# Welfare Review Submission Template

## Pillar One: Simpler and sustainable income support system

Changes to Australia’s income support system over time have resulted in unintended complexities, inconsistencies and disincentives for some people to work. Achieving a simpler and sustainable income support system should involve a simpler architecture, a fair rate structure, a common approach to adjusting payments, a new approach to support for families with children and young people, effective rent assistance, and rewards for work and targeting assistance to need.

### NOTE: I HAVE RESPONDED TO YOUR QUESTIONS IN THE DIALOGUE-BOXES BELOW, BUT THESE ANSWERS REPRESENT ONLY PART OF MY SUBMISSION. MY MAIN SUBMISSION ACCOMPANIES THIS DOCUMENT. IT IS TITLED “HONOUR AND THE MANIPULATION OF OUTCOMES” AND IS 68 PAGES LONG.

###  NICK COSTELLO

### Simpler architecture

**Page 42 to 52** of the Interim Report considers the need for a simpler architecture for the income support system. The Reference Group proposes four primary payment types and fewer supplements. The primary payment types proposed are: a Disability Support Pension for people with a permanent impairment and no capacity to work; a tiered working age payment for people with some capacity to work now or in the future, including independent young people; a child payment for dependent children and young people; and an age pension for people above the age at which they are generally expected to work.

In shaping the future directions for a simpler architecture the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* What is the preferred architecture of the payment system?
* Should people with a permanent impairment and no capacity to work receive a separate payment from other working age recipients?
* How could supplements be simplified? What should they be?
* What are the incremental steps to a new architecture?

| Before we can discuss the preferred architecture of the payment system we need to consider what the shortcomings of the existing system might be and how this situation has developed. In my view, the first step in this process should be an examination of the philosophy underpinning the welfare-system. Such an examination will reveal ambiguity and conflicting agendas. As a consequence of the rapid pace of Global Industrial Change, and a political desire to hide the extent of its local impacts for the sake of economic stability, much of Australia's recent welfare-policy has been cobbled together on the run; and our welfare-machinery has become cumbersome owing to a need to satisfy two conflicting aspirations at the same time. (These issues are discussed in greater length in my main submission).This presents us with our main obstacle to improvement. It also helps to explain the presence of glaring incongruities in the Howard Government's "welfare to work" agenda and the current welfare-review process. Of particular concern to those of us who value democratic-process and genuine Mutual Obligation is the veil-of-secrecy behind which policy-makers are seeking to operate. If this continues to dominate proceedings the dysfunction within our welfare-system can only deepen. Once this issue is more clearly understood it will become possible to repair much of the damage done, not only to our welfare-system, but also to the fabric of our society. Redesigning the architecture of the system should be more straightforward. * The architecture of the payment system.

Once we agree that all Australians have a right to income-support on the basis of need, all other conditions become secondary. The establishment of a system dominated by a single payment-regime is easy if that payment is set at or above the level required for basic individual function within contemporary Australian society. Once this baseline-payment is established, additional payments tailored to the individual needs of welfare-recipients in specific groups can be devised. This reflects the desire, introduced in the 1970s, to introduce a Guaranteed Minimum Income - a scheme consigned to the too-hard-basket long ago for political reasons.* People with permanent impairments

If the abovementioned payment-system is introduced, people with permanent impairments would occupy the first tier where their income is guaranteed on the basis of their need. Any specific costs arising from the nature of their impairment would be included as add-ons, as would the additional costs and conditions applied to other welfare-recipients such as unemployed people, single parents, carers, etc.* Simplified supplements

Given the broad range of individual circumstances existing within the welfare-system, the simplification of supplements becomes difficult. Perhaps one way of making things easier would be to create standard add-on-payment-blocks for specific groups with an additional payment determined by variables. That way, the basic income would remain unchanged, and additional factors would involve a proactive discussion between Centrelink and individual welfare-recipients. In this way, services could be tailored to the individual needs of "clients" while the increased engagement of the client in the relationship would help to build individual responsibility and capacity. Furthermore, if the standard add-on was guaranteed, any additional third-tier payments provided as rewards for participation in programs designed to increase individual capacity and job-readiness would be seen as positive incentives and their withdrawal in the event of non-compliance would be more directly influenced by the behaviour of the client. In this way, personal responsibility can be more easily cultivated than through the current regime of paternalistic punishment. Penalties may still have a function, but they are a poor substitute for positive-incentives based on reward.* Incremental steps to a new architecture

The first step must be a review of the philosophy which underpins the welfare sector. Once this has been done, conflict between opposing agendas can be addressed.    |
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### Fair rate structure

**Page 55 to 60** of the Interim Report considers changes that could be considered to rates of payment for different groups. In shaping the future directions for a fairer rate structure the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How should rates be set, taking into account circumstances such as age, capacity to work, single/couple status, living arrangements and/or parental responsibilities?

| Rates should be set with reference to living-costs and the cost-of-engagement (see main submission). Payments should be no lower than the amount set by poverty-line determinations. The basic payment-rate should apply to an individual person, with the dollar-value of add-ons determined by the circumstances attached to that individual’s situation ( as described in the previous response). |
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### Common approach to adjusting payments

**Page 60 to 64** of the Interim Report considers a common approach to adjusting payments to ensure a more coherent social support system over time. In shaping the future directions for a common approach to maintaining adequacy the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* What might be the basis for a common approach to adjusting payments for changes in costs of living and community living standards?

| This is a good question, and it deserves a considered response. Such a question should be the subject of serious and lengthy discussion because the task of meeting living-costs on a government payment (especially the cost of housing) has always been difficult. The fact that economic-settings designed to stimulate growth act as a barrier to people on low-incomes, and the fact that social-engineers appear to want to quarantine welfare-recipients from the Mainstream economy by building convoluted structures around them, presents the impression of two separate societies. Another important consideration here involves changes in the ways people engage with and function within their communities and the wider society. (See section in main submission titled “The Cost of Engagement”)Establishing a baseline for income-support should probably reflect the accepted level (the poverty-line). However, as the level of Newstart Allowance remains below the poverty-line, and the Abbott government has stated a desire to deny even this payment to specific age-group of unemployed people, it would seem that efforts to ensure that welfare-payments keep pace with living-costs are likely to meet with strong political resistance.  |
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### Support for families with children and young people

**Page 65 to 68** of the Interim Report considers how the payments could be changed to improve support to families with children and young people. In shaping the future directions for support for families with children and young people the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can we better support families with the costs of children and young people to ensure they complete their education and transition to work?
* In what circumstances should young people be able to access income support in their own right?

| Parents on low incomes face the constant challenge of deciding which bill should take priority over others. When income levels are inadequate, the task of putting food on the table or paying an outstanding bill must come before other costs are considered. A good way to help here would be to raise income-support-payments to help meet living-costs; and reduce the additional costs associated with education and transition to work through subsidies.Admittedly, such measures might be hard to introduce, given that recent Budget measures eroded Family Payments.Your question regarding the circumstances under which a young person should be able to access income-support in their own right is curious, consideringthe document has already stated that payments should be based on need. In the spirit of consistency, determining a person's right to access income support should be based on need determined by individual circumstances. In my view, this question should not be so much about access to income-support as the value of the add-on-payment. For example, if an unemployed person is still living in the family home, the cost of shelter will not be as pressing as it would be for someone without family contact, but that should not mean that the family should foot the total bill for that person’s upkeep.Given that the government has already determined that one of the circumstances that precludes payment is to involve being in a state of unemployment at a particular stage of life. If such a decision has already been made, what is the point of the question? |
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### Effective rent assistance

**Page 68 to 71** of the Interim Report considers Rent Assistance and suggests a review to determine the appropriate level of assistance and the best mechanism for adjusting assistance levels over time. In shaping the future directions for Rent Assistance the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How could Rent Assistance be better targeted to meet the needs of people in public or private rental housing?

| This begs the question: "What's wrong with it now?" Rent assistance is only necessary in the first place because Australia's housing-market is artificially-inflated to favour cashed-up-investors, and this has forced housing-costs beyond the reach of low-income-earners. Your question: "How could rental assistance be better targeted?" implies that there is some advantage in deciding who gets it and how it is administered; but I would have thought that targeting should be based on need. In that sense, your question seems nonsensical.The section about rent assistance in your Executive Summary states: *"Rent Assistance for parents should recognise their role in supporting young people beyond school to independence."* This is a troubling statement because it carries subtext. If rent assistance is to be provided for a parent who is supporting children at home, what happens when they leave home? There appears to be an unspoken expectation here that the parent would then be able to get a job and cover the shortfall when the support is withdrawn. As I see it, rent-assistance for an individual or a family should be based on the real cost of the rent rather than a theoretical scenario. Unless a fair, standardised system is devised, means-testing remains an effective way to fox the amount of assistance.Another sentence in the same section states: *"Consideration could be given to moving away from ... income based rents towards the use of Rent Assistance as the preferred rent subsidy scheme"* I find this statement confusing. If the intent here is to move away from income-based rents, by what criteria will need be measured?  |
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### Rewards for work and targeting assistance to need

**Page 72 to 78** of the Interim Report considers changes to means testing for improved targeting to need and better integration of the administration of the tax and transfers systems to improve incentives to work. In shaping the future directions for rewards for work and targeting assistance to need the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How should means testing be designed to allow an appropriate reward for work?
* At what income should income support cease?
* What would be a simpler, more consistent approach to means testing income and assets?

| Today's casualised labour-market creates huge fluctuations in cash-flow for low-income-earners. Supplementary income-support-payments are often the only way a person can make ends meet. People in this situation can be caught in a sort of limbo where the mix of their earnings and income-support-payments, and their reliance on the stabilising effect created by rent-assistance and a health-care-card, can inhibit their desire to earn too much and be penalised for doing so. I'm sure that for many people on Newstart, the leap to a higher wage-bracket is such an unimaginable feat that they don't even consider it possible. Again, this is a question worthy of serious discussion, but with economic-settings sitting where they do, I can't see anything changing here for a long time. Your question *"At what income should income support cease?"* is open to broad interpretation. Surely this question should not be about the amount a person is earning as much as about the stability and sustainability of that income. Given the nature of the labour-market, it seems clear that income-support-supplements are likely to be necessary for underemployed people for a long time to come. As I see it, income support should not cease unless the earned wage at the very least meets living-costs and continues for an extended period. The wording of your question *"What would be a simpler, more consistent approach to means testing income and assets?"* also begs the question about what drives the complexity. How can the assessment-process be "simple" when income-streams in a casualized labour-market can be infrequent and unreliable? I can't answer this question because I don't fully understand how determinations are made at present. I presume mention of the word "assets" here refers to the value of property owned by an applicant, and what the sum-total of the applicant's assets might necessarily be reduced to before eligibility to income-support can be determined. As someone who has been trapped on welfare for a long time, I seriously question the idea of forcing people in need of income-support into the same "simpler, more consistent" group of penniless paupers. As I see it, the poorer a person becomes, the harder it will be for that person to ever climb out of the poverty-trap. |
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## Pillar Two: Strengthening individual and family capability

Reforms are needed to improve lifetime wellbeing by equipping people with skills for employment and increasing their self-reliance. To strengthen individual and family capability changes are proposed in the areas of mutual obligation, early intervention, education and training, improving individual and family functioning and evaluating outcomes.

### Mutual obligation

**Page 80 to 85** of the Interim Report considers more tailored and broadening of mutual obligation and the role of income management. In shaping the future directions for mutual obligation the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How should participation requirements be better matched to individual circumstances?
* How can carers be better supported to maintain labour market attachment and access employment?
* What is the best way of ensuring that people on income support meet their obligations?
* In what circumstances should income management be applied?

| This proposition is utterly disgusting. The idea that mutual obligation can be "tailored and broadened" reveals that you have no idea what the concept entails. Mutual Obligation is a pact between an individual and the community within which that individual lives, and it is entered into in a spirit of mutual-respect and co-operation. Your version of mutual obligation is far from that. The way in which you appear to have interpreted the concept involves a lop-sided-arrangement in which the government and its agencies dictate terms under which individuals are to behave; prescribe tasks which individuals must perform; and impose penalties for non-compliance. This is NOT Mutual Obligation. Mutual Obligation dictates that participation requirements should be better matched to individual circumstances, and that individuals be encouraged to develop their strengths to benefit the community wherever possible.Your question: *"How can carers be better supported to maintain labour market attachment and access employment?*" is curious. If you are talking about assisting carers in being available for work outside the times when they need to be available to care for the person they are supporting, that whole idea flies in the face of why a person is a carer in the first place. It is based on the assumption that the person being cared for has a measure of self-reliance, yet the eligibility for a carer's pension is so tight that it precludes such a level of self-reliance. It seems to me that you want to have your cake and eat it too here.The Executive Summary states: *"Mutual Obligation needs to be aligned with labour market opportunities. It should also reflect broader community expectations that those who can work should do so, in order to become more self-reliant, and that people should care for their children.”* This is another ambiguous, double-barrelled aspiration, and a dangerous rewriting of what is already an obscene misrepresentation of reciprocity. On one hand, it suggest that Mutual Obligation should take the level of opportunity into account, yet on the other, demands that people who can work should.Considering the fact that politicians and economists have routinely understated the true extent of unemployment for the sake of public-confidence, the very idea of aligning Mutual Obligation with labour market opportunities is problematic. Insisting that people should "become more self-reliant", and "should care for their children" to satisfy "community expectations" implies that this measure panders to the needs of the spectators rather than the needs of the participants. If this was really about Mutual Obligation there should be some reference to how the system will provide assistance to help people find work and care for their children.The executive Summary also states: *"In a new system, requirements need to be balanced with appropriate and timely sanctions if expectations are not met."* but does not explain who is at fault if "expectations are not met". Presumably, if the expectation is for an individual to become self-sufficient through employment, and if jobs do not exist for that person, will a sanction be imposed on the individual for not finding work?The Executive Summary also states: *"Consideration should be given to broadening mutual obligation to include building life skills, promoting parental responsibility and improving outcomes for children, particularly for jobless families dependent on income support*." I'm not sure if this means that these things will be added to the eligibility-criteria for income-support or if this is actually a list of some of the things the government will provide as part of its own commitment to Mutual Obligation. Clarification would be helpful.How far does the government's responsibility extend in this relationship? If the missing element is a lack of job-opportunities, and the efforts of the individual to gain training and experience fails to provide adequate qualifications, to what extent does the government's role in targeting the training constitute a breach of Mutual Obligation?  |
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### Early intervention

**Page 85 to 88** of the Interim Report considers risked based analysis to target early intervention and investment and targeting policies and programmes to children at risk. In shaping the future directions for early intervention the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can programmes similar to the New Zealand investment model be adapted and implemented in Australia?
* How can the social support system better deliver early intervention for children at risk?

| I am not qualified to comment on this topic, but I am curious to know what the New Zealand investment model is. If respondents are being asked to weigh up the pros and cons of a particular program-model, it stands to reason that you already have a proposal in place for such a scheme. While I concede that evaluation of options is necessary, I do not understand the ”investment” element here. If a need has been identified regarding children at risk, why should the solution necessarily reside in the private sector?  |
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### Education and Training

**Page 89 to 90** of the Interim Report considers the need for a stronger focus on foundation skills in both schools and vocational education and training, and on transitions from school to work. In shaping the future directions for education and training the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* What can be done to improve access to literacy, numeracy and job relevant training for young people at risk of unemployment?
* How can early intervention and prevention programmes more effectively improve skills for young people?
* How can a focus on ‘earn or learn’ for young Australians be enhanced?

| This is another loaded question. Asking "what can be done to improve access to literacy, numeracy and job relevant training" invites respondents to comment on the quality of a service which is largely redundant in the absence of job-opportunities. It's a bit like saying: "Here is a cake that nobody can eat; how can we make it bigger?" The size of the cake is not the question when relevance is a moot-point.A lack of literacy and numeracy skills is a problem that arises from the Education Department rather than the labour market. Nevertheless, given that a significant number of jobless people have difficulty with literacy and numeracy, the need for training within the welfare-to-work model is clear. However, I do not believe this aspect of the Jobs Network requires expansion as much as it needs to be streamed towards opportunities. Basic literacy and numeracy might help to prepare people for low-skilled-jobs, but given that the blue-collar-sector is shrinking, a need exists to take people with limited literacy and numeracy skills beyond the basic level. If you really want to enhance the focus of “earn or learn”, entry-level skills must be a starting-point rather than a destination. |
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### Improving individual and family functioning

**Page 90 to 93** of the Interim Report considers cost effective approaches that support employment outcomes by improving family functioning and the provision of services especially to people with mental health conditions to assist them to stabilise their lives and engage in education, work and social activities. In shaping the future directions for improving individual and family functioning, the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can services enhance family functioning to improve employment outcomes?
* How can services be improved to achieve employment and social participation for people with complex needs?

| This is another question about a narrow sliver of the total client-base, and it applies only to individuals whose employment-prospects are adversely-affected by family dysfunction. Services can help people in such situations by identifying the specific problems that can be overcome with the help of intervention and develop programs to stream these people through. This, however, is likely to require an investment of resources which has previously been deemed unjustified (because much of the dysfunction is a consequence of generational government neglect of “ghetto” suburbs). While I acknowledge that a certain group of people can be classified as victims of family dysfunction, such a definition does not apply to many other jobless people without such handicaps who do not appear to have been mentioned in this document. I predict that serious problems will arise in the administration of welfare-services if the narrow samples used in this survey are applied across the board. I also find the idea of *"strengthening individual and family capacity''* curious. Does this relate specifically to particular families, such as those experiencing generational unemployment? Does "building family capacity" include developing an increased reliance on families for the material support of young people denied access to income-support? It's all very vague.The Executive Summary states: *"Income management could also be used to build capabilities as part of a case-management approach to assist the large number of disadvantaged young people not fully engaged in either education or work."* How does this work? There seems to be an implication here that the incomes of welfare-recipients should be manipulated in some way to direct these people into a predetermined course. As the system already threatens suspension-of-payments to people not involved in prescribed activities, it's hard to understand how income-management might achieve the same outcome differently.Your question: "How *can services enhance family functioning to improve employment outcomes?"* is a real doozie. It draws a direct line from service-provision aimed at enhancing family function to employment outcomes. Put simply, it implies that the cause of unemployment is family dysfunction. In some cases, it's probably true, but it can only be considered a sound basis for policy when the number and nature of employment opportunities are factored into the equation. It is clearly not a measure for everyone. While this might be appropriate in the case of families with special needs, it should not be sold as a generic rule to be applied to all cases. Where are the examples that apply to "normal" families? |
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### Evaluating outcomes

**Page 93** of the Interim Report considers improved monitoring and evaluation of programmes aimed at increasing individual and family capability to focus on whether outcomes are being achieved for the most disadvantaged. In shaping the future directions for evaluating outcomes the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can government funding of programmes developing individual and family capabilities be more effectively evaluated to determine outcomes?

| If they are to be “more effectively evaluated, how are they evaluated now? How can you evaluate the effectiveness of funding of any program TO DETERMINE OUTCOMES? The logic of the above sentence makes no sense. Evaluation of programs is impossible without knowing what the aims and outcomes are. How else can you compare one to the other? The only thing that makes sense to me here is the possibility that whoever framed this question left a word out. Perhaps the last three words should be “determine better outcomes”.Unfortunately, it would seem that the “outcomes” may be more about saving money than delivering effective services. The Executive Summary states: *"Ongoing monitoring and evaluation is important to be able to rigorously assess the effectiveness of government intervention in community capacity building to ensure taxpayer funds are well targeted”.*Given that the eventual outcome for programs involving the development of individual and family capabilities is financial independence through employment, and given that many people engaged in such programs are unlikely to secure long-term-employment in a casualized labour-market where jobs are in short supply, at what point will the programs be deemed to have failed? More importantly, with politicians doing their best to hide the true level of joblessness, what will any failure be attributed to and who or what will be targeted for blame?  |
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## Pillar Three: Engaging with employers

Employers play a key role in improving outcomes for people on income support by providing jobs. Reforms are needed to ensure that the social support system effectively engages with employers and has an employment focus. These reforms include making jobs available, improving pathways to employment and supporting employers.

### Employment focus – making jobs available

**Page 95 to 100** of the Interim Report considers what initiatives result in businesses employing more disadvantaged job seekers. In shaping the future directions for making jobs available the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can business-led covenants be developed to generate employment for people with disability and mental health conditions?
* How can successful demand-led employment initiatives be replicated, such as those of social enterprises?

| That depends on the nature and objectives of the covenant, Asking us to comment on a specific direction that has already been put forward presupposes that the direction in question has already become policy. What exactly are "business-led covenants" and "demand-led employment initiatives"? The tone of these questions smacks of a desire to hand service-provision in the area of disability and mental-health to the private-sector.Having read the "Engaging with employers" section of the Executive Summary, it seems to me that the main focus is aimed at working with employers to *"make jobs available"* for people with disability and mental health conditions, while also requiring that "*training of disadvantaged job seekers should focus on the skills that are required for available jobs".* Considering that many able-bodied people are unable to find work, this requirement seems wildly ambitious. I'm guessing it's really designed to provide a few more jobs for the boys within the welfare machine.Assuming that “business-led-covenants” and “demand-led employment initiatives” are likely to be driven by market forces, what types of initiatives are envisaged to both stimulate job-opportunities and cultivate the unrecognised skills of people without work? |
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### Improving pathways to employment

**Page 101 to 107** of the Interim Report considers the different pathways to employment for disadvantaged job seekers such as vocational education and training and mental health support models. In shaping the future directions for improving pathways to employment the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can transition pathways for disadvantaged job seekers, including young people, be enhanced?
* How can vocational education and training into real jobs be better targeted?
* How can approaches like Individual Placement and Support that combine vocational rehabilitation and personal support for people with mental health conditions be adapted and expanded?

| “Vocational education and training into real jobs” can be better targeted through a more honest appraisal of the true nature of the labour-market and the availability of paid work.This is important because current programs place a strong emphasis on job-readiness, yet anecdotal evidence suggests that many participants in training-programs do not gain employment at the end of the training and finds themselves churned back into the system where they are forced to participate in voluntary-work and work for the dole in order to qualify for income-support. "Transitional pathways", "vocational education" and "vocational rehabilitation" all imply a journey from one situation to another. While many words in this review have been dedicated to the journey, nothing has been said about the destination. If the destination really is employment, where are the models and where are the success-stories, and where is the statistical proof that the training is working? From where I stand, the value of training-programs looks far more theoretical than real. |
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### Supporting employers

**Page 108 to 110** of the Interim Report considers what can be done to support employers employ more people that are on income support including better job matching, wage subsidies and less red tape. In shaping the future directions for supporting employers the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can an employment focus be embedded across all employment and support services?
* How can the job services system be improved to enhance job matching and effective assessment of income support recipients?
* How can the administrative burden on employers and job service providers be reduced?

| What mischief is this? The idea of "embedding" an employment focus across "all employment and support services" sets a dangerous precedent. It makes the provision of assistance to all recipients of support within those services (including aged pensioners and disabled people) reliant on an employment focus. The Social Security system was set up on the premise that assistance would be provided for people who could demonstrate a need for help, not a capacity-to-work.Given that the job service system was originally designed to help people find work, the only way it can be improved is for it to conduct its activities more objectively, taking the reality of job-shortage into account and setting realistic and practical goals for clients instead of making them jump through hoops that constantly lead them back to the same place.On this third point, I find myself confused about what the Reference Group is seeking to achieve here. In one breath, it asks respondents what can be done to "improve" services (which implies an increase in administrative tasks), and in the next it wants to know how "the administrative burden on employers and job service providers" can be reduced. Given that these are the main players in the equation here, if we take them out, who's left? Who are they suggesting should take up the slack?  |
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## Pillar Four: Building community capacity

Vibrant communities create employment and social participation for individuals, families and groups. Investments by government, business and civil society play an important role in strengthening communities. Also, access to technology and community resilience helps communities build capacity. Building community capacity is an effective force for positive change, especially for disadvantaged communities.

### Role of civil society

**Page 112 to 116** of the Interim Report considers the role of civil society in building community capacity. In shaping the future directions for the role of civil society the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can the expertise and resources of corporates and philanthropic investors drive innovative solutions for disadvantaged communities?
* How can the Community Business Partnership be leveraged to increase the rate of philanthropic giving of individuals and corporates?
* How can disadvantaged job seekers be encouraged to participate in their community to improve their employment outcomes?

| What an unfair set of questions? What you appear to be saying here is "How can we get other people to take responsibility for our own lack of vision?" While I agree that there is a place for all these suggestions, none will succeed without a framework or infrastructure to hang their efforts on. The section in the Executive Summary dedicated to "Building Community Capacity" is a particularly disappointing part of the review-document because it promises so much yet delivers nothing.It suggests that *"connecting disadvantaged people to their local community is important in building community capacity"* when the greater need is to connect these people with the wider community. Then as if adding insult to injury, it suggests that this connectedness can be achieved through volunteers and corporate-philanthropy rather than public programs for which government must take responsibility.The only programs government seems interested in advancing are existing ones. *"The Australian Government funds major initiatives in disadvantaged communities, including Indigenous communities. These initiatives address issues such as unemployment, skills improvement, family dysfunction, community capacity building, school attendance, safety, parenting and transition from school".* It would seem that the proposed measures laid out by this review are really just calling for an expansion of existing programs.On the question *“How can disadvantaged job seekers be encouraged to participate in their community to improve their employment outcomes?”* the answer is simple: If you want disadvantaged job seekers to participate in their communities to improve their employment outcomes, you give them hope; you give them faith in something; you give them your word that things will improve for them if they try. I count myself among the many jobless people who have a lot to offer our community, but can't because nobody seems to want what we have to offer. In any business-venture, there is no point in creating and marketing a product if you don't have a market for it. Many people lack employment, not because they are dysfunctional, but because the marketplace is dysfunctional: it has no need for their products. That is where you need to look for answers. |
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### Role of government

**Page 116 to 120** of the Interim Report considers the role of government in building community capacity. In shaping the future directions for the role of government the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can community capacity building initiatives be evaluated to ensure they achieve desired outcomes?
* How can the income management model be developed to build community capacity?

| You're doing it again; putting the cart before the horse. Community capacity building initiatives cannot be "evaluated" until they have been tried, and they can't be tried unless a plan has been devised to achieve a "desired outcome". Then, the outcomes that come to light can be compared to the original aims. That seems pretty logical to me, so what is the purpose of the question?In response to your question about developing the income management model to “build community capacity”, I would like to propose an alternative question: "How can we use the premise of building community capacity as an excuse to introduce income management across the board?" Isn't that what you really want here? The best way to build community capacity is through planting seeds, providing nutrients, and watching the plants grow. What your plan appears to involve is a desire to tame weeds, test their ability to endure in harsh conditions, and dictate to them how they should grow. Community-capacity is not something that can be grown in a test-tube and governed by paternalistic overseers. As long as you seek to impose ideological rules on communities where lived experience tells people a different story, the situation will remain unchanged.How can you build community-capacity by remote-control? Your Executive Summary states: *"Ongoing monitoring and evaluation is important to be able to rigorously assess the effectiveness of government intervention in community capacity building to ensure taxpayer funds are well targeted."* It seems to me that this is just an extension of the logic surrounding the closure of the Commonwealth Employment Service. The government seems intent on handing responsibility for the provision of services to the private sector, yet wants to reserve the right to punish people. Then, we see the Joker being played again*: "How can the income management model be developed to build community capacity?"* So we're back to the idea that manipulation of the incomes of welfare-recipients will enhance participation in their communities. Why is there no mention of capacity-building programs that involve carrots? Could it be that infrastructure costs money, and the government is really more interested in digging holes for welfare-recipients than in building structures that can help them climb out of poverty? |
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### Role of local business

**Page 121 to 123** of the Interim Report considers the role of local business in building community capacity. In shaping the future directions for the role of local business the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can communities generate opportunities for micro business to drive employment outcomes?
* How can mutuals and co-operatives assist in improving the outcomes for disadvantaged communities?

| This appears to be another question based on the idea that communities and private-sector initiatives can provide solutions to unemployment without the proactive involvement of government.One thing I haven't seen mentioned is the disconnect between the opportunities represented in micro-businesses etc. and the unrecognised skills of unemployed people. Perhaps you are trying to wag the dog here.For individuals, there are many obstacles to setting up micro-businesses. Place where rents are cheap are usually places where employment-opportunities are in short supply and cashed-up-customers are equally scarce. Access to materials and workshop-space is difficult, as is storage and access to retail-outlets. Even community-markets, that once provided a reasonable income for enterprising folk, offer very limited opportunities.At the same time, I’m sure there are many jobless people with ideas and a readiness to work hard to get ahead. Imagine what might be possible if, instead of asking how unemployed people can be skilled-up to meet the demands of the marketplace, who don't we find out what unrecognised skills jobless people have and turn our attention to creating markets for them. Admittedly, that would require a lot of work, but it might help to engender the missing elements: faith, hope, trust, respect, honour. The way things are now, we don’t have much of that.  |
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### Access to technology

**Page 124 to 125** of the Interim Report considers access to affordable technology and its role in building community capacity. In shaping the future directions for access to technology the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* How can disadvantaged job seekers’ access to information and communication technology be improved?

| This question goes to the heart of the disconnectedness experienced by disadvantaged job seekers. Access to information and communication technology has become a basic prerequisite for individual function in our society, yet many Mainstreamers seem to think that welfare recipients have no right to spend their taxes on such a "luxury". One of the first things that needs to be done is to educate the public about the meaning of engagement in modern society. Of course, this would also entail addressing many of the systemic-mechanisms that contribute to the social-exclusion of "disadvantaged job seekers", and that might be politically problematic.  |
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### Community Resilience

**Page 125 to 126** of the Interim Report considers how community resilience can play a role in helping disadvantaged communities. In shaping the future directions for community resilience the Reference Group would like feedback on:

* What strategies help build community resilience, particularly in disadvantaged communities?
* How can innovative community models create incentives for self-sufficiency and employment?

| I don't understand your thinking at all. Disadvantaged communities are resilient in their own way, so what brand of resilience do you want to see in them? What challenges do you want to see them rise to, and what resources are you prepared to offer to help achieve that outcome?"Innovative community models" must do more than "create incentive". The very suggestion that "creating incentive" is all they must do carries a subtext of half-heartedness. The greatest challenge here will be to provide support without being too paternalistic, and resisting the temptation to withdraw support too early. That requires resources that have, so far, been unavailable.  |
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