morris Report on Youth Homelessness

5 June
The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs (1995) tabled A Report on Aspects of Youth Homelessness. Chaired by Mr Allan Morris, the Inquiry investigated the provision of assistance for homeless youth requiring income support, with particular reference to: the availability of family support and welfare services (including mediation services), their role and effectiveness in reducing homelessness and in resolving differences before young people leave home; the integration of income support provisions for homeless young people with services that assist with family reunion, transition to stable independent living and opportunities for education, training and employment; and the appropriateness of income support arrangements for homeless young people, noting the need not to create undue incentives to leave home or school.

30 November
The Government’s response to the Morris Report was tabled in the Federal Parliament. The Minister for Schools, Vocational Education and Training, Ross Free, said Mr Allan Morris, as chairman of the Committee which
produced the report, deserved congratulations on its comprehensiveness and
the energy with which he had explained its recommendations to audiences
around Australia. The formal government response indicates that a significant
number of recommendations will be referred to the Ministerial Council. The
Minister has asked State and Territory Ministers to consider recommendations
that fall within their areas of responsibility.

Reports from the Senate Employment, Education and
Training References Committee

The Committee invited submissions to a number of major inquiries during
1995 and planned to table reports on each during the year.

Inquiry into Long Term Unemployment

The Inquiry, chaired by Senator John Tierney, aimed to re-examine the
concept of work and the way it is valued and rewarded; examine how we
support the long-term unemployed and alternative job creation strategies;
and look at ways by which we might modify existing work arrangements to
enable more people to participate. The report (Australia, Senate 1995a) was
released in October 1995.

Inquiry into the Development of Open Learning in Australia
(Part 2)

Part 1 of this Inquiry was published in 1994 and dealt primarily with open
learning in higher education and the roles of the Open Learning Agency of
Australia (OLAA) and the Open Learning Technology Corporation (OLTC).
Part 2 addresses other issues raised during the Inquiry such as the role of
Distance Education Centres in providing open learning, issues of credit
transfer, use of flexible delivery in the vocational education and training
sector, student support, the professional development of teachers, future
broadband services and the potential advantages offered by an information
superhighway to the adult and community sector and people with a disability.
The report was published in March 1995 and a Government response tabled
in September 1995.

Inquiry into Austudy

The Inquiry was set up to examine some features of the design and operation
of Austudy which have come under criticism; for example, problems resolving
eligibility, differences between DEET and the DSS in determining various income support entitlements, and the claim that some students are receiving Austudy benefits to which they are not entitled because the true extent of their parent's income is not revealed. The report (Australia, Senate 1995b) was released in June 1995.

**Inquiry into Early Childhood Education**

The terms of reference of this Inquiry are as follows: (1) to examine recent research dealing with (a) early childhood factors which bear upon capacity to learn during formal school education, (b) the impact of early childhood education on learning success in later years, and (c) the role of parents as early childhood educators, particularly with respect to literacy and cognitive skills; (2) to analyse and assess the cost of remedial and other interventions required to ensure successful completion of secondary schooling; (3) to examine recent and notable early childhood initiatives in Australia and OECD countries and report on implications or desirable changes to Commonwealth policies and priorities in education and child support; (4) to assess the existing relationships and policy interface between the early childhood services sectors and school sectors, and report on their effectiveness in achieving the successful transition of children into formal schooling arrangements.

**Inquiry into Accountability in Commonwealth–State Funding Arrangements in Education**

The report of the Inquiry (Australia, Senate 1995c) identifies the many issues and complexities surrounding financial and educational accountability arrangements for the Commonwealth's Schools programs and points to a number of key issues in the post-compulsory sector for both the schools and vocational sectors.

**References**


The 1995 year saw the consolidation and continuation of the May 1994 *Working Nation* (Keating 1994) initiatives, in which the Government had set its strategy for dealing with continuing high unemployment through jobs growth in the private sector. As 1995 progressed the Government pointed to continuing economic growth as proof that its policy mix was appropriate and effective. Official unemployment rates gradually declined to the lowest levels in four years, but remained above 8 per cent and with significant regional variation. Several studies pointed to areas of very high unemployment and disadvantage.

The Government emphasised making Australia's unemployed 'job ready', and extended individual case management for eligible job-seekers. Labour market programmes were expanded and reform of the training system continued, a major aim being to encourage and facilitate greater employer involvement in shaping labour force training.

**Employment Trends**

**January**

The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) reported that in November 1994 its leading jobs indicator fell for the first time in three years. This was mainly attributed to a fall in dwelling approvals. The indicator, based on job vacancies, overtime, vehicle registrations and dwelling approvals data, continued to fall throughout the year, though there were signs of growing job vacancies in some skilled areas late in 1994.

**March**

The national unemployment rate was reported at 8.7 per cent, the lowest level in four years.
April
The third quarterly progress report of Working Nation found that youth unemployment for 15 to 19 year olds had nearly halved over the past year. The national unemployment rate had decreased to 8.3 per cent.

May
Employment Minister Crean stated that 550,000 jobs had been created in the past two years. The national unemployment rate was reported at 8.5 per cent.

June
The national unemployment rate was down to 8.3 per cent.

July
A new study by the Centre for Economic Policy Research at the Australian National University (ANU) (Gregory & Hunter 1995) showed that continuing services jobs growth and manufacturing decline aggravates the employment gap between rich and poor areas. Lower socio-economic status areas have lost jobs and not gained employment in service industries. The fastest to lose jobs in these areas are 15 to 19-year-old and 55 to 65-year-old males.

Housing Minister Brian Howe released a study by ANU demographer Peter McDonald (1995) as part of the Australian Urban and Regional Development Review series for Howe's department. The study reiterates that manufacturing regions have been hardest hit by increasing unemployment. However, unlike the industrialised regions of some countries, those in Australia were not urban ghettos and had more chance of reversing economic decline.

September
Employment Minister Crean announced the creation of 670,000 jobs in the past two-and-a-half years, exceeding the planned progress towards the target of 5 per cent unemployment by the year 2000. The national unemployment rate was 8.5 per cent, with State variations between 7.5 and 10 per cent.

November
The Department of Employment, Education and Training (1995) released its report, Australia's Workforce 2005: Jobs in the Future. The report suggests that unemployment could be as low as 4 per cent by 2005. Employment trends of the past two decades were expected to continue, with strongest growth in the services sectors and a likely decline in manufacturing. Part-time work will
continue to grow, as will the proportion of women in the workforce. The fastest jobs growth is predicted to occur in highly skilled occupations, with some exceptions; for example, in the area of sales (recognised as less skilled).

It is noted that since the release of an earlier report, *Workforce 2001* (Department of Employment Education and Training 1991), increased growth in tertiary educated graduates has occurred. By the year 2005 an historically high number of workers will hold qualifications. Consequently, a less widely-spread shortage of skilled occupations than previously predicted is expected. It would therefore be considered a missed opportunity and a waste of government investment in education and training if employers failed to take advantage of this highly trained workforce.

The report concludes that, based on current assumptions, by the year 2005 there will be an increase in the average age of workforce participants, with a greater proportion of the population of working age (contrary to predictions of an increasing burden of non-working people on the workforce).

**December**

The Graduate Destination Survey (Graduate Careers Council of Australia 1995) indicated that job prospects for new bachelor graduates had improved, although not to the levels of the 1980s. The majority of graduates found work within four months (an increase of 4.4 per cent over 1994 figures and 7.8 per cent over 1993). Non-graduates had twice the unemployment rate of graduates. Mining engineering graduates and those in health-related fields had the highest success rate of finding jobs (over 95 per cent), while more than half the visual and performing arts graduates were still seeking full-time work four months after the completion of their degrees. Over a third of graduates in life sciences, social sciences, psychology, mathematics, languages and humanities had yet to find work after four months.

**Labour Market Programs**

**February**

Employment Assistance Australia (EAA) formally began operations, implementing part of the *Employment Services Act 1994* (December 1994), and enacting Working Nation changes to the delivery of labour market assistance. The scheme provides for public intensive case management for unemployed people in order to achieve a job; for example, to improve employability through job-related training.
March
Community and private case managers began receiving Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) referrals under the Contract Case Management scheme launched by the Prime Minister. Contracted Case Management allows job seekers to choose their own case manager, either in the government sector or from among 160 private companies and community organisations. The Employment Services Regulatory Authority will supervise the new system.

May
Employment Minister Crean stated that $1 billion in cuts to Working Nation's budget will not affect program and employment targets, mainly because of reduced unit costs but also as a result of efficiencies achieved from, for example, competitive tendering for courses. Expected employment growth, changed arrangements for part-time and seasonal workers, transfer of more unemployed to Mature Age Allowance, greater use of preparatory and personal development courses, and ending the Community Activity Program will also reduce labour market program costs.

June
By late June the CES had referred 30,000 people to Contract Case Management organisations. The plan was for 10 per cent of case-managed clients to be assisted by private Contract Case Managers in 1994-95, increasing to 20 per cent the following year and 30 to 40 per cent thereafter.

October
Employment Minister Crean announced changes to the Working Nation program. JobStart (providing wage subsidies for up to 26 weeks for disadvantaged job-seekers) and National Training Wage subsidy rates were simplified into a single wage subsidy program. Employers will be able to receive as much as 50 per cent of the Federal Government's wage subsidy up front. Subsidies worth almost $2,000 will be extended to job seekers who have been unemployed for between six to 12 months (previously not eligible), with subsidies for people unemployed between 12 to 18 months more than doubling to $3,000. Subsidies were also extended to cover new apprenticeships.

November
Employment Minister Crean announced further measures to assist job seekers from non-English-speaking backgrounds. These include $8.5 million per year for temporary child care places to help some 5,300 disadvantaged job seekers
attend training programs, an expansion of English language courses, and competitive tendering for translation and interpreter services for DEET.

Employment Minister Crean announced that Working Nation labour market programs will be delivered with maximum simplicity and effectiveness, following the release of the CES Advisory Committee Review of Labour Market Programs. A single contract has been developed for all labour market program providers. By early 1996, forms will be rationalised, guidelines standardised across programs, and tendering arrangements streamlined.

An increased allocation was provided to Area Consultative Committees for developing Regional Employment Development Strategies to improve labour market program delivery. The Committees are a Working Nation initiative designed to bring together local businesses, government and the CES to increase CES responsiveness to local employment possibilities and spread jobs growth to regional areas.

**December**

The 62 Area Consultative Committees met in Sydney at the second national jobs forum, setting a target of the creation of 350,000 new jobs in 1996. Employment Minister Crean announced that some 250 trainee employment officers will be recruited to the CES to cope with an anticipated increase in demand from employers and job seekers. Crean further announced a $1 million grant for a ‘skills audit’ to provide a detailed analysis of labour markets by Area Consultative Committees, enabling them to better target their activities.

**National Training Initiatives**

**January**

The Australian Vocational Training System (AVTS) was implemented. The System aims for greater industry input as agreed by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in November 1994, and involves flexible design of employee training, with employer input integral. The Commonwealth committed $47.6m over the 1995 and 1996 calendar years for this revamp of Australia’s vocational training.

**February**

At an Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) conference, the Prime Minister, Mr Keating, pointed to unmet demand for Technical and Further
Education (TAFE) places being 36 per cent higher than in the higher education sector. He noted that half as many women as men receive financial or other support from their employer for education. One solution suggested was to establish group training companies for women only.

March
Building Employment and Training Australia, a joint venture of the Master Builders’ Association and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, was created. The venture aims to create 1,000 jobs by the year’s end, and is the twenty-third such training company to be established.

May
MCEETYA approved a training package to increase competition in the training market through national skills standards and accreditation of courses. Training consumers would be able to choose from among competing trainers.

August
The Vocational Education and Training Amendment Bill 1995 was passed. The Bill aims to provide an extra $70m in growth funds to that sector in 1996, making available an additional 35,000 student places, with the proviso that the States maintain their effort.

November
National Training Awards went to: Apprentice of the Year, Teresa Greer (an industrial plumber); Vocational Student of the Year, Mark Cave (a travel consultant); Trainee of the Year, Jacquelynnne La Fou (a gardener); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Trainee of the Year, Joseph Cleland; ANTA Achiever of the Year, Laurie Carmichael. The inaugural Prime Minister’s Training Award went to Virginia Simmons, Director of the Kangan Institute of TAFE in Melbourne. Employer of the Year went to Ford Australia, and the Training Award to Email Ltd.

Youth Training Initiatives
January
The Youth Training Initiative (YTI) began operation. It aims to prevent 15 to 17 year olds becoming long-term unemployed through intensive case management to ensure their participation in training. The Youth Training Allowance (YTA) replaced the Job Search Allowance (JSA).
April
It was reported that of 3,700 young people provided with case management under YTI, 43 per cent had either found a job or been placed in a training or education program.

June
The Youth Training Initiative was reported as having enabled about 22,400 young people to receive YTA.

August
Employment Minister Crean announced easier access for young people to the Job Compact, halving the waiting period for access to training under YTI to 13 weeks.

September
Employment Minister Crean announced the Jobs Pathway Guarantee for school leavers. This initiative is designed to help school leavers gain a job or training place in ‘blackspots’ of youth unemployment.

December
Employment Minister Crean announced that since 1983, the number of young people without work had decreased by 60,000. This number will be further cut by the Government’s education and training initiatives.

Schools Minister Free said that the high official rate of 30 per cent youth unemployment included fewer 15 to 19-year-old school leavers, resulting from the Government’s success in encouraging people to stay at school. Free argued that only 7.5 per cent of all 15 to 19 year olds were looking for full-time work.

The Long-term Unemployed

May
More than one-fifth of the long-term unemployed had gained employment in this first year of Working Nation, largely through intensive case management.

August
Employment Minister Crean stated that all of the Working Nation programs for the long-term unemployed were now in place despite initial delays. In the program’s first year, 380,000 new jobs had been created.
September

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures for August show that the number of long-term jobless fell to its lowest level in almost four years, down to 231,100 seasonally adjusted, or down 69,800 (23.2 per cent) in annual terms.

December

Working Nation was credited with a continued reduction of long-term unemployed from 291,000 (or 36.1 per cent of total unemployed) in November 1994 to 237,000 (30.8 per cent) in December 1995.

References


3

Family Law

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Legislative Reform

March
The first report of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislative Committee (1995) inquiry into the Family Law Reform Bill 1994 and the Family Law Reform Bill (No.2) 1994 was released. The Family Law Reform Bill 1994 was referred to the Legal and Constitutional Legislation Committee by the Selection of Bills Committee in November 1994 for review as part of the examination of legislative change to the Family Law Act. In December 1994 the Senate also referred the draft Family Law Reform Bill (No.2) 1994, along with the Explanatory memorandum relating to the draft, to the Legislation Committee for examination.

The Committee's report is divided into two parts. Part 1 concerns the Family Law Reform Bill 1994, which deals primarily with children and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms available in the family law. Part 2 concerns the draft Family Reform Bill (No.2) 1994, which is predominantly concerned with financial and property settlement. Thirty-six submissions were received by the Committee in addition to evidence taken at public hearings early in 1995. The Committee recommended that, subject to three suggested changes, the Family Law Reform Bill 1994, be enacted. (See also December entry.)

June
The second report of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Legislative Committee (1995b) inquiry into the Family Law Reform Bill 1994 and the Family Law Reform Bill (No.2) 1994 was released. This second report presents a further eight submissions to the Inquiry and expands on issues examined in the first report. Of note is debate concerning the treatment of
family violence under the proposed amendments, and discussion as to whether grandparents' interests should be specially recognised in the Family Law Act. Concerns that mediation and conciliation may not be in the best interests of families subjected to family violence were specifically raised. The Committee recommended that Court orders must have regard to safeguards for individuals in respect to exposure to family violence.

**December**

The *Family Law Reform Act 1995* (No.167 of 1995) was passed and given Royal Assent on 16 December 1995. This Act, which amends the *Family Law Act 1975*, saw its origins in the *Joint Select Committee Report into Certain Aspects of the Operation and Interpretation of the Family Law Act 1975*. The Act reflects changes to guiding philosophies of family law practice in Australia and introduces a new approach for the treatment of children in family law matters. Underlying the Act are notions of the rights of the child, or the 'best interests of the child', and emphasis upon primary forms of dispute resolution other than litigation, and on parental responsibilities.

Areas of legislative reform address: inconsistencies with family violence protection orders arising from contact orders made under the Family Law Act to ensure that the latter do not expose people to family violence; separate representation of children in family law matters; court procedures for determining the 'best interests of the child'; the jurisdiction of courts; the location and recovery of children; and parental responsibilities regarding adopted children and children born as a result of artificial insemination. The Reform Act removes the concepts of 'custody' and 'access' and, consistent with Australia's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, expresses the rights of children to parental care and contact.

The *Family Law Reform (Consequential Amendments) Act 1995*, No.140 of 1995 was introduced. As a consequence of the changes made by the *Family Law Reform Act 1995* to the *Family Law Act 1975*, a number of amendments to related Acts became necessary. This Act outlines these amendments and includes changes to: the *Australian Citizenship Act 1948*; the *Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989*; the *Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988*; the *Child Care Rebate Act 1993*; the *Commonwealth Legal Aid Act 1977*; the *Jurisdictions of Courts (Cross-Vesting) Act 1987*; the *Marriage Act 1961*; the *Migration Act 1958*; the *Passports Act 1938*; and the *Social Security Act 1991*. 
The *Family Law Reform Bill (No.2) 1995* was introduced. The Bill proposes to amend Part VIII of the *Family Law Act 1975*, and give effect to recommendations made by the Joint Select Committee into Certain Aspects of the Operation and Interpretation of the *Family Law Act 1975* relating to spousal maintenance and the disposition of matrimonial property. Proposed amendments are consistent with the approach taken in the *Family Law Reform Act 1995*, and are aimed at providing a structure for parties whose marriages have broken down to facilitate their concluding agreements out of the Court. Of note is the introduction of the assumption in the Bill that each party, regardless of financial and non-financial contribution, has contributed equally to the marriage as a whole. The Bill proposes amendments regarding maintenance agreements, pre-nuptial agreements and provisions facilitating orders in respect of property, and includes provisions for the re-numbering and re-lettering of the *Family Law Act 1975*.

**The Budget and Related Papers**

**May**

The *Social Justice Statement 1995-96* (Keating & Howe 1995) was released. The Statement reports on Commonwealth Government strategies aimed at promoting social justice through fairness and equity in policies and practice. Details of initiatives and ongoing policies in the following areas are included: maternity allowance; guardian allowance; rent assistance; family benefits and payments; and child care services.

The *Women's Budget Statement 1995-96* (Lawrence 1995) was released. Outlined in the Statement are a number of changes to the Child Support Scheme aimed at increasing its flexibility. The Child Support Agency, for example, will have authority to pay child support to a custodial parent where payment has not been made by the payer to the Agency; the Registrar will have the power to temporarily prevent a person leaving Australia where that person has child support arrears and where it is desirable to issue an order; increased data exchange is to occur between the Child Support Agency and the Department of Social Security; and future initiatives will cater for parents' varied incomes.

Many of these initiatives were in response to the recommendations of the report on the Child Support Scheme by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on Certain Family Law Issues (1994). The Statement also reported that as
part of the ongoing examination of the Scheme, two studies would be commissioned regarding, firstly, the costs of children and, secondly, reasons why child support is not universally received by custodial parents.

Australian Law Reform Commission

April

The report of the inquiry into complex court cases in the Family Court, *For the Sake of the Kids: Complex Contact Cases in the Family Court* (Australian Law Reform Commission 1995b), was released. The Inquiry’s primary purpose was to identify the characteristics and causes of difficult contact cases, to develop recommendations to reduce the adverse effects of conflict and repetitive litigation on children and families, and to save Family Court and legal aid resources. An Issues Paper (Australian Law Reform Commission 1994) was circulated in December 1994 as a basis for consultations. Over 150 submissions were received.

The Report outlined the Commission’s recommendations regarding the principles that should underlie complex contact cases. These include: paramount consideration of the best interests of the child; a child’s right to contact with both parents unless his or her best interests require otherwise; a child’s right to be heard; and parental management with minimal court intervention of arrangements for the care of and contact with their children, unless the best interests of the child require otherwise. Finally, the Report encourages a review of the training and education of professionals working with complex contact cases.

August

The report, *Costs Shifting – Who Pays for Litigation* (Australian Law Reform Commission 1995a), was released. This report was in response to a reference from the Attorney-General, Michael Lavarch, to the Law Reform Commission, primarily to inquire into and report on current arrangements governing the award of costs in proceedings before courts and tribunals. Underlying the Report was the notion that all Australians should have access to high quality legal services and that cost should not be a barrier to those wishing to use the litigation system. The Commission found that, in general, the costs allocation rules sometimes operate unfairly and deny easy access to justice; that access to justice is affected by the amount litigants have to pay in legal costs as well as by who has to pay those costs; and that most litigants had
little idea of the amount of legal costs they would be required to pay, and that this was difficult to predict in advance.

The inquiry found, however, widespread support for the current costs allocation rule in family law proceedings, although a number of concerns were raised (pursuant to s117 and s117(2A) (costs)): that costs orders are seldom made; that the weighting of factors to be taken into account in the allocation of costs is unclear; that there is need to take a greater disciplinary role against non-compliant parties; and that the ability of the Family Court to make interim costs orders to assist a party to undertake legal proceedings is seldom used. The report addressed costs allocations for separate representatives for children and other miscellaneous expenses in family law proceedings including guardians and child medical treatment and appeals. Implementation strategies focusing on State and Territory consistency and the need for regular review of costs rules were recommended.

Family Court of Australia

November

The report of the Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues (1995), Funding and Administration of the Family Court of Australia, was released. This report presents findings of the Committee inquiry into the administration of the Family Court of Australia. The Inquiry was made with particular reference to the base level of funding required to enable the Court to function and to the effectiveness of present expenditure by the Court in undertaking its functions.

The report considered whether the office of Judicial Registrar is an effective adjunct to the judicial resources of the Family Court and whether an alternative office should be created to enhance public access to family law dispute resolution. The report presents a review of the statutory functions of the Family Court, its self-administration, funding, structure, ancillary services and management structure, as well as an overview of courts exercising family law jurisdiction. Recommendations include the move to a two-tier structure of the Judiciary and the Registrars, and that future consideration be given to the Family Court becoming a division of the Federal Court of Australia, with the establishment of a Federal Magistracy considered at that time. With regard to the use of alternative dispute resolution in family law, counselling and reconciliation counselling, the Committee recommended
that these be pursued primarily through community-based rather than Family Court structures.

Family Law Council

May

The discussion paper, *Involving and Representing Children in Family Law*, was released by the Family Law Council (1995a). As a result of significant changes in the treatment of children in family law proceedings in recent years and Australia’s ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Family Law Council decided to review the involvement of children in family law. The purpose of this discussion paper was to seek the community’s views on the framework developed by the Council for the identification of cases where separate representation for children is necessary; for the coordination of efforts on the child’s behalf; and for the competent representation of the child. The paper discusses the effects of family breakdown on children, explores the notion of ‘involving’ the child, examines means of protecting and advocating the child’s ‘best interests’, and presents a possible model for change. Submissions were invited to 31 August 1995.

July

The report, *Magistrates in Family Law: An Evaluation of the Exercise of Summary Jurisdiction to Improve Access to the Family Law* (Family Law Council 1995b), was released. The evaluation addressed the question of how a balance between quick and inexpensive access to justice and quality of justice can be achieved in the exercise of family law, and considered the role of courts of summary jurisdiction in resolving family law disputes; the appropriateness of court premises and facilities; the availability of conciliation/mediation services; arrangements for listing and hearing of family law cases; issues of procedural simplicity; the availability of legal aid for summary proceedings; the training of magistrates and court registrars in family law and family dynamics; the relationship between courts of summary jurisdiction and the Family Court; the need for duty lawyer services; and the interaction of domestic violence and family law matters.

Report recommendations centred on the need to improve the quality of service provided within the family law summary jurisdiction, while ensuring that all people continue to have ready access to such services. A main proposal was for the establishment of specialist family law Magistrates comprising
both Family Court Magistrates and interested State and Territory magistrates. The Council considered the present three-tier judicial structure of judges, judicial registrars and senior registrars (SES registrars) cumbersome, and recommended that a Family Court magistracy be established on a gradual basis, with the Family Court assuming exclusive family law summary jurisdiction in all but the most remote areas, as a longer term objective.

Family Services Council

1 May

The Secretariat of Family Services Council was established. The Council provides independent and high level policy advice to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Attorney-General regarding the Family Services Program administered by the Attorney General’s Department. The Council’s terms of reference include the provision of advice on consumer or research requirements, and assisting in communication between service groups and Government throughout the States and Territories and nationally. Members of the Council include service providers, members of the academic community and professionals from government and community organisations concerned with families.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

December

Australia’s report under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was released (Attorney-General’s Department 1995). The Convention came into force internationally on 2 September 1990 and was ratified by Australia on 17 December 1990. As part of the reporting process under the Convention, the report aims to provide information about the approach taken by the Commonwealth and States and Territories to ensure that domestic legislation, policies and practices comply with the Convention. Outlined in the report are Australia’s practices concerning child rights in areas of civil liberties, family and alternative care environments, health and welfare, education, leisure and culture, and child protection. The report describes provisions under the Family Law Act 1975 and changes introduced under the Family Law Reform Act 1995, which detail those factors courts must consider when determining the ‘best interests of the child’ (see also Legislative Reform).
Research, Planning and Future Direction

September
Following advice given by the Family Law Council to the Attorney-General, the Australian Institute of Family Studies was commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the effects of the reforms to the *Family Law Act 1975*, as they relate to children. The evaluation research will target two groups of people: a sample from the general community; and a sample of parents divorced since 1988 who had dependant children at that time. The views of both groups on the provisions in the legislation for children will be obtained at the beginning of the evaluative process, and then again two to three years after the reforms have been established. It is anticipated that the legislative reforms will have a profound effect on the treatment and involvement of children and parents in family law.

November
In conjunction with the Family Law Council, the Australian Institute of Family Studies played host to a planning seminar on research issues in family law aimed at enabling roundtable discussion on areas of current and possible future concern. Participants included representatives of the Family Law Council, the Australian Institute of Family Studies, the Attorney-General’s Department, the Family Court of Australia, the Family Court of Western Australia, the Law Council of Australia, National Legal Aid, the Australian Law Reform Commission, the Family Services Council and the National Alternative Dispute Resolution Advisory Council.

References


Departmental Matters

April

The Primary Health Care Group was formed as part of the Public Health Division. The group will have a division-wide responsibility for ensuring the coordination of existing and new initiatives, and better integration at the local level of public health and health promotion activities with personal care and treatment services.

Therapeutic Goods

9 May

The 1995-96 Budget announced three initiatives to improve the safety of drugs. First, the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) will be provided with new high technology equipment costing $0.6m to allow more reliable and quicker testing of new drugs developed through biotechnology and recombinant technology. Second, the TGA will be provided with $0.4m per year to investigate illegal practices. Third, the TGA is to establish a Commercial Office to make its specialist skills available to industry and government bodies in Australia and overseas. When fully operational, revenue from this office will help meet future costs. Anticipated commercial services include: manufacturing plant validation; contract testing of drugs and medical devices; training in good manufacturing processes and laboratory testing; and international certification of suppliers to the pharmaceutical and devices industries.

The Budget announced funding of a total of $46.6m over four years ($10.5m for 1995-96) for an increase in supplies of Factor VIII, a blood clotting agent,
which will lead to a better quality of life for people with haemophilia. Supplies will be lifted from the current average of 1.7 international units per person to in excess of 2.4 units. The product will continue to be provided free of charge to patients through hospitals.

4 July
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced a grant of $1.7m to produce a Medicines Handbook. The handbook will provide information in a user-friendly form for all health professionals, with the aim of improving the quality use of medicines in Australia. It will also provide the foundation for the teaching of pharmacology and therapeutics at both undergraduate and graduate levels. The handbook will be jointly developed by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia and the Australasian Society of Clinical and Experimental Pharmacologists.

1 December
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced that the Government will slash the time required for the approval of new drugs and important treatments, including HIV/AIDS, following an audit of approval procedures by the Department of Human Services and Health. Improvements to existing procedures could include: offering drug manufacturers the option of earlier lodgement of applications for Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) listing, with a possible time saving of up to two months; improved advice and assistance to drug manufacturers in preparing their applications; better arrangements with overseas drug regulatory agencies for information exchange; and improving the use of computer technology.

Environmental Health Standards

June
After publication of more stringent radiation protection recommendations by the International Commission for Radiological Protection, the Australian exposure standards were revised and adopted by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC).

The Australian Radiation Laboratory completed the task of delineating the soil-removal contour for clean-up work at the atomic weapons test site in Maralinga.
1 July
Harmonised labelling and packaging requirements for scheduled drugs and poisons between New Zealand and Australia commenced.

24 November
The Minister for Human Services and Health released the report, *The Use of Radioisotopes in Medicine and Medical Research, Australia 1947–73* (Australian Radiation Laboratory 1995). It rejected claims that a large number of Australians were subjected to unconscionable medical experiments.

Food and Nutrition

*February*

The first comprehensive national nutrition survey since the 1940s commenced. The survey is to be conducted over a 12-month period.

Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

*31 January*

The report of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs (1995), *Breast Cancer Screening and Treatment in Australia*, was tabled in Parliament. The Government has accepted or supported most of the 27 recommendations, particularly key points on screening and research. The Committee’s advice on screening is consistent with the Commonwealth’s current practice. The only outstanding issue is the Committee’s call for open biopsy to be excluded from the screening program, pending advice from the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Community Affairs, which is currently inquiring into the management and treatment of breast cancer in Australia.

*17 February*

The Minister for Human Services and Health launched a national campaign to increase the number of women undertaking mammograms.

*10 March*

The Australian and Thai Governments have joined forces to target Australian tourists, business people and commercial sex workers in Bangkok with a new ‘Travel Safe’ public awareness campaign.
15 March
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced a $1.6m package to reduce the incidence of heart disease in Australia.

10 April
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced that researchers from the University of Newcastle have been commissioned to lead a $3.5m long-term study into women's health, the first of its kind in the world. The study will follow a group of 60,000 women in the age groups 18-22 years, 45-49 years and 70-74 years for a period of 20 years.

9 May
The 1995-96 Budget allocated a further $103m over the next four years to improve the health of indigenous Australians, bringing funding to a total of $482m over four years. Responsibility for the primary health care of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been transferred to the Department of Human Services and Health from 1 July 1995 to ensure it a priority position within the mainstream health system. Funding for existing Health Services and Substance Abuse programs will be transferred from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). In the first year, the focus for health and substance abuse services will be on improved planning and assessment of local needs.

During 1995-96, every Aboriginal Health Service will be invited to develop a joint action plan to meet the health needs of their area. A new national indigenous corporation will be established to recruit, train and employ a pool of health personnel to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services. The corporation will be managed by a Board including representatives of the Department, health services, health professionals and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers. Funding will be provided for an employee relief scheme for staff attending training in or out of the workplace. Aboriginal Health Services will be funded to develop new initiatives to address health problems such as mental illness in local communities, as well as improving access to mainstream community and secondary mental health services.

The Budget committed an additional $85.6m for preventative health, for new initiatives and for existing immunisation and screening programs. These are described as follows:
The National Childhood Immunisation Program received a $24m boost over two years. The major initiative in 1995-96 will be to set up a National Childhood Immunisation register to act as a database. Other initiatives will include continued funding of the States and Territories to buy and distribute NHMRC recommended childhood vaccines to immunisation providers; review Commonwealth funding of the purchase of these vaccines at the end of 1996-97 for States and Territories that have not reached vaccine coverage targets; and ongoing target training and education for immunisation providers and the wider community, focusing on people from non-English-speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The National Cervical Screening Program received funding of $41.8m over four years ($7m for 1995-96) to enhance communication and recruitment strategies to increase women's participation in screening; to provide additional services to improve access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women in rural and remote areas; to introduce measures to strengthen quality assurance at all steps of the screening pathway, including developing and implementing standards for laboratories, taking smears, and the clinical management of women with abnormalities found by screening; and for setting up cervical cytology registries in all States and Territories to notify women when their Pap smears are due.

A $3.8m two-year research and education program for Hepatitis C was announced. National education strategies will be developed, and the NHMRC will create guidelines for the control of Hepatitis C that will include protocols for its clinical management and guidelines for laboratory diagnosis.

Funding of $13m over four years was made available for a new package of initiatives to investigate the causes of youth suicide. This includes $7m in additional funding and $6m that has been earmarked from existing funds available under the National Mental Health Strategy. The funds will be used to trial a number of strategies specifically to address the needs of young people in high risk groups, such as young people who have previously attempted suicide, young people in rural and remote areas, young people with a mental illness, and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The initiatives are to include: pilot programs undertaken with medical general practitioners (GPs) to increase their awareness of youth suicide and enhance their capacity to deal with these issues; incentive funding to re-establish a trial follow-up program for young people who have attempted suicide; piloting of suicide awareness programs as proposed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; further training and support of health professionals who come into contact with vulnerable young people and their
families; and the development, collection and publication of data to increase knowledge and understanding of the risk factors associated with youth suicide. The Minister for Human Services and Health will consult with her State and Territory counterparts as to how the $6m should be allocated under the National Mental Health Strategy.

The Budget established Health Australia, an $18.3m three-year program ($7m in 1995-96) dedicated to finding new ways to reduce preventable disease and death. Future directions of health promotion will be informed by the work of the Health Advancement Standing Committee of the NHMRC. The Committee will examine the work undertaken under Tobacco Harm Minimisation, and will develop detailed advice on the long-term future role of health promotion in Australia. This advice will include: appropriate health promotion models and structures; workforce and training needs for health promotion; identifying health promotion performance measures; and developing mechanisms to foster communication and cooperation between health promotion organisations with common goals and objectives.

The 1995-96 Budget allocated $3.6m over five years for an education and assistance program to deal with female genital mutilation in certain migrant groups. Specific legislation banning the practice will be introduced to reinforce the message that female genital mutilation is not an acceptable practice in Australia.

30 May

The Minister for Human Services and Health announced that the first National Men’s Health Conference would be held in Melbourne, 10–11 August 1995. This conference will identify ways of targeting health promotion strategies to persuade men to take better care of their health and wellbeing.

8 June

The Minister for Human Services and Health announced funding of $1.4m over four years for the Program of Assistance for Survivors of Torture and Trauma, to assist refugees and migrants who suffered torture or trauma prior to coming to Australia.

1 July

Responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health was transferred to the Department of Human Services and Health.
17 July
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced a national project focusing on the health and wellbeing of older women. The project is to be conducted by a consortium of health professionals, educators and managers through Luminis Pty Ltd, University of Adelaide. The project will identify the priority needs of older and isolated women and offer appropriate programs of information, education and other assistance. It will develop models of collaboration among local government agencies, health professionals, service providers and consumer organisations, and develop a draft plan through piloting a number of local initiatives that will be used as a basis for consultation with key national bodies. The project is valued at $148,800.

30 August
The Minister for Human Service and Health announced funding of more than $1m over three years to establish a new national network to address the specific mental health needs of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The network is to be established and maintained by the University of Melbourne’s Victorian Transcultural Psychiatry Unit.

27 September
The report of the evaluation of the current three-year HIV/AIDS Strategy (Feachem 1995), which finishes in June 1996, was released. The report has 79 recommendations and concludes that HIV/AIDS remains a major public health challenge which Australia should continue to manage with a dedicated and securely funded national strategy. The Government announced its support for a third, five-year National HIV/AIDS Strategy with appropriate funding.

6 October
The Minister for Human Services and Health unveiled the Government’s youth suicide prevention program at the inaugural meeting of the Youth Suicide Prevention Advisory Group. Details of the program are detailed in the National Plan for Youth in Distress, entitled Here for Life (Department of Human Services and Health 1995a). A major aim is to develop better practices for youth, health and welfare services, and to introduce more responsive service models into existing structures in order to bring about a comprehensive process of reform.
15 October
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced funding of $440,000 for the development of national standards for mental health services. A consortium of three organisations – the Australian Council of Healthcare Standards, the Community Health Accreditation and Standards Program, and Area Integrated Mental Health Services – will work together over the next year to develop the standards.

16 October
A new nationwide television and print campaign urging parents to immunise their children was launched.

20 October
The Minister for Human Services and Health launched a new information kit to help women at risk of cervical cancer. The kit contains the following informational materials: Screening to Prevent Cervical Cancer: Management of Women with Screen Detected Abnormalities, to be distributed to medical practitioners; and Pap Smear Test Results: A Guide for Women with an Abnormal Pap Smear Test, a booklet for women. The kit was developed by the National Cervical Screening Program from management guidelines issued by the NHMRC in 1994.

23 October

24 October
The Office of Rural Health was established under the National Rural Health Strategy.

27 October
The Minister for Human Services and Health launched a campaign targeting parents from non-English-speaking backgrounds, as part of the National Childhood Immunisation Program.

23 November
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced funding of $1.07m for national Hepatitis C education.
28 November
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced grants of more than $14m for this financial year under the Family Planning Program.

30 November
A Memorandum of Understanding that will provide a basis for cooperation between the Department of Human Services and Health and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission was signed. The principles underlying the Memorandum include: acceptance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s holistic view of health; recognition of the importance of local indigenous community control; and intersectoral collaboration. Development of the Memorandum followed the transfer of responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health to the Department of Human Services and Health on 1 July 1995.

30 November
Aboriginal Medical Services received an additional $12.5m to improve primary health care.

14 December
The Minister for Human Services and Health launched the video, Standing on Your Own Two Feet, a community information project designed to combat a leading cause of preventable injury and death among older Australians. The video complements a range of programs intended to reduce the incidence of accidents and injuries from falling.

Health Research
9 May
The 1995-96 Budget allocated funding to the NHMRC of $5m in 1995-96, rising to $12.7 in 1996-97, $18.3m in 1997-98 and $22m in 1998-99, for research in priority areas such as Aboriginal health, breast and prostate cancer, and mental health.

18 October
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced a $41m package of new medical research grants to be provided through the NHMRC in 1996 for research into Aboriginal health, prostate cancer, injury, dementia, schizophrenia and cerebral palsy.
13 December
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced funding of $2.7m over three years for breast cancer research, to be issued by the Kathleen Cunningham Foundation, a national research funding body established by the Commonwealth in 1994.

Drug Abuse Reduction
1 January
A new system of strengthened health warnings took effect. These require all tobacco products manufactured in Australia to bear stronger health warnings.

17 January
The Federal Government's National Anti-Smoking Campaign commenced.

27 January
The Minister for Human Services and Health launched the three-year campaign, 'Alcohol. Go Easy'. The campaign focuses on 'risky' drinking among social drinkers aged 25-34 years, with a secondary target group aged 18-24 years. The NHMRC defines low risk drinking as four standard drinks per day for men and two standard drinks per day for women, with at least two non-drinking days each week.

9 May
The 1995-96 Budget allocated $18.3m for Health Australia. Its first priority will be to reduce the deadly impact of tobacco on Australians, with particular focus on young Australians. The Tobacco Harm Minimisation component of Health Australia will follow a dual strategy of community education and regulatory and legislative support. The community education work will include: marketing activities to challenge the positive image of smoking in the community; educating the community on the health effects of smoking; building community support for initiatives developed under the National Tobacco Policy; establishing community-based education programs to ensure everyone has access to relevant information and services; and setting up research mechanisms which, for example, monitor the program's impact on attitudes, smoking rates and identify specific needs. Regulatory and legislative support will include: setting up mechanisms to educate the community about relevant regulations and legislation, focusing on key target groups; and monitoring the effectiveness of such legislation.
16 June
The Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy announced several measures: it agreed to consider new measures to reduce tobacco smoking, particularly among young people; it endorsed a three-year action plan to combat the escalating use of amphetamines among young people; it established a new taskforce to address heroin-related deaths and look at a system for improved early warning; and it endorsed a draft Alcohol Action Plan.

1 July
From this date, all tobacco products imported into Australia must bear health warnings in accordance with new labelling regulations.

21 September
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced details of the independent panel to review Section 18 of the Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992. The panel will be chaired by Alan Rassaby. The terms of reference are to review Section 18 with regard to its consistency with the principles and objectives of the legislation and relevance to sporting events of international significance in Australia.

The Review will assess options for retaining, modifying or removing the provision for exempting sporting events of international significance under Section 18. It should include the following options: phasing out the exemption; modifying the criteria against which an exemption may be granted; modifying the extent of discretion available in granting an exemption; and specifying conditions to be imposed if an exemption is granted and/or modifying the extent of discretion in the specification of conditions. The Review will report to the Minister by 30 April 1996.

30 November
Aboriginal Substance Abuse programs received an additional $4m funding.

Health Care Services

16 February
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced funds of $22.053m for the Royal Australian College of Practitioners to operate its training program in 1994-95, an increase of $614,000 over the previous year’s grant. The Training Program provides three years of post-intern training relevant to general medical practice throughout Australia. This includes one year of
hospital-based and two years of community-based training. An additional year is available for trainees wishing to undertake rural practice.

9 May

The Budget announced measures to reduce the overall rate of growth in the medical workforce, to better distribute doctors, and to address shortages in some specialties such as dermatology and urology – particularly in rural areas (as identified by Professor Peter Baume in his 1994 report, A Cutting Edge). The Budget allocates $6.4m over four years to set up additional specialist training posts and to deal with issues relating to the selection and training of surgical specialists. These measures will complement existing programs, including the Rural Incentives Program, which forms part of the General Practice Strategy. The Program has been allocated $15.2m with the aim of attracting and retaining General Practitioners in rural and remote areas.

A priority will be to reduce the number of overseas-trained doctors entering Australia’s workforce on both a permanent and temporary basis. Measures are to include: retaining the target limiting the annual number of permanent additions from overseas to the medical workforce to 200 by reducing the quota on overseas-trained doctors able to take the Australian Medical Council’s clinical examination; reducing the number of overseas-trained doctors temporarily filling positions that could be filled by Australian-trained doctors; stricter enforcement of conditions of entry for temporary resident doctors; and tightening the arrangements applying to New Zealand-trained doctors. These measures will result in a saving of $95m over four years. The Government will also be negotiating with universities to reduce the annual intake to medical schools from current levels of around 1200 to 1000.

The Government will work with the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons on a series of projects funded in 1995-96 at $0.3m and including: making surgical specialisation more attractive to women; increasing openness and accountability in training and assessment processes; and possibly reskilling General Practitioners to equip them for routine surgery in situations where it is deemed impractical to provide full-time specialist surgical services.

3 August

The Minister for Human Services and Health released the report of the Public Health Workforce Education and Training Study (University of New South Wales 1995). The study surveyed workers in a range of government and
non-government organisations across Australia. It found that public health workers were multi-disciplinary and highly mobile, and showed a major growth in the intake of students into postgraduate public health education. It is hoped that the report will assist universities to design courses that best meet the diverse needs of both employers and the workforce.

21 September
The Minister for Human Service and Health announced funding of $200,000 over the next 12 months to enable the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists to improve education and training for general practitioners in the mental health area.

14 December
The Minister for Human Services and Health released the paper, Women in the Medical Workforce: The Changing Gender Profile and Its Implications (Department of Human Services and Health 1995b). The paper analyses a range of data and literature which details women’s work patterns in the medical workforce, and highlights a number of issues for further attention. Most women in the medical workforce pursue careers as general practitioners, many on a part-time basis, with relatively few moving into specialist private practice. The proportion of women in the medical workforce is set to rise from 25 per cent to almost 50 per cent over the next decade, and it is therefore considered vital to understand why the work patterns of women doctors are significantly different from their male counterparts.

Service Delivery

20 February
The Minister for Human Services and Health welcomed the report on hospital waiting lists by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (Mays 1995). This is the second report in a project funded by the Commonwealth aimed at improving the quality and comparability of data about waiting lists in the States and Territories.

9 May
Hospitals will receive Federal funding of over $4.6 billion in the 1995-96 Budget. The Budget has committed $15m, including new funding of $6m, to
establish nationally consistent performance measures for standards of quality and outcomes of care in Australian hospitals. The three-year program will develop and trial performance indicators which can be used in hospitals to improve overall quality control. The program will also support demonstration activities including: monitoring adverse incidents to reduce adverse patient events; the development and implementation of clinical practice guidelines; research into the relative cost-effectiveness of alternative clinical interventions; and enhanced quality management. The program will also develop an information/education strategy to promote the use of indicators and communicate quality and outcome improvement strategies to clinicians, managers and consumers.

The 1995-96 Budget allocated funds of $45m over two years to reduce hospital waiting lists and to undertake the following initiatives: the publication of national waiting list data to highlight areas of clinically inappropriate waiting times, and thus assist the States and Territories in the better management of access to elective surgery and allow better targeting of resources to areas of poor performance; the development of nationally consistent urgency ratings for the prioritisation of procedures according to clinical need; and the transfer, throughout the public hospital sector, of best practice management systems for elective surgery through the National Demonstration Hospitals Program.

1 June
The Minister for Human Service and Health announced the findings of the Australian Hospital Care Study, which was commissioned by the Department and undertaken by a consortium from the universities of Adelaide and Newcastle. It reveals a disturbing number of deaths and injuries occurring in hospitals (0.5 per cent and 1 per cent of admissions respectively) that could have been prevented.

15 June
Commonwealth and State and Territory Health Ministers reached an historic agreement on Commonwealth-State funding arrangements to improve patient care in public hospitals. The new bilateral agreements will take into account: improved patient outcomes and access to services; increasing demand on public hospitals arising from declining private insurance levels; productivity improvements made by public hospitals; and the need to reduce barriers to patient care in the most appropriate setting.
20 September
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced a new federally-funded project under the National Hospital Outcomes Program to examine ways of assessing the quality of care in Australian hospitals. Over the next 18 months, Monash University’s Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine and the Alfred Healthcare Group will receive funding of $421,000 to test ways of comparing and assessing levels of care in hospitals throughout Australia. The indicators to be tested are based on those developed by the Australian Council of Healthcare Standards in conjunction with the Royal Australian College of Medical Administrators. The program will also promote activities that will assist hospitals in responding to problems identified by performance measures.

5 November
The Minister for Human Services and Health released the interim report of the Taskforce on Quality in Australian Health Care (1995). The Taskforce was established to recommend strategies to reduce preventable injuries and deaths in Australian hospitals. It made recommendations on four key issues: acute respiratory problems in children; action on vital laboratory results; patient falls; deep vein thrombosis; and pulmonary embolism. The Minister announced funding of $1.2m to extend incident monitoring and to develop a general occurrence classification of adverse events. The work is to be directed by Professor Bill Runciman on behalf of the Australian Patient Safety Foundation based at Royal Adelaide Hospital.

19 December
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced funding of $50,000 for six months to design a computer software package for developing a more flexible hospital booking system. The aim is to tackle hospital waiting lists by optimising the use of available resources, smoothing out current variation in the demand for beds, minimising the cancellation of elective surgery due to lack of beds or operating theatre time, and assisting in identifying best practice benchmarks.

Medicare

9 May
The 1995-96 Budget announced that the Medicare levy will increase from 1.4 per cent to 1.5 per cent to help fund growth in expenditure on Common-
wealth medical benefits, estimated to be $6 billion in 1995-96. The levy is expected to raise additional funds of over $299m in a full year, and amount to an increase of 64 cents per week for a person of average income.

The Budget introduced a package of measures designed to improve the delivery of pathology services under Medicare. This initiative will constrain the rate of growth of pathology service use and expenditure, and increase efficiency and effectiveness. A saving of $46m is expected this financial year with further on-going savings anticipated. The measures include strengthening incentives in the Medicare benefit arrangements to promote effective pathology practice from 1 July 1995 by: introducing new arrangements for the reimbursement of pathologists; targeted changes in fee relativities for a selection of items in the Pathology Services Table; a joint review of the licensing scheme with the industry and profession, with results to be implemented from 1 February 1996; and a joint industry, profession and government National Pathology Forum in 1995, to examine longer-term directions for Australian pathology.

Medicare Benefits Schedule fees will increase from 1 November 1995. The actual increase will depend on movements in indexes to the end of June 1995, but provisional estimates are: for specialist items, an increase of 1.7 per cent; for medical general practitioner attendance items, 0.85 per cent. Other non-referred attendances will not increase.

Funding available for general practitioner grants in 1995-96 will be $211.6m. The allocation for Better Practice Program grants will be $99m.

The 1995-96 Budget allocated total payments to the States and Territories under the Medicare Agreements of $4.64 billion, an increase of $105m over 1994-95 funding, and announced the introduction of penalties under the Medicare Agreements to reduce cost-shifting.

3 October

The Health Insurance Commission launched MedClaims – new procedures for claiming Medicare electronically. These encourage the electronic lodgement of doctors’ Medicare claims, making payments faster and easier and eliminating voucher forms. In addition, MedClaims will offer computer-generated prescription stationery at no cost to medical practices using this service (currently charged at $150 per stationery package).
Health Insurance

20 October
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced the appointment of the first Private Health Insurance Complaints Commissioner. The Commissioner’s main functions include investigating and conciliating complaints relating to private health insurance cover, and advising on industry practices for improving services to consumers.

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme

24 April
The Federal Government and the Pharmacy Guild of Australia signed a new five-year agreement. The new agreement will introduce a system of professional allowances to encourage pharmacists to expand their role in delivering primary health care. Under this initiative, the Federal Government has allocated $4m for a review of drug use in the community and nursing homes. The dispensing fee paid to pharmacists by the Government (currently $4.06 per prescription) has been increased, and a new administrative fee has been introduced in acknowledgment of the role of pharmacists in implementing new government policies such as generic drug substitution.

9 May
The 1995-96 Budget allocated $2.2 billion to PBS and announced an agreement between the Government and the Pharmacy Guild of Australia to reduce growth pressures in the Scheme. Under this agreement, $45m will be saved over four years by removing some drugs from the PBS that could be dispensed over the counter, and the PBS safety threshold will increase from $407.60 to $600 per year from 1 January 1996, representing a saving of $100m over four years. These changes will not apply to people holding appropriate concession cards.

United Nations Reform Program (WHO)

9 May
The 1995-96 Budget allocated $1.65m over four years for Australia’s role in the reform of the World Health Organisation (WHO), part of which will
assist Australia's participation on the Executive Board of WHO. In 1997, Australia will host the 48th Western Pacific Regional Committee of WHO.

References


Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement

Renegotiation of Agreement

11 April
The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) considered a progress report by Housing Ministers on proposed reforms to housing assistance arrangements. The Council endorsed Housing Ministers’ proposals for changes in the Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement (CSHA) to achieve better housing outcomes. The reform agenda involved a clarification of State and Commonwealth roles and responsibilities. Under the proposed CSHA, the Commonwealth would be responsible for income support while the States and Territories would be responsible for the delivery of housing services and tenancy and property management. In order to pursue agreed national objectives, the Commonwealth would rely on core performance indicators to assess housing outcomes. The States and Territories would be given flexibility in delivering housing assistance.

17 August
The Housing Ministers’ Conference was held in Perth to discuss various items relating to reforms of the Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement. Issues discussed included: long-term roles and responsibilities; financial reporting; development of a needs measurement model; consumer rights and responsibilities; minimum legislative standards for residential tenancies in Australia; and some specific programs of housing assistance. The Ministers agreed that further work would be required on developing performance measures and housing needs indicators to enable assessment of housing outcomes of CSHA programs.
11 December

The Prime Minister, in his statement *Community and Nation* (Keating 1995), announced the Commonwealth Government’s approach to national housing policy. The reforms were proposed to be carried out through two stages: the renegotiation of the Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement, to come into force for up to three years from 1 July 1996; and the formulation of longer term policy directions, to be put into place by 1999. The proposed changes are designed to achieve greater equity of assistance to people in the public and private rental markets, improve people’s ability to choose appropriate housing, and deliver much improved private rental affordability for people on low incomes.

By the end of 1995, a Bill establishing the new agreement had not been passed. However, in summary, the main features of the proposed new CSHA include: clearer delineation of Commonwealth and State roles and responsibilities; introduction of performance monitoring to demonstrate achievement of intended outcomes; development of nationally consistent needs assessment; and introduction of annual financial reporting. In short, a new CSHA would represent a change in focus from inputs and outputs to the achievement of outcomes in a performance-based agreement.

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Public Rental Housing Program*

30 June

A bilateral housing agreement was signed by the Federal and Northern Territory governments for the provision of housing and related infrastructure to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Territory. Co-signing this Agreement was the Chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). The Agreement was the first to be negotiated under the National Indigenous Housing Strategy. It established a new Aboriginal Housing Authority of the Northern Territory, which would develop a rolling strategic plan for meeting housing and infrastructure needs of Aboriginal communities and determine allocation of funding in accordance with the plan.

*Social Housing Subsidy Program*

27 October

The Federal Minister for Housing and Regional Development announced an initiative to improve young people’s access to affordable and appropriate housing by refocusing its Social Housing Subsidy Program (SHSP) to meet
the accommodation needs of young people, particularly young people exiting crisis accommodation. Introduced in 1994-95, SHSP is a Commonwealth program that, in partnership with the States, provides funds for up to 20 years to local government or non-profit community groups to subsidise recurrent costs of financing accommodation for people on low or moderate incomes. Funding available under the program will be $6 million in 1995-96 rising to $8 million in 1996-97 and thereafter. Three proposals, from Western Australia, New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, received ministerial approval in 1995 for implementation.

**Community Housing Program**

**7 September**

The Federal Minister for Housing and Regional Development, in his speech to the Catholic Welfare National Conference, stated the Commonwealth Government’s commitment to strengthen the community housing sector. The Commonwealth will provide $65,000 to the Centacare Community Housing Project to facilitate the Church’s coordinated involvement in providing community housing. Community Housing Program (CHP) is a tied program under the CSHA that was introduced in the 1992-93 Budget and has been operating since 1 January 1993. The Minister noted that community housing has proved itself to be popular among low-income people because it provides flexible and affordable options.

**Supported Accommodation Assistance Program**

**30 June**

As of this date, all States and Territories except New South Wales and Western Australia had entered into a new Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Agreement with the Commonwealth. SAAP is a joint Commonwealth–State program which aims to provide transitional support services to homeless people and help them achieve self-reliance and independence; the financial year 1994-95 marked the beginning of a further five-year SAAP Agreement. The Commonwealth allocated $105 million to the States and Territories for the program in the 1995-96 budget.

**22 September**

The National Data Collection Agency (NDCA) was established at the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The purpose of the NDCA is to develop a new national SAAP data collection, to commence from July 1996.
The NDCA will provide information and support on an ongoing basis to ensure that all agencies participating in the collection gain benefits from their data. Expected outputs include twice-yearly summary reports to agencies of their data and comparative national, state or regional statistics; biannual state and national reports to governments and service providers; and responses to requests for analysis of specific issues by service providers or governments.

10 October
The Federal Minister for Housing and Regional Development, in an address to the official launch of the Women's Emergency Services Network (WESNET), affirmed the Commonwealth Government's strong commitment to women. WESNET is a national network of services for women and children who are escaping violence or are homeless. For the 1994-95 Budget, funding amounting to $700,000 was established for the category of Referral Services for Women Escaping Domestic Violence in Rural and Remote Areas.

Budget Initiatives

10 May
Additional funding of $86 million from the 1995-96 Budget to the 1998-99 Budget was provided to ATSIC for improvements in Aboriginal housing and related infrastructure.

5 June
Two initiatives totalling $300,000 to enhance the rights of tenants and clarify the roles and responsibilities of landlords and tenants were announced by the Minister for Housing and Regional Development. The first initiative outlined uniform minimum legislative standards which govern landlord and tenant relationships within each State or Territory. As detailed in the report, *Minimum Legislative Standards for Residential Tenancies in Australia* (Kennedy, See & Sutherland 1995), uniform minimum standards should be applied to meet the interests of all parties. The second initiative, a tenant education project, aims to inform tenants and landlords of their rights and obligations. As part of this project the specific needs of people from non-English-speaking backgrounds, people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin, residents of boarding houses and sole parents with children would be examined.
30 June
The Department of Social Security provides a Rent Assistance supplementary payment to low income private renters. The Commonwealth Government announced an increase in Rent Assistance to Australians on low incomes and in the private rental market. For the 1995-96 Budget, increases in Rent Assistance for families with children was $5 per fortnight, effective from March 1996. Funding of $88 million has been allocated up to 1998-99.

Legislation

23 June
The Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 1995 was passed by the Parliament and received Royal Assent on 23 June 1995, becoming Act No.49 of 1995. As part of the scaling down of the First Home Owners Scheme, the Bill amended the First Home Owners Act 1983. In addition, the Bill amended the Housing Assistance Act 1989 to permit the Minister to authorise under the Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement up to the full level of Commonwealth funding during 1995-96, in circumstances where a State is unable to match up to half of untied grants from the value of home loans made under home purchase assistance programs.

29 November
The Housing Assistance Bill 1995 was introduced to the House of Representatives. The Bill had not been debated when the Parliament was prorogued on 29 January 1996 in the lead-up to the Federal election. As a consequence, the Bill lapsed. In order to proceed with a new Agreement, a new Bill would need to be introduced by the Commonwealth Government.

Housing Industry
The Australian Bureau of Statistics building approvals data for 1995 showed a continuation of the decline in activity in the housing industry. This decline was reflected in a reduction in building approvals, due mainly to a sharp fall in approvals for medium to higher density dwellings. According to the statement by the Minister for Housing and Regional Development on 1 March 1995, the fall resulted from a restriction in lending by some banks to consumers and developers as a reaction to a perceived over-supply. Other forward indicators of housing activity, such as building commencements and
housing finance, showed a consistent pattern of a continuing decline from historically high levels during 1991-1993. The downturn in housing industry activity for 1995 was widespread across Australia, with falls in dwelling commencements and housing finance recorded in all States and Territories. With regard to median housing prices, the monthly figures for 1995 released by the Real Estate Institute did not show a uniform pattern for all capital cities, with a declining trend for Canberra and Hobart, a marginal increase in Sydney, Brisbane and Perth, and a relatively stable market in Melbourne.

27 October
The Indicative Planning Council (IPC) for the Housing Industry (1995) forecasted that in 1996-97 there would be 133,000 dwelling commencements. The IPC expected the current oversupply of dwellings to be absorbed by late 1996. With regard to the possibility of negative equity, where the asset value of a house falls below the amount of the debt obligation, the Council was of the view that the risk of widespread negative equity developing in Australia was slight.

International Cooperation

6–12 March
The World Summit for Social Development was convened in Copenhagen. One hundred and seventeen heads of state or government met to discuss the interrelationship of economic and social policy. Leading the Australian Government’s contribution to the conference, the Department of Housing and Regional Development established a secretariat to coordinate activity in the Summit, and actively liaised with South-East Asian countries and the UN Secretariat. Australia played an active role in specific regional events in preparation for the Conference by contributing to discussions on core issues at the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) Expert Meeting in Bangkok, a jointly funded Australia–Indonesia seminar in Bandung, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) sponsored Conference on Social Policy Development in Beijing, and the ESCAP Asia-Pacific Ministerial Meeting on Social Policy in Manila.

31 May
A Memorandum of Understanding on building and housing was signed between Japan and Australia. The initial program of activities under the Memorandum includes working towards mutual recognition of building
standards and testing methods, and the establishment of a Japan–Australia Housing and Building Committee to pursue activities of mutual interest. Areas of interest include building and housing policy, building codes and building material standards.

30 June
Funding of $500,000 was announced in the 1995-96 Budget for Australia’s participation in the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II), to be held in Istanbul in June 1996. The funds make provision for funding of a secretariat function administered by the Department of Housing and Regional Development, and subsequently for the Department of Social Security, as well as for domestic and regional consultative processes including joint funding with ESCAP of a regional seminar. The conference will provide an important opportunity to enhance cooperation at the international, regional and domestic levels.

26 October
China and Australia signed a Protocol of Meeting complementing a Memorandum of Understanding to which the two Governments were signatories in June 1994. The Protocol provides further details of possible areas of cooperation. These include: housing planning, design and construction; housing financing and management systems; property management practices; and land use and environmental planning. It is proposed that the activities will be pursued through various methods including: commercial joint ventures for the undertaking of projects; exchange of information and personnel; and conferences and training programs.

Reports and Reviews

18 January
The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare released a report entitled Public Housing in Australia (Foard et al. 1994). Launched by the Minister for Housing and Regional Development, the report assesses the effectiveness of public housing by examining housing affordability, adequacy, security of tenure and accessibility. It also profiles public housing stock, funding arrangements and characteristics of public tenants. The results show that affordable rents in the public sector reduced the likelihood of public tenants being in poverty by over one-third in 1990. Nevertheless, public renters were
more likely than private sector households to have experienced problems with their homes. Across all States and Territories in Australia, demand for public housing outstrips supply; for every household accommodated, over two more apply for housing. The report points to the need for data improvement for the purposes of program evaluation and future policy development.

25 July

The report, *Places for Everyone*, prepared by the Australian Urban and Regional Development Review (McDonald 1995) was launched by the Federal Minister for Housing and Regional Development. The report examines outcomes in housing, education, employment, income and transport across communities in Australia divided into seven functional types: the five metropolises, other large cities, provincial service centres, manufacturing and mining towns, coastal resort centres, smaller rural localities and remote towns.

December

The National Youth Housing Strategy (NYHS) released a final report entitled, *Finding a Place* (Maas & McNair 1995). This report presents the findings on a study of young people and their achieving independence in living arrangements. A recommended agenda for action was proposed in order to improve the housing outcomes and options for independent young people on low incomes. The purpose of the report is to provide industry, the community sector and the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments with a recommended agenda for action to inform the future development of youth housing policy. Much of the discussion within the report and the recommended agenda for reform is based upon background research on topics such as: making housing more affordable; improving access to housing; increasing the supply of appropriate and affordable housing; and improving coordinated systems of support for independent low-income young people.

19 December

The first annual report on Government Service Provision prepared by the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (1995) for the Council of Australian Governments was released by the Industry Commission. The volume contains information relating to the effectiveness and efficiency of a number of government-funded social
services including housing assistance. The chapter on housing concentrates on the provision of public housing. Future reports will progressively cover other forms of housing assistance. The report also discusses briefly the roles and responsibilities of the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments through the renegotiation of a new Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement, expected to be effective from 1 July 1996. Proposed reforms to the CSHA include the development of performance indicators to measure outcomes of housing assistance. These will be the basis of many of the measures presented in future reports.

References


Departmental Matters

February
The Portfolio Strategies Group was established. This group is intended to strengthen the cross-portfolio view, improve performance measurement and reporting, and provide an analytical approach to strategic policy development and budgetary tasks.

March
New arrangements for the Department's National Program Plans were announced, with the objective of improving performance reporting. The Plans' focus is a set of performance indicators which measure effectiveness, efficiency and quality for each sub-program.

Home and Community Care

7 February
A report on aged care by the Australian Law Reform Commission (Australian Law Reform Commission 1995a) was launched. The report makes recommendations about how social justice, human rights and federal legal policies should be reflected in aged care legislation.

9 May
The 1995-96 Budget announced a range of expenditure initiatives and reforms in the area of home and community care:

A total of $537m will be provided for community care designed to assist frail older people and people with a disability to remain in their own homes.
The Commonwealth’s contribution to the Home and Community Care (HACC) Program will increase in 1995-96 by $25m to $424m, an increase of 6 per cent in real terms. In partnership with the States and Territories, the Commonwealth Government will institute a number of reforms. Proposed reforms entail: moving to a system of funding with a focus on outcomes for clients; creation of a more streamlined administration by adopting joint approval of funds at the regional level; nationally consistent eligibility and assessment criteria; implementation of a national fees policy.

More places are to be created in the Community Aged Care Packages. These Packages are developing more flexible ways of providing nursing home and hostel services in people’s homes. An allocation of $0.5m over the next three years has been made to test a ‘managed-care’ approach where the full range of Commonwealth–State services and those provided by others will be brought together to meet individual needs. A pilot project will also be expanded.

Over $10m is to be allocated for carers of frail older people, the chronically ill and people with a disability. Over the next three years the new Carer Support Strategy will enable carer associations in each State and Territory to continue to provide counselling, information kits and assistance to individual carers; to develop information specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and carers of non-English-speaking backgrounds (to be communicated through culturally appropriate community networks); and to implement a communication strategy to raise awareness of carers, service providers, health professionals and the community, both about the role and needs of carers and the range of government assistance available.

Funding of the Commonwealth Respite for Carers Program will increase by 10 per cent (or $1.3m) in 1995-96, taking the total available funds to $14.5m. Carers are also supported under the HACC Program. Funding has been made available to review and improve the effectiveness of respite care programs, and to improve the administration of the Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit.

Allocations were made of $21m over five years to improve community care services for veterans, and $5m over four years for research directed to areas of particular concern for veterans and war widows.

21 September

The Minister for Human Services and Health announced the first step towards trials of Coordinated Care, a program designed to cut across programs and jurisdictions to focus on the social as well as medical needs of people whose care and support requirements are complex or longterm. The trials will specifically target people with high levels of need.
6 October

The Minister for Human Services and Health launched a new kit entitled, *A World of Food: A Manual to Assist People in the Provision of Culturally Appropriate Meals for Older People* (Gallegos & Perry 1995), compiled by the Department of Geriatric Medicine at Osborne Park Hospital, Western Australia.

7 December

The Minister for Human Services and Health announced funding of $7.6m over four years for the Ethnic Older Persons Strategy. The Strategy aims to offer a range of care models and will comprise: $0.824m to promote culturally appropriate assessment of ethnic older peoples' needs; $2.8m to identify, promote and demonstrate best practice in the care of older people from ethnic backgrounds; $2.4m to fund ways of increasing access to high quality care; and $1.6m to fund ethnic community organisations to assist in developing high quality care services.

19 December

The Minister for Human Services and Health announced that the Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit would increase by 5.1 per cent to a level of $57.10 per fortnight from 4 January 1996, in line with the Consumer Price Index. The Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit is paid to people who undertake care in their own homes of relatives who would otherwise receive nursing home care.

Residential Care for Older People

9 May

The 1995-96 Budget provided an additional $36.4m over four years for capital investment assistance to nursing homes. A new tiered funding system for nursing home infrastructure (Standard Aggregated Module (SAM)) will be established and include the following: new and rebuilt homes may be eligible to receive an additional $7 per place per day, indexed for 10 years; nursing homes spending at least $20,000 per place on upgrading may be eligible to receive an additional $3 per bed per day, indexed for 10 years; homes of a satisfactory standard will continue to receive SAM funding, indexed; and a small proportion of homes, those which fail to meet basic standards (e.g. in areas of fire and safety) will have their infrastructure (SAM) funding frozen at 1994-95 levels until standards are improved. Care funding (Care Aggregated Module (CAM)) will not be frozen. This funding will replace
funding for new, rebuilt and upgraded homes; however, voluntary sector homes receiving new nursing home approval will be eligible for a capital grant of the capitalised value of the additional infrastructure funding. The new arrangements are to take effect from 1 October 1995. An additional $5m per year will be committed to replace non-profit hostel buildings primarily used for the care of financially disadvantaged people. Buildings not meeting basic fire and safety standards will be prioritised.

The Government has made a commitment to work closely with the aged care industry, unions and consumers over the next year to improve consumer choice in aged care. The care of people with particular needs, such as dementia sufferers, will be targeted.

Approvals-in-Principle for new nursing homes and hostels are to be subject to annual renewal. Under this initiative, approvals more than two years old and others making little or no progress will be reviewed. The aim is to ensure new facilities are well targeted and established in a timely way.

Funding will be provided to increase the number of participating facilities in pilots for a project intermixing nursing home and hostel care places. The project enables residents to remain in one residential care location and receive either hostel or nursing home care as their needs change.

Of the 6000 new hostel places to be allocated over the next four years, 33 per cent are to attract capital funding. Capital assistance will be targeted to areas and communities in greatest need.

A Nursing Home Advisory Service will be established to support nursing home proprietors. The Service will offer expertise on the nursing home funding system and will help develop strategies for nursing homes experiencing financial problems. Legislation also will be introduced to improve the level of compliance with regulatory requirements, such as encouraging nursing home proprietors to enhance the standard of record keeping.

Incentives will be provided to nursing homes to improve staff occupational health and safety by paying average premiums as a percentage of nursing home payrolls. Reflecting consultation with industry and unions, the new system will protect homes against catastrophic events and provide training and education support.
1 October
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced a grant of $1.62m for Residential Aged Care Advocacy Services to promote residents' rights and improve the quality of care in Commonwealth-subsidised nursing homes and hostels.

Assistance for People with Disabilities

January
A set of key reforms to the Disability Services Program (DSP) was recommended in the report of the Review of the Disability Services Program (Baume & Kay 1995). The review found, in particular, an unmet demand for vocational assistance, and recommended key reforms to clarify goals and improve equity, effectiveness, client outcomes and program administration in the employment component of the Program.

9 May
The 1995-96 Budget introduced a range of measures of reform for the Disability Services Program. The DSP will assist 28,000 people, an increase of 650 new places, in 1995-96.

To address reforms recommended in the employment component of the Review of the Disability Services Program (Baume & Kay 1995), a comprehensive analysis of the need for employment assistance for all people with a disability will be conducted by the departments which manage the DSP – namely, the Department of Social Security, the Department of Employment, Education and Training, and the Department of Human Services and Health. This study will take place over the next six months and assist the 1996-97 Budget process.

An allocation of $42m over the next four years has been made for reforms to the employment component of the DSP including: increasing employment options for people eligible for the Disability Support Pension, but whose needs cannot be met solely through mainstream labour market programs; phasing in over two years an independent needs assessment and referral system to determine priority of access to services and to address the needs of women, indigenous peoples and people from non-English-speaking backgrounds; equitable funding arrangements resulting in the introduction
of a performance-based funding system for employment services (to be developed over the next 18 months and phased in over three years from July 1997); the introduction, over the next two years, of a system to assess productivity wage levels of employees in supported or sheltered employment; and service provider training in the use of new assessment systems, new payment systems and new outcomes monitoring systems. Relevant peak bodies, service providers and consumers will be consulted during the development of the new system.

30 May
The National Telephone Typewriter Relay Service, providing people with severe speech and hearing impairment with access to the national telephone system, commenced.

31 July
The Minister for Human Services and Health released a statement on the Strategic Review of the Disability Services Program, announcing the introduction of a new independent assessment and referral process and a new funding system for the Disability Services Program. This will mean a move away from block grants to the purchase of specific results for individuals at a specified price. The results will be reviewed every three years, and where services are not achieving their goals, new tenders for service provision will be invited.

August
The Australian Law Reform Commission released a discussion paper which looks at how the Commonwealth, through the Department of Human Services and Health, is meeting its obligations towards people with a disability (Australian Law Reform Commission 1995b). Its aim is to obtain feedback from the community about how new legislation should regulate Commonwealth funding and the provision of services for people with a disability.

The paper concentrates on the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service and services funded by the Department such as: open labour market employment services; supported employment or small business services; sheltered workshops and vocationally-focused Activity Therapy Centres; advocacy services; print disability services; information services; and other initiatives to improve the independence of people with a disability. It also looks at how the Disability Services Act 1986, currently a main mechanism for funding
support services, funds and regulates service providers and protects community resources. The paper examines the effectiveness of the Act in achieving equity, access and social justice, but does not cover the Home and Community Care Program.

18 October
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced funding of $1.1m for a new national Disability Services Quality Council, as part of the Government’s overall Disability Services Program reforms.

20 December
The Minister for Human Services and Health announced funding of $1.3m to extend the Jobnet Pilot Program for a further six months. The program gives young, intellectually disabled people between the ages of 15 and 25 access to vocational training.

Services for Families with Children

9 May
The policy statement, *An Agenda for Families* (Keating, Baldwin & Crowley 1995), was released by the Government with the 1995-96 Budget. The statement is based on consultations by the National Council for the International Year of the Family.

The Government also announced its commitment to meeting the demand for work-related child care by the turn of the century, based on a target of 354,000 places by 2000-01. This target includes 60,000 additional community-managed and non-profit places, and another 20,000 places yet to become operational under the joint Commonwealth and State National Child Care Strategy. The 1995-96 Budget allocated $1,095m for the Children’s Services Program.

Children with additional needs in approved child care services will get increased support through the expansion of the Supplementary Services Program (SUPS). The priority groups are children with a disability, children from non-English-speaking backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. A further $17.2m over four years in addition to the 1994 Budget allocation of an extra $14.2m over four years, sees an estimated
37,000 families and 552 services benefiting from this program. A major evaluation of the SUPS Program recommended the implementation of a regional model offering support by the SUPS teams to all service types in their region including children from each of the priority groups. This initiative will implement the regional support model.

On 1 April 1996, there will be a real increase of $2 per week in the minimum fee paid by parents who receive Childcare Assistance, the Childcare Cash Rebate or both. On the average 20 hours per week of care, this will be an increase of 80 cents a week. Also from this date, eligible families requiring occasional child care will be able to access Childcare Assistance to reduce their fee for up to 12 hours of care per week per child in the Long Day Care sector. Occasional care services, where access is currently restricted to four hours per child per week, will be able to move to the new arrangements. This will improve support for up to 31,000 additional families receiving work-related occasional care.

The Government has brought forward 3,500 additional Family Day Care places, to be implemented over the next two years. In addition, the current limit on the number of employer-sponsored Family Day Care places has been removed to encourage employers to take up Family Day Care places for their employees. A further 4,250 planned community-based centre places will also be converted over four years into Family Day Care and innovative services such as mobile child care services for seasonal needs and multipurpose centres. Within these latter places, 500 are to be established by 1998-99 with funding of $7.5m over four years as innovative services in remote areas. From 1 April 1996, parents using Family Day Care will be able to claim Childcare Assistance for all sick leave, and all families will be entitled to Childcare Assistance at a rate of 50 per cent for any holding fees paid to retain their child care place during annual leave. The current meals, snacks and transport allowances available only in Family Day Care will be withdrawn.

The 1995-96 Budget provides an additional 13,060 places for Outside School Hours Care; some 53,000 places are to be established by 2000-01. The Government will provide $6m over the next three years to research and pilot alternative methods of delivery of Outside School Hours Care, and a comprehensive research program will simultaneously be conducted to better understand family preferences and ways of improving service delivery. The Government’s commitment to the community-based Long Day Care sector
is to be maintained, with 4,750 places to be established between 1995-96 and 199899. Growth in the private sector is anticipated to continue at a rate of about 15,000 places per year.

The 1995-96 Budget will provide $14.4m over three years to establish a capital upgrade and replacement program, commencing in 1996-97. This program will help small centres of less than 30 places to become more efficient through relocating or amalgamating with other services. This initiative includes $6.9m for a rolling program to upgrade or replace older child care centres funded solely by the Commonwealth.

Sole parents participating in the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program will benefit from an additional $14.7m to be allocated over four years for a further 4,000 temporary child care places per year to meet increased demand. This will bring the total number of temporary child care places for JET clients to 15,000 places in 1995-96.

30 June
An independent evaluation of the Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS) by Coopers and Lybrand (Coopers & Lybrand Consultants 1995) was released. QIAS encourages centres and parents to work together in their complementary roles to define a philosophy and goals for guiding the program and all other activities at the centre. The evaluation report confirmed that the system is cost-effective and accepted by both parents and staff as a valuable tool by which centres can improve the quality of care provided. It also found that participation in QIAS and the process of self-study were the most important factors associated with improved quality of child care. The cost to centres of implementing the system was estimated at about $1.95 per week per place. However, the evaluation also noted that many centres experienced difficulty in obtaining parental input.

Industry Commission Report on Charitable Organisations

27 September
The Minister for Human Services and Health, the Minister for Development Cooperation and Pacific Island Affairs, the Treasurer, and the Assistant Treasurer released the Industry Commission's report on charitable
organisations (Industry Commission 1995). The Industry Commission Inquiry was set up by the Government in December 1993 to examine the role of charitable organisations and the way they interact with governments, particularly in service delivery. The final report was presented to the Government in June 1995. The following details in part the Government's response to the report:

The Government accepts the recommendation that funding should be related to outcomes. Where it is not easy to define desired outcomes, it is accepted that funding should be based on agreed objectives and that costs should reflect efficiency and quality. The Government also accepts the recommendation that organisations should have a publicly available policy on client fees. However, it notes that for services funded or partly funded by governments, these policies should reflect government policies on access.

While the Government endorses the objective of improving service quality, the Ministers said further work was needed on the establishment of formal quality standards. The Government supports the idea of a consistent set of funding principles for charitable organisations, but further consideration is needed of how this might best be achieved.

The Ministers welcomed the Commission's emphasis on improving accountability to governments, taxpayers and the public and will further consider the recommendations on incorporation and accounting standards, and their links to tax deductibility and fundraising legislation. The Government supported the broad objectives of ongoing review of the tax deductible status of non-government aid organisations, but would further examine the actual approach to be adopted for implementation. The Government does not accept that the fringe benefits tax exemption should be removed.

On the question of selecting service providers, the Minister for Human Services and Health noted that, wherever practical, the Government currently pursues the principle of contestability when selecting charitable organisations to provide services. The Government will examine the tender issue more closely before extending these processes.

The Government accepts the broad objectives of recommendations on best practice in departmental administrative arrangements with charitable organisations. Recommendations on simplifying and standardising tax exemptions, fundraising regulation, inoperative inheritance legislation and policies for funding peak councils have implications for other levels of government and will be raised with the relevant Commonwealth and State and Territory bodies for consideration.
Volunteers

26 September

The Minister for Human Services and Health announced a Cabinet decision to extend the Volunteer Management program with additional funding of approximately $2m.

References


Immigration and Ethnic Affairs Budget

9 May

Total outlays for the portfolio’s 1995-96 budget will be $452 million compared with $410 million in 1994-95. Specially targeted in the 1995-96 Federal Budget are settlement services for newly-arrived migrants – particularly those in special need. Budget highlights include: enhancement of Migration Resource Centre work within Australia; improved settlement information, with particular reference to identified disadvantaged groups; extension of the employer awareness campaign, encouraging employers to not employ visitors to Australia who lack appropriate visas; a focus on citizenship issues, such as campaigns to raise community awareness and encourage residents to seek Australian citizenship; expanded marketing for the Business Skills category; streamlining of arrangements for business travellers.

Business Migration

22 March

Cabinet approved an increase in business migration to Australia during the 1994-95 financial year of 500 places, bringing the intake under this class to around 2,100.

Three initiatives were launched to boost Australia’s entrepreneurial skills base: business migrants must agree to invest in Government securities, have demonstrated ability in investment and business management skills, and meet given requirements regarding language ability and age. Other initiatives increase accessibility to the Business Skills Class of Migration for potential migrants already in Australia on temporary business activities.
16 June
International business people can be nominated for short visits to Australia by the Queensland and Northern Territory Governments and selected corporations from July 1995. The initiative will be introduced on a trial basis and will mean streamlined immigration processing for the 200,000 business people who visit Australia for up to three months each year.

16 August
Prospective business migrants to Australia will be able to invest in designated State and Territory government securities for a minimum of three years. The securities are designed to attract people with a business or investment background who can invest from $750,000 to $2m.

2 November
Sweeping reforms to temporary entry requirements for business people and highly skilled specialists follow from the Roach Committee’s recommendations (Committee of Inquiry into the Temporary Entry of Business People and Highly Skilled Specialists 1995). International business people coming to Australia for short periods of time can apply for the new temporary entry visa. The applicants’ spouse and children are granted equivalent visa entitlements.

Illegal Workers

9 May
The Federal Government stepped up its campaign against would-be illegal workers with an allocation of $709,000 in the 1994-95 Budget. Since 1991, the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs has undertaken a concerted campaign encouraging employers to check work rights and immigration status before hiring.

Immigration Programs and Initiatives

16 March
Visitors and other temporary entrants from the former Yugoslavia and Sri Lanka will soon be able to extend their stay until 30 September 1995. The extension will apply to all citizens of the former Yugoslavia and Sri Lanka.
who are normally resident there, who have held a valid entry permit for substantive visa at any time on or after 31 December 1991, and who are in Australia at the time of their application.

11 May
The Humanitarian Program will be maintained at 13,000 places in 1995-96, with 4,000 places for refugees (who meet the United Nations definition); 5,200 places in the Special Assistance Category (those in vulnerable positions overseas with close links in Australia); and 3,800 places in the Special Humanitarian Category (those who have suffered discrimination or other violations of human rights but are not defined as refugees). The Humanitarian Program excludes people assessed as refugees within Australia and granted permanent residence.

Total Program Migration (Non-Humanitarian) planning levels will be 76,500 in 1994-95 and 83,000 in 1995-96 (an increase of 6,500 places on the 1994-95 Migration program projected outcome). These comprise: Total Family – 47,000 in 1994-95, 51,000 in 1995-96; Total Skilled – 28,500 in 1994-95, 30,800 in 1995-96; Special Eligibility – 1,000 in 1994-95, 1,200 in 1995-96.

9 June
Grants of around $300,000 have been made to five non-profit community organisations to help people from non-English-speaking backgrounds obtain advice on immigration-related matters through the Immigration Advisory Services Scheme (IASS). This scheme was established in December 1991. The five organisations are: New South Wales Immigration Advice and Rights Centre; Victorian Immigration Advice and Rights Centre; South Brisbane Immigration and Community Legal Service; Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia; and Catholic Migrant Centre, Western Australia.

28 July
The Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Senator Nick Bolkus, announced four initiatives to enhance migration links between Italy and Australia. The initiatives provide: agency arrangements for quicker and geographically more accessible visitor visa issue; increased regional visits of Australian migration officials; enhanced promotion of the Working Holiday Maker Scheme for young Italians; and enhanced promotion of Australia’s Business Migration Program.
18 August
A 24-hour immigration information service for people in Victoria was launched by the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs.

30 November
The Government accepted a majority of recommendations of the Joint Standing Committee on Migration (1995) report on migration agents. Recommendations included widening the scope of the Migration Agents Registration Scheme, amendments to the Agents' Code of Conduct, and a number of recommendations designed to give the Scheme's Board a wider range of sanctions against agents in breach of their obligations. The scheme would continue to cover agents working for non-fee-charging organisations.

1 December
The Government has cut back growth in the Independent and Concessional Family migration categories, due to an unexpected surge in applications for business skills visas and visas for close family.

Settlement Services and Initiatives

8 February
Ethnic community organisations and individuals were invited to make submissions to the first Parliamentary Inquiry into access and equity in State and local government services. The Inquiry Committee is seeking submissions from interested individuals and organisations across Australia and will conduct public hearings in each capital city and other centres.

9 May
Further steps were announced in the Budget to help newly-arrived migrants, particularly those with special needs, settle more quickly and successfully in Australia. A $2 million increase in on-going funding would improve the capacity of the national network of Migrant Resource Centres to facilitate the effective settlement of special needs groups, especially refugees and the unemployed. (See also Immigration Programs and Initiatives; Refugees.)

11 July
The 1995 Settlement Plan for South Australia, prepared by the Commonwealth State Migration Committee (COSMIC), was launched today. The plan
lists migrant services and resources, identifies service gaps and proposes a more coordinated approach by all agencies for meeting the needs of particular communities.

31 October
Melbourne’s ethnic communities and business leaders were called upon in an address about the Government’s Working Nation strategy to work with the Federal Government in dealing with the employment and training needs of unemployed people in their communities. A report entitled Working Nation: Overseas Skills for Australia (Department of Employment, Education and Training 1995) was launched outlining the Government’s achievements in improving the recognition of overseas skills and the challenges ahead.

1 November
A new pilot scheme to encourage migrants to settle in regional and low growth areas commenced. From this date, State and Territory government authorities and Regional Development Organisations will be able to sponsor migrants who are skilled, relatively young and have good English language ability, to work on specific projects.

3 November
Australia’s national network of Migration Resource Centres was awarded $7.8m in annual core funding. The funding is for the running costs of the 28 centres from 1 October 1995 to 30 September 1996.

Refugees

25 January
A new reception and processing centre for unauthorised boat arrivals was identified near Derby in Western Australia by the Minister, Senator Nick Bolkus. The centre could accommodate 300 people and be activated at short notice.

6 March
The Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No.4) was introduced to the House of Representatives. The Bill prevents applications by people already found not to be refugees, and concerns definition of the ‘particular social
group' contained in the United Nations Refugee Convention. It does not deny refugee status to persons who seek it as a member of a particular pre-existing social group ... who [have] a well founded fear of persecution because of fertility control policies', the Minister said.

28 March
The new reception and processing centre for unauthorised boat arrivals identified in January 1995 near Derby at RAAF Base Curtin, Western Australia, will be activated for the period of one year. This follows two recent boat arrivals of 171 people at Darwin and Christmas Island.

9 April
Agreement between the Australian and Chinese Governments was reached on implementation details concerning the return to China of Vietnamese refugees who were originally settled in China and attempted to enter and settle in Australia over the past six months. The first group of people will be returned to China in May. Vietnamese refugees settled in China are not able to claim refugee status in Australia.

11 May
Four thousand places will be maintained for refugees who meet the United Nations definition under the Humanitarian Program (see Immigration Programs and Initiatives for further details).

9 June
A new rent rebate scheme for Humanitarian and Refugee Migrants who make use of Commonwealth Government subsidised on-arrival accommodation was introduced.

11 September
A new handbook (Community Refugee Settlement Scheme 1995) for voluntary groups assisting refugees to settle in Australia through the Community Refugee Settlement Scheme was released (see also Settlement Services and Initiatives).

17 October
The Minister announced a Plan of Action to investigate any new and substantive evidence of Vietnamese asylum seekers having been wrongfully screened out as refugees under the Comprehensive Plan of Action.
24 October

Australia's Humanitarian Program for 1995–96 is to be increased by 2000 places for people from the former Yugoslavia, bringing the total number of places in this year's program to 15,000.

5 December

A new service to more quickly and comprehensively meet the needs of refugees in South Australia was launched. The service, called Case Coordination, has been successfully trialed in Victoria and will be expanded to five states by the end of the year.

Gender guidelines are to be developed for the sensitive handling of applications by women for humanitarian entry to and refugee status in Australia.

7 December

The reception and processing centre for unauthorised boat arrivals at RAAF Base Curtin near Derby in Western Australia will be curtailed. This move stems from a successful operation to remove Vietnamese refugees to China under the Safe Third Country Legislation, resulting in ample accommodation at Port Hedland for all remaining boat people.

Services for Tourists

14 February

Australia's visa-issuing system has been further streamlined to allow visitors from particular countries to acquire visas from selected travel agents and airlines before leaving home.

29 August

A major expansion of a fast, electronic visa issuing system for tourists has been announced by the Minister for Tourism, Michael Lee, and the Minister for Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, Senator Nick Bolkus. Six countries introduced the agency arrangement this year; at least 15 will be participating by the end of 1995.

25 September

New arrangements to fast-track QANTAS passengers through Immigration and Customs have started at Sydney airport, the Minister for Immigration
and Ethnic Affairs, Senator Nick Bolkus, and the Minister for Customs, Senator Chris Schacht, announced. The new system, called Advance Passenger Clearance (APC), will minimise delays for both visitors to Australia and Australians coming home. The system was developed jointly by the Department of Immigration and Ethnic Affairs, QANTAS and the Australian Customs Service. APC links QANTAS and Immigration computer systems and utilises an enhanced link to the Customs Service.

Working Holiday Maker Program

31 March
Australia has reached agreement with the Republic of Korea to introduce a working holiday scheme. Under a memorandum of understanding young Koreans will be able to travel to Australia as working holiday makers from 1 July 1995. Australia has current working holiday arrangements with the United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland.

31 July
Australia has reached agreement with the Republic of Malta to introduce a working holiday scheme.

1 December
The Working Holiday Maker Program will be limited to 38,000 young people in 1995-96, to better control the impact of working holiday makers on opportunities for the long-term unemployed. (See also Immigration Programs and Initiatives.)

Communities and the Media

24 March
Representatives of Australia’s non-English-language media were informed by the Prime Minister that the Government will increase its spending on advertising in the ethnic media from 5 per cent to a minimum of 7.5 per cent. The initiative will enable the Federal Government to make greater use of Australia’s ethnic-language newspapers and thus ensure access by all people to essential information.
References


Provision for Families with Children

9 May

Measures announced in the 1995-96 Budget (at a cost of $643m over four years) provide for a new Maternity Allowance to be paid to women who meet the Family Payment income test, irrespective of whether they are in the paid workforce prior to the birth of their child. The Allowance will be paid to women for each child born on or after 1 February 1996, be equal to six weeks full Parenting Allowance ($816 at current rates), and be indexed in March and September each year. It will also be paid for newborn adopted children, for each child in the case of multiple births, and to a family where a child is stillborn.

The Guardian Allowance paid to sole parents will increase by $4 per fortnight from September 1996, in addition to indexation increases.

From 1 January 1996, families who experience any drop in income can apply for Family Payment using an estimate of their current financial year income. (This replaces the requirement that a family's income must fall by 25 per cent before the rate can be recalculated.) Where family income increases by 10 per cent or more, the Family Payment rate must be reassessed on the basis of their current financial year income.

The Budget amalgamates Additional Family Payment and Basic Family Payment into one Family Payment from January 1996. The new fortnightly rates will be: $88.90 for each child aged 0–12 years; $115.80 for each child aged 13–15 years; and $55.70 for each full-time dependent secondary student aged 16–18 years (until 1 July 1996 when responsibility for these students
will be transferred to the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) and hence Austudy). Those families currently receiving Basic Family Payment, but whose children will be transferred to Austudy on 1 July 1996, will be paid two lump sums of $250 in January and July each year. A ‘large family’ supplement of $7.20 for the fourth and each additional child in a family will also be paid. A minimum $21.70 per child will continue to be paid to families with incomes below the current Basic Family Payment income ceiling.

After January 1996 the dependent spouse of an Austudy recipient who is caring for children under 16 years will be able to claim Parenting Allowance instead of the DEET payment of Dependent Spouse Allowance (previously paid as part of their partner’s Austudy).

The application and review processes for Family Payment and Childcare Assistance will be coordinated from 1 January 1996 so that families do not have to provide duplicate information to DSS for the two forms of assistance. The review processes of the two payments will be combined, and there will be alignment of reassessment rules and the collection of income information.

21 May
The Minister for Social Security issued a reminder to parents in low income families caring for children at home to put in their claim forms for Parenting Allowance. Parenting Allowance starts from 1 July 1995 and has two components. Basic Parenting Allowance (up to $61.00 per fortnight) is nontaxable and payable to carers with personal incomes of up to $170.00 per fortnight. It subsumes Home Child Care Allowance (HCCA) and, like HCCA, is independent of the income of the claimant’s partner. Additional Parenting Allowance (up to $211.00 per fortnight) will be taxable and payable to the carer in families earning less than about $20,000 per year and in families where the carer’s partner is a social security recipient, subject to income and assets tests. From 1 July 1995 the Basic Parenting Allowance will be reduced once the home carer earns $60 or more per fortnight. (See 1994 Diary for more information.)

29 December
The Minister for Social Security announced Family Payment rates to be paid from January 1996. The maximum fortnightly rates are: $93.10 for each child under 13 years; $121.10 for each child aged 13–15 years; and $58.20 for each child aged 16–17 years. The minimum fortnightly rate will increase
to $22.70, and income limits will increase in line with the CPI. From January 1996, the total annual income a family may earn and be eligible for maximum Family Payment will be $22,650 (families with one child) increasing to $24,522 (families with four children), with an extra $624 for each additional child. The total annual incomes at which minimum Family Payment will cease are $63,766 (families with one child) and $73,333 (families with four children), with an extra $3189 taken into account for each additional child. Rates are based on estimates of current financial year incomes. Families who underestimate incomes by more than 10 per cent might be required to reimburse DSS. Those who overestimate cannot claim arrears. Families who are not eligible for maximum amounts may still be eligible for a Health Care Card (see Income and Assets Tests for details of eligibility).

People with Disabilities and their Carers

2 May

The Ministers for Social Security, Employment, Education and Training, and Human Services and Health released an evaluation report of the Commonwealth Disability Reform Package (1995). The report, prepared by a disability taskforce over a period of 18 months, found that the Reform Package had been generally successful in meeting its objectives, with more customers gaining assistance than would otherwise have been the case and with more positive employment outcomes. However, it noted a number of inequities including the fact that the demand for places had exceeded the number of places provided, and that some groups (for example, Aboriginal people) had not accessed services at an equitable rate.

9 May

From July 1996, measures in the 1995-96 Budget will extend eligibility for Carer Pension to carers who do not live with the person for whom they provide a necessary level of care. Carer Pension will be available to anyone caring for a person who has a family income of less than $61,020 and assets of less than $559,250; that is, the person receiving care does not have to be a pensioner in order for their carer to be eligible Carer Pension. The limits will rise in line with the Basic Family Payment income and assets tests. If a pensioner leaves their home to live with the carer, the pensioner will receive Rent Assistance immediately, and the former home will not count under the assets test for two years. Likewise, if a carer needs to move in with the
pensioner in order to provide the necessary level of care, the carer's former home will not be counted under the assets test for two years.

From March 1996, Carer Pension will continue for 14 weeks following the admission of a care recipient to a nursing home.

Former carers over the age of 60 who lack recent workforce experience will have immediate access to Mature Age Allowance (MAA), without having to register with the CES.

29 November
Legislation announced in the Budget for changes to Carer Pension, due to come into operation in 1996, were passed in the Parliament. The Bill was introduced on 19 October 1995 and debated cognately with the second reading on 25 October 1995.

Unemployment and Labour Market Programs

1 January
The Youth Training Allowance (YTA) replaced Job Search Allowance (JSA) for unemployed people less than 18 years (announced in the White Paper, Working Nation (Keating 1994)). Those already receiving JSA will continue to do so.

20 March
Changes to the social security system announced in Working Nation (Keating 1994) came into effect. JSA or Newstart Allowance (NA) recipients of three months standing will qualify for an advance of up to $500; recipients of six months standing will qualify for an advance of up to $1000. These advances, intended to help in job search activities, will be recovered from clients’ ongoing payments. Clients who engage in activities that may ultimately lead to self-employment, or who participate in cooperatives or other community initiatives, will also be eligible for income support provided the activities have Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) approval. Restrictions on participation in voluntary work are also to be relaxed, and the CES will be able to approve training courses undertaken for a period greater than the previous limit of six months. New NA clients will be referred to case management, and those already in receipt of NA will gradually be referred
for case management assistance. People who have casual or part-time work and are working on the day of their compliance form lodgement, will be able to lodge forms by mail or alternative delivery.

9 May
Measures announced in the 1995-96 Budget which affect the current two-tiered system of income support for unemployed people were introduced. From September 1996, Newstart Allowance will continue to be available to eligible people regardless of their period of unemployment, removing the need to re-apply for assistance after the first 12 months of unemployment. Additional help such as training programs or case management support will be linked to the likelihood of becoming long-term unemployed. An intensive review of people who have remained unemployed for nine months will thus be undertaken to identify these clients and to recheck eligibility requirements. Such people will then be referred to appropriate services and assistance.

Clients whose search for work is supervised by one-on-one case management will be given the option of submitting claim forms every four weeks. This option will also be available to people undertaking formal training, voluntary work or short courses. People over 50 years of age who are unemployed and have been recipient of a pension such as Carer Pension, will have the option of reporting every 11 weeks. People living in rural or remote areas will be able to make individual arrangements with regional office staff about lodgement cycles and methods which suit them best, including the use of facsimiles.

26 May
'The Minister for Social Security announced changes to the income test on unemployment payments due to come into operation on 1 July 1995. The 100 per cent taper rate in the test will be replaced by a 70 per cent taper rate.

21 June
The Minister for Social Security announced details of changes to the income and assets tests to take effect from 1 July 1995 (see Income and Assets Tests for new thresholds). The new Employment Entry payment threshold is $513.57.

1 July
Further reforms announced in the White Paper, Working Nation (Keating 1994), were implemented. The reforms, which represent a change in the way
women are treated within the social security system, move away from the assumption that women are financially dependent upon their partners. They include the following: Wife Pension is to be phased out; Partner Allowance, which is not activity tested, will be restricted to partners of income support recipients born before 1 July 1955, who have little or no workforce experience and no dependent children; Parenting Allowance will replace Partner Allowance for recipients with dependent children; younger women, except those with children, will be expected to seek work or access to other payments such as Carer Pension.

23 August
The Minister for Social Security announced changes in income and assets tests, which are to come into operation from 20 September 1995 following indexation (see Income and Assets Tests). The new threshold for receipt of Employment Entry Payment rose to $526.43.

Pension, Benefit and Allowance Rates

8 February
The Minister for Social Security announced new rates of payment to be paid from 23 March 1995 following a rise in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) of 1.4 per cent. The maximum pension rate will increase to $331.30 per fortnight (single) and $274.60 (each member of a couple), including in each case a $5.20 pharmaceutical allowance (see also Rent Assistance).

9 May
Measures announced in the 1995-96 Budget will allow pensioners to take a $500 interest free lump sum advance of the pension from July 1995. Advances will be repaid by deductions from future pension payments over six months. Part-rate pensioners with sufficient assets as security will be able to increase their pension up to the maximum rate from March 1996. The extra pension will be a loan with a low rate of interest; people will be able to return to their usual rate of pension or repay the loan at any time. The $500 advance will be available to recipients of Carer Pension.

Pensioners who leave Australia without obtaining a Departure Certificate will have their pensions suspended, rather than cancelled, after a period of six months. A review form will be sent to the last known address and the
pension will be restored, with full arrears, if the form is returned within three months of issue and the person still qualifies for a pension. Where the review form is returned more than three months after issue but within one year of the pensioner’s departure date from Australia, the pension will be restored from the date of the form’s return but with no arrears being payable. A pension will be cancelled if the review form is not returned before the anniversary of the pensioner’s date of departure from Australia; however, for up to two years of a pensioner’s departure, the Secretary will have the discretion to restore it with full arrears in special circumstances.

23 August
The Minister for Social Security announced increased rates of pension and allowance resulting from indexation to be paid from 20 September 1995. Fortnightly maximum pension rates will be $335.90 (single) and $280.20 (each person in a couple). For benefits and allowances the fortnightly rates are: $310.50 (21 years and over, no children); $280.20 (21 years and over, partnered); $335.90 (21 years and over, single, with children; 60 years or over and single, after six months). Partner allowance for those 21 years and over with children will be $280.20 (see also Rent Assistance). Fortnightly rates for Parenting Allowance, introduced as of 1 July 1995, rose to $62.80 (basic rate); $217.40 (additional rate); and $273.10 (additional rate where partners are separated by illness). The combined basic rate plus additional rate is $280.20 (see Provision for Families with Children for further detail).

Income and Assets Tests

20 April
The Minister for Social Security announced an increase in the deeming rate from 4 to 5 per cent from the first pension pay day after 1 July 1995, the first change since May 1993. A single pensioner with no other income can have savings of $46,800 earning 5 per cent before their pension is affected; a married couple can have $81,120.

9 May
A response to the Final Report of the Strategic Review of the Pensioners’ Income and Assets Tests, Targeting for Equity (Barber, Moon & Doolan 1995), has been incorporated into the 1995-96 Budget. From July 1996 one
simple method will exist for calculating the DSS treatment of income from financial investments (bank or term deposits, bonds, shares or managed investments) for income test purposes. This method will build on the bank deeming measure. A deeming rate of 5 per cent will apply to the first $30,000 of financial investments for single pensioners and the first $50,000 for couples. A higher rate of 7 per cent will apply to the value of financial investments over these amounts. The deeming rates will be reviewed in the same way as the current bank deeming rate.

A significant change is that if a pensioner earns more than the deeming rates, the extra income will not count and will not reduce his or her pension. Pensioners will receive a full pension under the income test where their only income is from financial investments worth less than $42,000 (single) or $72,000 (pensioner couples). This is because a single pensioner can earn up to $2340 per year, and a pensioner couple up to $4056 per year, without affecting their pension. The current rules about capital growth on shares and managed investment will be abolished. Pensioners will not be locked into investments by the older rule of assessing many years of capital growth in just one year when the investment is cashed in.

From September 1996, DSS will assess income from the time at which it is actually received (as opposed to earned), to avoid situations of hardship.

21 June

The Minister for Social Security announced changes to social security income and assets test thresholds following indexation, to take effect from 1 July 1995. The new income free areas for pensions, on a fortnightly basis, are $94.00 (single) and $164.00 (partnered, combined), with an additional $24.00 for each child (not indexed). The new pension disqualifying income limits (including Pharmaceutical Allowance), on a fortnightly basis, are $756.60 (single) and $1,262.40 (partnered, combined), with an additional $24.00 for each child.

For full pension, the assets value limits (and the disqualifying assets limits for JSA, NA, Sickness Allowance (SA) and Special Benefit (SB) are $118,00 (single homeowner); $202,000 (single, non-homeowner); $167,500 (partnered homeowners, combined); and $251,500 (partnered non-homeowners, combined). The disqualifying assets limits (including Pharmaceutical Allowance) for the pension are: $228,500 (single homeowners); $312,500 (single, non-homeowners); $351,000 (partnered homeowners, combined); and $435,000 (partnered non-homeowners, combined). The family home will remain exempt under the pensions assets test.
Social Security

Disqualifying income limits for JSA, NA, YTA, WA and Parenting Allowance (PA) will vary from 1 July 1995 due to a change in the taper rate from the current dollar for dollar rate to 70 cents in the dollar for every dollar of income over $140.00 per fortnight. The new fortnightly limits will be $275.00 (16–17 years, at home); $400.14 (16–17 years, independent, homeless or away from home); $314.00 (18–20 years, at home); $433.71 (18–20 years, away from home); $513.57 (21 years or over); $548.71 (over 60 years, after six months; any age with children); and $471.43 (each member of a couple).

The Maintenance Income free areas for Additional Family Payment (AFP) (per fortnight) are: $34.20 (claimant with one child); $68.40 (partners both in receipt and with one child each; $34.20 (partnered, one partner in receipt, one child only); $11.40 for each additional child.

The Minister for Social Security announced indexed changes to social security income thresholds for eligibility for low income earners, to apply from 1 July 1995. The weekly income limit to qualify for a Health Care Card (HCC) is now $271.00 for a single person, $485.00 for a single person with one child, and $451.00 for a couple, with $34.00 (unindexed) for each additional child. The income limit to retain the HCC is 125 per cent of the above limits, on a four week basis. The annual income limits for Commonwealth Seniors Health Card eligibility is to be: $19,671.60 (single); $32,822.40 (couples); $19,359.60 (each person in a couple separated by illness); with an additional $624.00 for each child (not indexed).

The Minister for Social Security, while announcing indexed changes to social security thresholds, announced that the maximum amount of accrued credits under the pension earnings credit scheme has been raised to $1,050, effective from 1 July 1995.

1 July

From this date, as announced in the 1993-94 Budget, Partner Allowance became a non-activity tested payment available to partners of income support recipients (including pensioners) aged 40 or over on 1 July 1995, with no dependent children and no recent workforce experience. It is anticipated that many former recipients will move to the new Parenting Allowance or apply for another payment (in many cases, JSA).

The joint income test for JSA or NA couples was replaced with a personal and partner income test. Under the personal income test, each member of a
couple has a free area of $60.00 per fortnight, with a reduction of 50 cents for each dollar of income between $60.00 and $140.00 per fortnight. There is no additional free area for earned income. The income of one member of the couple will not affect their partner's payment until it is sufficient to preclude payment of their allowance. In this case, the partner's payment will be reduced by 70 cents for each dollar of income over the cut-out point.

Changes to the Earnings Credit Scheme reflecting changes to JSA and NA income tests, were implemented. The existing free areas, $90 (single) and $80 (couples), was amended to $60, with the rate of accrual of the earnings credit balance reduced to $60 in line with the new free area.

23 August
The Minister for Social Security announced changes to income and assets tests to apply from 20 September 1995, following indexation. The pension disqualifying assets limits will rise to $231,750 (single homeowner); $315,750 (single non-homeowners); $356,500 (partnered homeowner, combined or where only one partner is eligible); and $440,500 (partnered non-homeowner, combined or where only one partner is eligible). The pension disqualifying income limits, fortnightly, will be $776.20 (single) and $1,295.20 (partnered), with an additional non-indexed $24.00 for each child. The disqualifying income limits (per fortnight) for allowances (JSA, NA, YTA, WA, PA) will be: $526.43 (21 or over); $562.71 (over 60 years, after six months; single, any age, with children); and $483.14 (each member of a couple).

The weekly income limits for Health Care Card eligibility as of this date rise to $278.00 (single); $497.00 (single with one child); $463.00 (partnered). The annual income limits for eligibility for Commonwealth Seniors Health Card rise to: $20,181.20 (single); $33,675.20 (partnered, combined); and $19,869.20 (each, where couples are separated by illness). Telephone Allowance (divided into four instalments, paid quarterly) rises to $59.20 per year.

19 October
Legislation to introduce the Government's 1995 Budget decisions on deeming rules was introduced into the Parliament. The extended deeming rules will apply to pensioners' financial investments from 1 July 1996, but will not apply to the principal home or its contents, personal possessions, collectibles, standard life insurance policies, superannuation pensions, annuities, or to real estate. The current rules assessing capital growth on certain managed
investments when cashed in will be abolished from Royal Assent to the Bill. This means that payments to people who changed investments before July 1995 should not be adversely affected by past capital growth. This concession is intended to be in place by end 1995.

25 October
The Minister for Social Security announced that the Government will apply concessional income test treatment to pensioners affected by the failure of Estate Mortgage in 1990. The funds had been taken over by Meridian Investment Trust, then listed on the stock exchange, bringing them under the 'rate of return’ rules for managed investments under the social security income tests. The problem will cease to exist in July 1996 when the extended deeming measure will replace ‘rate of return’ rules. The concessional treatment will be applied through an *ex gratia* payment, calculated as soon as possible using 5 and 7 per cent deeming rates, and backdated to the next pension payday. Thus the *ex gratia* payment will cover the period up until the next pension payday and then the deeming rate will be applied to the regular pension payments.

Rent Assistance

8 February
The Minister for Social Security announced that from 23 March 1995 the full rate of Rent Assistance will increase by $1.00 per fortnight following a rise in the CPI of 1.4 per cent.

9 May
Measures were announced in the 1995-96 Budget that provide for an increase of $5 per fortnight from March 1996 for families with children, in addition to the indexation increases. At current rates, this will bring Rent Assistance to $82 per fortnight for families with one or two children, and $93 for those with three or more children. Rent Assistance will be paid immediately to a pensioner who must leave home to live with a carer.

23 August
Indexation changes to Rent Assistance were announced by the Minister for Social Security. Fortnightly rates will rise by $2.00 to $2.60, with new payments varying between $68.20 (partnered, no children) and $90.60 (partnered,
three or more children). Rent thresholds will also increase according to circumstance, with new threshold amounts varying between $64.40 (single, no children) to $129.40 (partnered, with children). Changes have also occurred to the minimum rents eligible to receive maximum assistance. These vary between $155.33 (partnered but temporarily separated, no children) to $205.20 (partnered, three or more children).

Adequacy of Payments

3 May

The Minister for Social Security released a DSS Policy Discussion Paper, *Developing a Framework for Benchmarks of Adequacy for Social Security Payments* (Chaffer et al. 1995), prepared by the DSS Adequacy Project Team. The team looked at available research on poverty and living standards and considered the adequacy of social security payments. They found that no single approach could meet the need for improved information on the adequacy of payments.

The paper suggests that a combination of research into the extent and incidence of relative deprivation among DSS clients, as well as into the cash expenditure requirements of different households, is required. Subsequently, Associate Professor Peter Travers (Flinders University) has been commissioned to undertake research into the identification of deprivation among groups receiving social security payments. The Department of Social Security will shortly approach major social research institutions to develop comprehensive budget standards for families in contemporary Australian conditions.

14 August

The Minister for Social Security announced that the Department of Social Security has commissioned the Social Policy Research Centre (SPRC) at the University of New South Wales to develop indicative budget standards for Australia. A budget standard provides the price of a 'basket of goods and services which corresponds to a specific standard of living for different types of households'.

The SPRC study will examine the costs of children in different family circumstances and at various ages, and be assisted by a Steering Group made up of experts including representatives drawn from the Australian Council of Social Service and the Brotherhood of St Laurence. Budgets will also be
developed for single people and for couples without children, including pensioners. The final report is anticipated in 1997; working and discussion papers will be released progressively as work proceeds.

Debt Recovery and Fraud Detection

9 May
The 1995-96 Budget provided increased funding for reviews of DSS clients. These may be prompted reviews through data matching with employment declaration forms held by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO), or targeted reviews run by staff in the field.

From 1 January 1996, debts of more than $50 may be recovered by withholding from social security payments. DSS and DEET will introduce an automated electronic debt recovery system, which will allow each department to recover the other’s debts. For example, a debt to DEET from an Austudy client who is no longer receiving Austudy may be recovered from a Social Security payment such as Newstart Allowance. Withholdings from Family Payment and Parenting Allowance can also occur. The Privacy Commission will be consulted throughout the development period.

Following a successful pilot program, a new measure will allow private debt collectors to recover some debts of more than $50 owed by former recipients of DSS benefits. Procedures will be developed in consultation with DSS, who will be able to waive debts where special circumstances would make recovery inequitable. Discounts for lump sum repayments and negotiated settlements in the administrative appeals process will also see greater use.

In another new measure, from 1 June 1996, DSS and the ATO will work together to detect income earned in the textile and fishing industries following the introduction of the Reportable Payment System.

18 October
The Minister for Social Security announced a limited amnesty for those working in the textile, clothing and footwear and fishing industries and wrongfully claiming social security payments. People who report to DSS within the amnesty period will not be penalised, will not have to repay any money received and will not be prosecuted.
Superannuation

9 May
Measures introduced in the 1995-96 Budget provide for the support of the phased introduction through industrial agreements and awards of a requirement for employees to contribute 3 per cent of their earnings to superannuation by the year 2000. The Government will make means-tested matching superannuation contributions to the accounts of employees (and to the self-employed in respect of contributions they make from after-tax income), in lieu of proceeding with the second tranche of personal tax cuts announced in the 1992 One Nation (Keating 1992) economic statement. The Government contribution will be capped at 3 per cent of Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings (about $1000 at present), will be means-tested and will phase out at about twice Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings. These measures mean that from the year 2002 (when employer contributions under the Superannuation Guarantee are scheduled to rise to 9 per cent), the equivalent of up to 15 per cent of the earnings of employees will be directed towards their retirement savings.

The Government introduced a scheme allowing employers to pay superannuation for employees with small superannuation accounts to a budget trust account instead of to superannuation funds. The new arrangement will be part of the established Superannuation Guarantee Charge (SGC) whereby employers’ contributions are compulsory. The choice of superannuation fund is a voluntary matter between employer and employee, and no penalties will be incurred if the budget scheme is not chosen.

Child Support Policy

29 May
Four initiatives to enhance the Child Support Scheme were implemented from this date. DSS customers whose child support is collected by the Child Support Agency (CSA) can now opt for private collection where the other parent has a good payment record. If private collection arrangements are not adhered to, the customer can revert to CSA collection and have up to three months (nine in exceptional circumstances) arrears of unpaid maintenance collected by CSA.
Changes have been introduced in the grounds for presumption of parentage for certain ex-nuptial children. This measure removes the need for documentary proof of parentage in a significant number of cases, by more closely aligning the child support legislation with the Family Law Act. This initiative should assist in reducing delays in collecting and making first payments, caused by the need to obtain proof of parentage (DSS 1995).

DSS customers are now required to have a child support formula assessment before an agreement can be registered with the CSA. Customers cannot make an agreement for less than 100 per cent of the formula assessment.

Non-custodial parents who pay child support under a court order or court registered agreement can have their CSA collection temporarily suspended while in receipt of a social security pension or benefit. The CSA can suspend collection where both parents agree that the child has left the care of the custodial parent, thus removing the need for a return to court.

**Mature Age Allowance**

*9 May*

Measures introduced in the 1995-96 Budget effect changes to the Mature Age Allowance (first introduced in 1994). The June 1996 ‘sunset clause’ is to be removed and the allowance will continue in a modified form. The requirement for receipt of income support for at least 12 months will be reduced to nine months for people transferring from unemployment payments (JSA or NA), and removed entirely for people who lose entitlement to other payments such as Carer Pension and Parenting Allowance. MAA recipients will not be required to look for work, but can do so if they wish. They may also register with the CES and receive labour market program assistance. Existing recipients will continue to receive MAA under full pension conditions including pension-type concessions. New MAA recipients from 1 July 1996 will be subject to the allowance income and assets tests rather than the pensions income and assets tests, and residence requirements will still apply. The requirements for 12 months CES registration will be replaced by a requirement that recipients have no recent workforce experience, defined as not having been employed in paid work for more than 20 hours per week for a total of 13 weeks in the previous 12 months.
1 July

No new entrants to Mature Age Partner Allowance (MAPA) will occur after this date. This group will largely be eligible for Partner Allowance.

17 October

The Government reversed a previous decision that recipients of Mature Age Partner Allowance born after 1 July 1995 would have their payments cancelled from 1 January 1996.

Widow Allowance

1 January

The Widow Allowance (WA) was established for women aged 50 years or over, to be paid at the same rate as JSA/NA. Women who are eligible for this allowance include those who have become widowed, divorced or separated (including from de facto relationships) after turning 50 years of age, do not have a partner, do not have dependent children under 16 years, are Australian residents, have lived in Australia for the past 26 weeks and have had little or no workforce experience (defined as 13 weeks or more work of at least 20 hours per week) in the 12 months prior to application.

As at this date, women receiving social security payments can apply to transfer to Widow Allowance without meeting the work experience and 26 week residence qualifying criteria. WA recipients can access the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program if they choose. In order to avoid confusion with WA, the Widowed Person Allowance was renamed Bereavement Allowance.

Wife Pension

1 July

No new entrants to the Wife Pension will occur from this date. Wife Pensioners aged less than 40 years and living in Australia will cease to qualify for this pension from 1 January 1996. Those with dependent children will automatically be transferred to Parenting Allowance, while those without dependent children will be required to qualify in their own right for an alternative income support payment.
17 October
The Government announced that Wife Pensioners born after 1 July 1955 would not have their payments cancelled from 1 January 1996, reversing the previous decision.

Department of Veterans' Affairs Initiatives

20 March
From this date, War Widows and War Widowers will be paid an income support allowance by Department of Veteran Affairs equivalent to the frozen maximum rate of Age or Invalid Pension they received formerly from DSS. Separated wives and widow/ers of DVA service pensioners, who previously were only eligible for payment by DVA at the half-married rate, will be paid at the standard rate (previously they were required to apply for a DSS payment in order to receive the single rate).

Information and Client Services

17 February
The Minister for Social Security announced the trial of a new touch-screen service to enable people to access information about DSS payments and services in the newly opened DSS office at Nelson Bay in New South Wales.

10 March
The Minister for Social Security opened the Darlinghurst Community Service Unit (CSU). The first of six mobile units in Australia, the CSU will take specialised Social Security services directly to homeless people. Each unit will be staffed by three Community Service officers and will visit several agencies for homeless people (e.g. hostels and hospitals) each week. A further 15 officers will be located in outer metropolitan areas and in major regional and rural centres. Community Service Units were first piloted in 1993; provision for their wider establishment was made in the 1994-95 budget.

23 March
The Minister for Social Security launched Beyond the Safety Net (Baldwin 1995), a paper presenting his views on the future of social security in Australia, to which public comment was invited.
6 April

The Minister for Social Security announced the first steps towards meeting the Government's commitment that all Australians be able to access electronic networks: the establishment of a Community Information Network (CIN). The CIN will operate at selected sites and be the largest public access network in Australia. The first network is scheduled to come on-line in June 1995.

3 May

The Multilingual Telephone Information (MTI) service will trial three new languages – Farsi, Hungarian and Romanian – until the end of June 1995.

9 May

Measures announced in the 1995-96 Budget provide for a 50 per cent increase (73 people) in Financial Information Service (FIS) staff. This will include increased staffing in major country areas to assist farmers plan for their retirement. The FIS network will provide financial seminars for age pensioners, people thinking of retiring, and people made redundant or who are retrenched. There will be increased funding to the National Information Centre on Retirement Investments, including a retirement handbook containing information on how to increase income from assets, and information for pensioners looking at selling their home and investing surplus money from the sale. A 'one-stop-shop' will also be piloted, incorporating a tax-related information service, and providing information to pensioners and retirees about DSS and Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) payments, taxation matters and superannuation issues.

Consolidated information and access for families to the extensive range of family assistance measures available from the Government will be provided through 15 Family Service Centres, which will be piloted as a result of Budget measures. These services will provide information on DSS entitlements and programs such as Childcare Assistance and child support for children in separated families.

A publicity campaign to inform carers of the benefits available to them will be undertaken in 1996, with focus on carers who may not be aware of the availability of Carer Pension.

Additional officers will be appointed to the Support Network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Parents (SNAP) to ensure that families receive the support they are entitled to.
26 May
The Minister for Social Security announced that unemployed people will receive a brochure update from the Department explaining changes in income tests.

June
A booklet, *You Are Your Family: A Handy Guide to Commonwealth Family Payments and Services* (Department of Social Security 1995), was delivered to all families in receipt of Family Payment. Copies of the booklet were also provided to Medicare offices, community groups, civic organisations, local government bodies and maternity hospitals.

29 June
The Community Information Network, whose establishment was announced in April 1995, was launched with the opening of sites in Queensland and South Australia – the first of 100 Local Access Points (LAPS) to be situated in DSS offices, libraries and community organisations. The Minister for Social Security announced he was investigating expanding this service into a National Community Information Network (NCIN), which will link a range of community facilities into a public computer network.

21 August
The Minister for Social Security launched the Civic Community Service Program, part of an outservicing initiative which takes specialised DSS services directly to homeless people throughout Australia. The Civic Program is part of the Community Service initiative.

Home Equity Conversion Loan Scheme

21 June
The new guaranteed residual equity was raised by $500 to $21,000. Home Equity Conversion (HEC) is a financial mechanism designed to help older people, through sale or loan plans, to convert home equity into cash while retaining security of tenure and guaranteed equity (indexed to the Consumer Price Index) in their home (DSS 1993, 1994; Storey, Wilson & Kendig). The loan is repayable when the property is sold, when the pensioner (or surviving partner) dies, or when the pensioner permanently leaves the principal residence.
Reciprocity and Portability

1 January
The new social security agreement with New Zealand came into effect. Under this agreement, Australia and New Zealand will reimburse each other for pensions paid to New Zealand or Australian nationals (respectively) with less than 10 years in the country of residence during their working lives. The level of reimbursement will be broadly based on the percentage of the person's working life in each country.

12 April
Delegates representing the Australian and Greek Governments met in Canberra to draft an agreement on social security matters. Payments to Greek-Australians who return to live in Greece before the normal age of retirement are in dispute.

Negotiations continued throughout 1994-95 to arrive at agreements with Turkey, Chile, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Slovenia and Croatia. Revisions to agreements with Canada and Austria will occur in 1995-96.

12 December
The Minister for Social Security outlined a proposal for achieving agreement in negotiations with Greece about a social security matter (see previous entry). Based on a 25-year working life residence in Australia, the proposal applies a more generous formula to people who are resident of and living in Australia as of this date. The proposal will also benefit Greek-Australians currently living in Greece, who are presently not entitled to any Australian pension, but will not affect people who leave, or have already left, Australia with their pension payments.

References


Acronyms

ABS  Australian Bureau of Statistics
AFP  Additional Family Payment
ANTA Australian National Training Authority
APC  Advance Passenger Clearance
ARC  Australian Research Council
ATO  Australian Taxation Office
ATSIC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AVCC Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee
AVTS Australian Vocational Training System
CAM  Care Aggregated Module funding
CDEP Community Development Employment Projects
CES  Commonwealth Employment Service
CHP  Community Housing Program
CIN  Community Information Network
COAG Council of Australian Governments
COSMIC Commonwealth State Migration Committee
CPI  Consumer Price Index
CSA  Child Support Agency
CSHA Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement
CSU  Community Service Unit
DEET Department of Employment, Education and Training
DRP  Commonwealth Disability Reform Package
DSP  Disability Services Program
DSS  Department of Social Security
DVA Department of Veterans’ Affairs
EdNA Education Network Australia
ESCAP Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
FIS  Financial Information Service
HACC  Home and Community Care
HCC  Health Care Card
HCCA  Home Child Care Allowance
HEC  Home Equity Conversion
HECS  Higher Education Contribution Scheme
IASS  Immigration Advisory Services Scheme
IPC  Indicative Planning Council
JET  Jobs, Education and Training
JSA  Job Search Allowance
LAPS  Local Access Points
MAA  Mature Age Allowance
MAPA  Mature Age Partner Allowance
MTI  Multilingual Telephone Information Service
NA  Newstart Allowance
NDCA  National Data Collection Agency
NEPS  National Equity Program for Schools
NHMRC  National Health and Medical Research Centre
NYHS  National Youth Housing Strategy
OLAA  Open Learning Agency of Australia
OLTC  Open Learning Technology Corporation
PBS  Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
QIAS  Quality Improvement and Accreditation System
SA  Sickness Allowance
SAAP  Supported Accommodation Assistance Program
SAM  Standard Aggregated Module funding
SGC  Superannuation Guarantee Charge
SHSP  Social Housing Subsidy Program
SNAP  Support Network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parents
SPRC  Social Policy Research Centre
SUPS  Supplementary Services Program
TAFE  Technical and Further Education
TGA  Therapeutic Goods Administration
UNDP  United Nations Development Program
WA  Widow Allowance
WESNET  Women’s Emergency Services Network
WHO  World Health Organisation
YTA  Youth Training Allowance
YTI  Youth Training Initiative
Index

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
  disability services 63
  health funding and programs 35, 37
  housing infrastructure funding 53
  public rental housing 51
  national review of education 9
  substance abuse programs 35, 42
Aboriginal Health Service 35
Abstudy 9
Aged care
  older women 37
  pensioner payments 84
  residential care 61
Alcohol Action Plan 42
Australian Citizenship Act 1948 24
Australian International Education Foundation 11
Australian Language and Literacy Policy 6
Australian Law Reform Commission 26
  access to justice 26
  costs of litigation 26
  report of inquiry into complex court cases 26
Australian Overseas Education and Training Program 11
Australian Vocational Training System 19
Austudy 1, 7, 80
  eligibility 7
  inquiry into 12
  operation of 12
Basic Family Payment 81
Breast cancer
  information booklet 39
  research 41
  screening 34
Business migration 70
Carer Pension 81, 84
Carers
  carer support strategy 60
  respite program 60
Charitable organisations report 67
Child care 65
  accreditation system 67
  family day care 66
  long day care 66
  occasional care 66
  outside school hours care 66
  work-related care 65
Child Care Rebate Act 1993 24
Child Support (Assessment) Act 1989 24
Child Support (Registration and Collection) Act 1988 24
Child Support Scheme 25, 92
Joint Parliamentary Committee
Inquiry 25
Childcare Assistance 66, 80
Childcare Cash Rebate 66
Children's Services Program 65
Commonwealth Disability Reform
Package 81
evaluation report 81
Commonwealth Employment Service
18, 19, 82
Contract Case Management
scheme 18
Commonwealth Legal Aid Act 1977
24
Commonwealth Rehabilitation
Service 64
Commonwealth–State Housing
Agreement 50, 54
renegotiation of agreement 50
role and responsibilities 50, 51
Community Activity Program 18
Community Aged Care Project 60
Community Development Employment
Project 9
Community Housing Program 52
Community Information Network
96, 97
Contract Case Management Scheme
18
Convention on the Rights of the Child
24, 28, 29
report 29

Department of Veterans' Affairs 95
Disability Services Act 1986 64
Disability Services Program 63
and indigenous peoples 63
and NESB people 63
government response to review 64
review 63
Disability Services Quality Council 65
Disabled see People with a disability

Distance education centres 12
Drug abuse reduction 41

Education 1
see also Higher education;
Vocational education and
training; school education
civics and citizenship 9
early childhood inquiry 13
inquiry into accountability 13
international market 11
legislation 1
open learning inquiry 12
Education Network Australia 10

Employment
see also Labour market programs
contract case management

jobs creation 16, 19
long-term unemployed 21
people with a disability 63
qualifications of workforce 17
regional strategies 19
Senate inquiry into long-term
unemployment 12
trends 15, 16, 17
unemployment rates 15
Employment and Training 15
Employment Assistance Australia 17
Employment, Education and Training
Amendment Act 1995 1

Environmental health
exposure standards 33
Ethnic Older Persons Strategy 61

Family Court of Australia
complex court cases 26
inquiry into court administration 27
Family law 23
and child support 93
Joint Select Committee Inquiry
into 25
legislative reform 23
Family Law Act 1975 24, 25
evaluation of reforms 30
Family Law Council 28
and United Nations Convention 28
report on access to justice 28
Family Law Reform Act 1995 24
Family Law Reform Bill 1994 23
Family Law Reform Bill (No.2) 1994/1995 23, 25
Family Law Reform (Consequential Amendments) Act 1995 24
Family Payment 7, 79
rates 80
Family Planning Program
funding 40
Family Services Council 29
Female genital mutilation 37
funding for education program 37
First Home Owners Act 1983 54

Graduate Destination Survey 17
Guardian Allowance 79

Health 32
see also Mental health
and NESB people 36, 38, 39
cervical screening program 36
childhood immunisation 35, 39
environmental health standards 33
food and nutrition 34
health insurance complaints 48
medicines handbook 33
men's health conference 37
project for older women 37
research 40
review of Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992 42
therapeutic goods 32
women's health study 35
Health Australia 37, 41

Health care services 42
see also Hospitals
agreement on patient care 45
limit on overseas doctors 43
medical workforce 43
National Hospital Outcomes Program 46
performance indicators 44
public health study 43
service delivery 44, 45, 46
survivors of torture and trauma program 37
Taskforce on Quality in Australian Health Care report 46

Health promotion and disease prevention
'Acohol. Go easy.' campaign 41
and indigenous Australians 35, 40
anti-smoking campaign 41, 42
breast cancer 34, 39, 41
cervical cancer 36, 39
drug abuse reduction 41
female genital mutilation 37
heart disease funding 35
Hepatitis C research and education 36, 39
HIV/AIDS 38
'Travel safe' campaign 34

Higher education 2
Graduate Destination Survey 17
graduate employment prospects 17
Inquiry into Open Learning 12
research funding 2
student eligibility 3
student places 2, 3
Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) 1, 2, 3
payment options 3
Higher Education Funding Amendment Act (No.1) 1
HIV/AIDS 33, 38
strategy evaluation report 38
Home and community care 59
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 60
budget initiatives 59
Community Aged Care Packages 60
Coordinated Care program 60
Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit 61
Ethnic Older Persons Strategy 61
NESB people 60, 61
report on aged care 59
respite for carers program 60
Home Equity Conversion Loan Scheme 97
Homeless people
social security services 95
Morris report 11
Hospitals
assessment of care 46
funding 44
report on hospital care 45
waiting lists report 44
Housing 50
Australia–China protocol 55
budget initiatives 53
building approvals and commencements 54
Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement 50
Community Housing Program 52
international cooperation 55
legislation 54
National Youth Housing Strategy 57
public housing 58
public housing report 56, 58
Rent Assistance 54
reports and reviews 56
Social Housing Subsidy Program 51
Supported Accommodation Assistance Program 52
tenancy 53, 56

Housing Assistance Act 1989 54

Housing Assistance Bill 1995 54
Housing Legislation Amendment Bill 1995 54

Human Services 59
see also Home and Community Care; Services for families with children
departmental matters 59
families with children 65
people with a disability 64
portfolio strategies group 59
Volunteer Management program 69

Immigration 70
see also Settlement services and initiatives
Advance Passenger Clearance 77
and NESB people 72, 77
Australia–China agreement 75
budget 70
gender guidelines 76
Humanitarian Program 72, 75, 76
illegal workers 71
Immigration Advisory Services Scheme 72
information service (Victoria) 73
international agreements 72
migrant resource centres 73
migration agents registration scheme 73
migration agents report 73
programs and initiatives 71
regional settlement scheme 74
Roach Committee report 71
services for tourists 76
unauthorised boat arrivals 74, 75, 76
Vietnamese asylum seekers 75
Working Holiday Maker Program 77

Immunisation 35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Index 107</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Income and assets tests 85, 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>deeming rates 85, 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earnings Credit Scheme 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate Mortgage failure 89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>income free areas 86, 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Compact 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Offer Guarantee program 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Search Allowance 2, 20, 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobnet Pilot Program funding 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs, Education and Training (JET) program 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JobStart 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurisdictions of Courts (Cross-Vesting) Act 1987 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour market programs 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and NESB people 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and unemployment 82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>building employment and training 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Activity Program 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contract case management programs 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Assistance Australia 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regional employment strategies 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language and literacy policy 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term unemployment 12, 21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inquiry 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage Act 1961 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternity Allowance 79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature Age Allowance 18, 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mature Age Partner Allowance 94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical practitioners training 42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women 43, 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>workforce 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fees schedules 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>levy 46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medclaims electronic lodgement 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pathology service delivery 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>payments to States and Territories 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national network for NESB people 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national standards for health services 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>national strategy 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training of medical practitioners 44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration Act 1958 24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration Legislation Amendment Bill (No.4) 74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris report on youth homelessness 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>government response 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Cervical Screening Program 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Child Care Strategy 65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Childhood Immunisation Program 35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Equity Program for Schools 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Indigenous Housing Strategy 51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Mental Health Strategy 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Plan for Youth in Distress 38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Rural Health Strategy 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Telephone Typewriter Relay Service 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Training Awards 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Youth Housing Strategy 57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Newstart Allowance 2, 82, 83
Nutrition
   national survey 34

Open learning development inquiry 12

Parenting Allowance 80, 84, 87
Partner Allowance 84, 87
Passports Act 1938 24

Pensions, benefits and allowances
   see also specific programs, e.g.
   Family Payment, Partner
   Allowance
   expatriates 84
   families with children 79
   health care cards 87
   income and assets tests 85
   rates 84, 85
People with a disability 63
   Commonwealth Disability Reform
   Package 81
   Disability Services Program 63
   employment 63
   pensions and payments 81
Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme 48

Quality Improvement and Accreditation
   System
   evaluation 67
Quality Schooling Program 4

Refugees 74
Rent Assistance 54, 89
   rate of payment 89
   thresholds 89
Residential care for older people 61
   see also Aged care; Home and
   community care

Royal Australian College of General
   Practitioners
   training program 42

School Education 3
   accord with teacher unions 6
   budget initiatives 3
   Curriculum Development Projects
   Program 4
   Enterprise Education in Schools
   Program 6
   gender equity 5
   literacy development 5
   National Equity Program for
   Schools 4, 5
   Quality Schooling Program 4
   schools funding 4
   Taskforce on Racism in Schools 6
Services for Families with Children 65
   An Agenda for Families 65
   Childcare Assistance 66
   Childcare Cash Rebate 66
   Family Payment 79
   Guardian Allowance 79
   Parenting Allowance 80
   Supplementary Services Program
   65
   work-related child care 65
Settlement services and initiatives 73
   Migrant Resource Centres 73, 74
   South Australia Settlement Plan
   73
Smoking
   prevention campaign 41, 42
Social Housing Subsidy Program 51
Social Justice Statement 1995-96 25
Social Security 79
   see also Income and assets
   tests; Pensions, benefits and
   allowances; People with a
disability
adequacy of payments 90
Australia–Greece agreement 98
child support policy 92
Community Information Network 96, 97
debt recovery and fraud detection 91
Department of Veterans' Affairs payments 95
financial information service 96
Home Equity Conversion Loan Scheme 97
homeless people 95
indicative budget standards 90
information and client services 95
international reciprocal agreements 98
investment management 96
Multilingual Telephone Information service 96
NESB people 96
Rent Assistance 89
Social Security Act 1991 2, 24
Superannuation 92
Supplementary Services Program 65
Supported Accommodation Assistance Program 52
national data collection 52
women's emergency services 53

Therapeutic goods 32
changes to approval procedures 33
development of medicines handbook 33
drug safety 32
Tobacco Advertising Prohibition Act 1992
review 42
Training see Vocational education and training

Unemployment
and young people 8, 21
income support 82
rates 15
restrictions on voluntary work 82
United Nations Refugee Convention 75
Vocational education and training 8, 9, 19
Australian Vocational Training System 19
Building Employment and Training Australia 20
Job Offer Guarantee program 8
Jobnet Pilot Program 65
Vocational Education and Training Amendment Bill 1995 20

Widow Allowance 94
Wife Pension 84, 94
Women's Budget Statement 1995-96 25
Women's Emergency Services Network 53
Working Nation 1, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 74, 82, 83
and long-term unemployed 21
jobs growth 15, 21
Jobstart 18
labour market assistance 17
multimedia program 9
review of labour market programs 19
youth unemployment 16
World Health Organisation funding for reforms 48
World Summit for Social Development 55
Young people

   Job Compact  21
   Jobs Pathway Guarantee  21
   Morris Report  11
   National Plan for Youth in Distress  38
   National Youth Housing Strategy  57
   Social Housing Subsidy Program  51

Youth Training Allowance  82
Youth Training Initiative  20
Youth suicide  36
The *Diary of Social Legislation and Policy* summarises the legislative and administrative changes made by the Commonwealth Government in social security and human services, employment and training, education, family law, immigration, housing and health.

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