Independent Review

of the operation of the

Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023

Liza Carroll PSM
Independent Reviewer

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Contents

Acknowledgment of Country 1
Letter from Independent Reviewer to the Minister for Social Services 2
Executive summary 3
Recommendations 5
1. About the Review 6
1.1 Methodology 6
2. History and establishment of the Committee 7
2.1 Interim Committee 7
3. Legislative framework for the Committee 9
3.1 Legislation 9
3.2 Terms of appointment 10
3.3 Membership requirements 10
4. Committee governance 12
4.1 Membership 12
4.2 Funding arrangements 13
4.3 Procurement 14
5. Committee functioning and secretariat support 16
5.1 Committee operations 16
5.2 Secretariat and departmental support 18
6. External engagement 20
6.1 Lived experience 20
6.2 Organisation engagement 22
6.3 Government engagement 24
7. Effectiveness of the Committee 26
7.1 Strategic framework and work program 26
7.2 Communications and promotion 27
8. Reports 29
8.1 Development of the reports over time 29
8.2 Presentation and recommendations 30
9. Concluding remarks 33

Appendix 1: Review Terms of Reference.....34
Appendix 2: Stakeholders consulted.....36
Appendix 3: Full list of report topics.....38
Appendix 4: Full list of Committee Members.....40
Appendix 5: Interim Committee Terms of Reference.....42

Acknowledgment of Country

I acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, water, culture and community. I pay my respects to the Elders both past and present.

Letter from Independent Reviewer to the Minister for Social Services

Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Social Services
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

Independent Review of the operation of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023*

On 1 July 2026, I was appointed to undertake the first Independent Review of the operation of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023* (the Act). The Review is required under Part 3, Section 28 of the Act, which states that you must cause an independent review to be completed within 3 years after the commencement of the Act. The Section also states the Review must consider whether the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (the Committee) is carrying out its function effectively.

This Review has found that the Committee has delivered on the requirements of the Act and established itself as an important source of independent advice on economic inclusion and disadvantage. Since its establishment, the Committee has evolved and adapted its approach, continuing to build its processes, evidence-base and engagement activities while meeting its legislative obligations.

It has been a privilege to undertake the first Review of the Committee. I would like to thank the Secretary of the Department of Social Services and departmental staff for their support throughout the Review. I also thank the Committee members, government representatives, parliamentarians, stakeholder organisations and other participants who generously contributed their time, insights and feedback through consultation interviews.

It is my pleasure to present you with the Review.

Yours sincerely



Liza Carroll PSM
Independent Reviewer

30 October 2026

Executive summary

This report provides the results of the first independent Review of the operation of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023* (the Act). The Review is a formal requirement of this Act, which established the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (the Committee) in 2023. The Review considered the establishment, functioning, and effectiveness of the Committee, drawing on Committee documentation and outputs, and interviews with Committee members, government representatives, parliamentarians and key stakeholder organisations.

The Review found that the Committee is operating in accordance with its legislative requirements and has continued to fulfil its statutory functions since its establishment. In doing so, the Committee has evolved and adapted its approach over time, refining its processes, strengthening its evidence-base and expanding its engagement activities to support its work.

The Committee has established itself as an important source of independent advice on issues relating to economic inclusion and disadvantage. Its activities are advisory in nature and are carried out through the provision of expert advice and evidence-informed insights on issues within its legislative remit.

The Committee's membership meets the requirements of the legislation and is widely regarded as a key strength. Members bring significant expertise and experience, enhancing the quality, credibility and authority of the Committee's research, advice and recommendations.

Interviewees generally viewed the Committee's engagement activities positively and recognised their contribution to the quality of the Committee's advice. The Review identified opportunities to strengthen the breadth and timing of engagement, including ensuring a more diverse range of perspectives is captured from participants with lived experience of the social security system, experts across government and a wider range of external stakeholder groups. It is recommended that the Committee undertakes earlier and more sustained engagement, particularly with governments and their departments throughout the report development process to strengthen the Committee's ability to test ideas, inform priorities and maximise the influence of its recommendations.

There are opportunities to strengthen the clarity of governance arrangements. Interviewees identified the need for formalised guidance on Committee processes such as the use of proxies, procurement and funding arrangements. The Review recommends the Department of Social Services (the department) establish formal guidance documentation to support shared understanding across the Committee.



The Review also identified the need to strengthen the strategic focus and impact of the Committee's advice. Interviewees noted that the number of recommendations and report presentation limits the accessibility and influence of the Committee's advice. To address this, the Review recommends the development of a multi-year work program to support longer term planning and a revised reporting approach. The reports could be separated into two documents with a more focused annual report that concentrates on new and emerging issues, supported by a separate report that monitors progress against previous recommendations and related government actions over time.

The Committee's reports are the primary mechanism through which it delivers its advisory function and are widely regarded as high quality, evidence-based contributions to policy discussions on economic inclusion and disadvantage. The reports are used by a range of audiences, including governments, the community sector, researchers and academics, and have contributed to a growing evidence-base on economic inclusion and disadvantage.

The Committee's reports have considered the economic inclusion issues identified in the legislation, including approaches to boost economic participation and the adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments. Reports have included recommendations on the adequacy of Australia's income support and social service systems, highlighting their impact on poverty, economic participation and social inclusion. Broader structural reforms aimed at reducing poverty and strengthening economic inclusion have also been covered. Key areas of focus have included reducing child poverty through family payment reforms, improving access to affordable and high-quality early childhood education and care and addressing concentrated disadvantage in communities.

While the Committee's role is advisory, the Review found that a number of its recommendations have been reflected, in part or in full, in government policy and program settings. These include social security, parenting support, employment services and early childhood education reforms. Appendix 3 provides a full list of topics addressed in the Committee's reports to date.

The Review concludes that the Committee is a respected and effective source of independent advice on economic inclusion and disadvantage. While opportunities exist to strengthen aspects of its operation and impact, the Committee is fulfilling its legislated functions and making a valuable contribution to policy development, public debate and the evidence-base on economic inclusion. The recommendations in this report are intended to support the Committee's continued effectiveness and future contribution.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The Committee should develop formal guidance on the use of proxies.

Recommendation 2: The department should introduce quarterly expenditure reporting to the Committee.

Recommendation 3: The department should formally articulate the procurement process as part of Committee governance and onboarding arrangements.

Recommendation 4: The Committee's activities should be designed and delivered to ensure in depth consideration of policy options and support equitable participation by all members.

Recommendation 5: The Committee should identify the best way to access additional support for report development and writing. This could be sourced internally from within the department or externally through a funded procurement arrangement.

Recommendation 6: The Committee should ensure it accesses broad enough perspectives from people with lived experience as it continues to evolve its engagement approach.

Recommendation 7: The Committee should consider opportunities to expand the diversity of external perspectives informing its research and recommendations.

Recommendation 8: The Committee should undertake earlier and more sustained engagement with departments, Ministers and the budget process to improve the Committee's influence.

Recommendation 9: The Committee should ensure it utilises a robust economic inclusion framework alongside developing and publishing a structured multi-year work program.

Recommendation 10: Each year, the Committee's report should be divided into two separate reports: a primary report focusing on new areas of inquiry, highlighting emerging evidence and presenting new recommendations; and a separate report outlining progress against previous recommendations.



1. About the Review

This is the first review of the operation of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023*[1] (the Act). The Review is required under the Act (subsection 28(4)) and provides an opportunity to consider the operation of the Committee, examining how it provides independent, evidence-based advice to the government. Appendix 1 provides the full Terms of Reference for the Review.

1.1 Methodology

In undertaking this Review, consideration was given to a range of evidence sources to assess the establishment, operation and effectiveness of the Committee against the requirements of the Act and the Review Terms of Reference.

The Review adopted a mixed methods approach drawing on evidence from a range of sources. It included a detailed examination of the legislative and governance framework supporting the Committee, including the Act, associated regulations and relevant governance documentation. This was complemented by a review of Committee reports, meeting materials, operational processes and publicly available information relating to the Committee's work.

The Review also assessed the Committee's governance arrangements, operating model, membership, consultation processes and administrative support to determine whether these arrangements effectively support the Committee in carrying out its legislated functions.

Consideration was given to the quality, relevance and timeliness of the Committee's reports and advice to government, including the extent to which the Committee's outputs align with and support the objectives of the Act.

Perspectives were obtained through 25 interviews conducted both in person and virtually. Interviewees included current Committee members, federal government representatives, representatives from stakeholder organisations, and senior officials from the Department of Social Services, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Treasury. A list of stakeholders consulted as part of the Review is provided at Appendix 2.

Findings were informed by themes emerging across interviews and documentary analysis, with observations tested against multiple sources where possible.

[1] *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023* (Cth). Part 3 subsection 28(4). [Periodic reviews of the operation of this Act, first review]

2. History and establishment of the Committee

This section provides background on the establishment of the Committee as an interim advisory body, including the Terms of Reference that would later be superseded by the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023* (the Act).

2.1 Interim Committee

The Committee was initially established as an interim advisory body in December 2022. It was jointly established by the Treasurer, the Hon Dr Jim Chalmers MP, and the then Minister for Social Services, the Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, as an independent expert body to provide advice on economic inclusion and disadvantage ahead of each federal Budget.

At the time of its establishment, the Australian Government indicated the Committee would operate on an interim basis, with a commitment to introduce legislation in 2023 to establish a permanent advisory body.

In accordance with its Terms of Reference, the interim Committee was established with 14 members, including the Chair, drawn from a range of backgrounds and expertise across social security including academics and economists, unions, business peak bodies, representatives from key relevant advocacy organisations and the philanthropic sector.

Membership of the interim Committee included:

- Chair the Hon Jenny Macklin AC
- Professor Peter Whiteford
- Professor Kay Cook
- Associate Professor Ben Phillips
- Professor Jeff Borland AO
- Professor Bob Breunig
- Dr Angela Jackson
- Dr Cassandra Goldie AO
- Ms Leah van Poppel
- Ms Emily Carter AM
- Dr Travers McLeod
- Mr Matthew Cox
- Sally McManus
- Professor Jennifer Westacott AC [December 2022 to September 2023]
- Mr Bran Black [September 2023 to April 2024]

Ex-officio members were Mr Ray Griggs AO CSC former Secretary of the Department of Social Services and Dr Steven Kennedy PSM former Secretary of the Treasury.



The interim Committee held its first meeting on 16 December 2022 and delivered its first report to government in April 2023 ahead of the 2023-24 Budget.

The report contained 37 recommendations covering income support, employment, housing, early childhood, place-based disadvantage and broader economic inclusion issues.

Appendix 5 provides the Terms of Reference for the interim Committee. These Terms of Reference were subsequently superseded by the Act which established the Committee as a permanent statutory advisory body.

3. Legislative framework for the Committee

This section outlines the legislative framework for the Committee, including the Committee's legislated functions, terms of appointment and membership requirements. It provides an overview of the arrangements established under the Act and the basis on which the Review has assessed the Committee's establishment and operation.

3.1 Legislation

On 8 December 2023, the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023* received Royal Assent, establishing the Committee as an ongoing statutory advisory body with legislated functions, membership requirements and reporting obligations.

The Committee is required to provide advice to government before each federal Budget on:

- economic inclusion, including approaches to boost economic participation through policy settings, systems and structures in the social security system and other relevant programs and policies
- the adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments, including options to boost economic inclusion and tackle disadvantage
- options to reduce barriers and disincentives to work, including in relation to social security and employment services
- options for tailored responses to address barriers to economic inclusion for long term unemployed and disadvantaged groups, including place-based approaches at the local level, having regard to the split between Commonwealth, State, Territory and local government responsibilities
- the impact of economic inclusion policies on people with barriers to work, including people with caring responsibilities; Indigenous persons; people with disability; and on gender equality
- the trends of inequality markers in Australia and international comparisons.

As it undertakes its work, the Committee is required to consider the government's fiscal strategy, workforce participation, existing relevant policies and the long term sustainability of the social security system.

The Act requires the Minister for Social Services to publish the Committee's findings on the department's website at least 14 days before the Commonwealth Government Budget is delivered in the House of Representatives. Recommendations of the Committee's reports are non-binding on government.

In addition to the core legislation, the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Regulations 2024*[2] (subsection 14(2)) provides for travel allowances for Committee members.

[2] Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Regulations 2024 (Cth). subsection 14(2). [Prescribes allowances that a Committee member is to be paid]

3.2 Terms of appointment

Committee members, including the Chair, are appointed by the Minister for Social Services on a part-time basis through a written instrument. Appointments are made in accordance with the Cabinet Handbook and the Australian Government Appointments Framework using the direct appointment method. Members receive an instrument of appointment and a letter from the Minister confirming their appointment.

Committee members are not remunerated and participate on a voluntary basis. Though, the Regulations provide for the payment of travel allowances.

The legislation requires that appointments are subject to a maximum of three years. Members are eligible for reappointment at the conclusion of their term. This is supported by the *Acts Interpretation Act 1901* (subsection 33AA)[3], which provides that a power to appoint includes a power to reappoint.

The Act (subsection 13(3))[4] also enables the Minister to appoint a person to act as a member of the Committee when there is a vacancy or during a Committee member's temporary absence. To date, this function has not been utilised.

As part of the onboarding process, and consistent with the Act (subsection 17)[5], members complete a Private Interests Declaration and a Conflict of Interest Declaration.

3.3 Membership requirements

In accordance with the Act (section 11(2))[6], membership of the Committee must consist of at least one of each of the following:

- an academic expert in social security
- an economist
- a representative of an organisation which advocates, or which consists of individuals with lived experience, in relation to a matter relevant to the performance of the Committee's function
- a representative of the community sector involved in assisting or supporting persons who are economically disadvantaged
- a representative of a trade union or a peak trade union body
- a representative of an employer or business association or a peak employer or business association.

[3] *Acts Interpretation Act 1901* (Cth). subsection 33AA. [Power to appoint includes power to reappoint]
[4] *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023* (Cth). Part 2 subsection 13(3). [Acting appointments]
[5] ibid. Part 2 subsection 17. [Disclosure of interests]
[6] ibid. Part 2 subsection 11(2). [Appointments and membership requirements]

Additionally, the Act (subsection 11(3))[7] requires that at least one of those members is an Indigenous person, and membership should reflect the diversity of the general community.

Committee membership continues to satisfy the legislative requirements through its current membership which, as at 31 August 2026, includes:

- Chair (the Hon Jenny Macklin AC), former Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
- academic experts (Professor Peter Whiteford, Professor Kay Cook and Associate Professor Ben Phillips)
- economists (Professor Jeff Borland AO, Professor Bob Breunig, Associate Professor Ben Phillips and Ms Melinda Cilento)
- representatives of organisations which advocate, or consist of individuals with lived experience (Dr Cassandra Goldie AO, Ms Leah van Poppel, Ms Emily Carter AM and Ms Donnella Mills)
- community sector representatives (Dr Travers McLeod, Mr Matthew Cox, Ms Emily Carter AM and Dr Cassandra Goldie AO)
- trade union representation (Sally McManus, ACTU [December 2022 to August 2026])
- business/employer representation (Ms Melinda Cilento, CEDA).

The Committee continues to include Indigenous representation through Ms Emily Carter AM and Ms Donnella Mills, and its membership reflects a broad mix of expertise and perspectives across the community (including disability and lived experience of the social security system), business, union, academic and not-for-profit sectors.

Secretaries from each of the Joint Minister's portfolio departments are included on the Committee as ex-officio members. These are Mr Michael Lye Secretary of the Department of Social Services and Ms Jenny Wilkinson PSM Secretary of the Treasury.

Appendix 4 provides the full list of members since the Committee was formally established.

[7] *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023* (Cth). Part 2 subsection 11(3). [Appointments and membership requirements of the Committee]

4. Committee governance

This section examines the governance arrangements supporting the Committee. It outlines the Committee's membership, funding and procurement arrangements and presents observations from the Review regarding the effectiveness of these arrangements in supporting the Committee's legislated functions and ongoing operation.

4.1 Membership

Committee members are appointed on an individual basis and bring knowledge, expertise and experience aligned to the legislative requirements. Current membership includes subject matter experts whose extensive knowledge and commitment enhance the credibility and quality of the research and work of the Committee. The diversity of experience and expertise was consistently seen as critical to the effective functioning of the Committee by interviewees.

As members complete their terms of appointment, the Committee will continue to undergo periodic renewal. While ensuring legislative requirements continue to be met, several interviewees noted that consideration should be given to the overall mix of skills, expertise and perspectives represented on the Committee as membership evolves. In particular, succession planning should seek to retain institutional knowledge while introducing new capabilities and perspectives that enhance the Committee's effectiveness.

Interviewees expressed differing views regarding the composition of the current Committee and the appropriate balance of future appointments. Some interviewees suggested the Committee's membership is weighted towards advocacy perspectives, while others perceived greater influence from academic and research-focused members. These differing views highlight the importance of maintaining a balanced mix of perspectives capable of supporting robust discussion and evidence-informed decision-making.

Several interviewees also highlighted the value of ensuring diversity of thought and experience within the Committee's membership, recognising that a broad range of perspectives can strengthen analysis and improve consideration of policy options and trade-offs.

It was suggested that the Committee would benefit from strengthening policy design and evaluation expertise, particularly in analysing policy trade-offs and applying contemporary research methods that leverage government data assets. Expertise in areas such as housing and health could also further enhance the Committee's work.

> **"I had thought that when it was established, there was a really strong desire to make sure there was a really broad diversity of perspectives that were being discussed in EIAC, including to allow there to be discussions about trade-offs, between different options for interventions…"**

A number of interviewees suggested that increasing the representation of individuals with lived experience of poverty and the social security system should be a priority in future membership considerations. While it was acknowledged that some current members have direct or previous experience aligned to this, interviewees noted that no individual can adequately represent the full range of lived experience perspectives. For this reason, many interviewees considered the Committee's broader lived experience engagement processes to be the most effective mechanism for gathering diverse experiences and viewpoints. These engagement approaches are covered further in Section 6.1 of this report.

Some members are supported by their organisations whilst on the Committee and utilise proxies for meetings. Under current arrangements, the use of proxies is considered by the Chair on a case-by-case basis. Interviewees noted that there is currently no formal guidance governing the use of proxies or clarifying the extent of their participation and decision-making authority. Several interviewees suggested that establishing clearer arrangements in this area would provide greater certainty regarding the status and role of proxy attendees.

Recommendation 1: The Committee should develop formal guidance on the use of proxies.

4.2 Funding arrangements

The Committee is supported through dedicated funding for secretariat, research and consultation activities. Current government investment provided $8.7 million over four years from 2023-24, with ongoing funding of $2.2 million per year thereafter. Of this funding, $800k per year is allocated to research, consultation and stakeholder engagement activities. The remaining $1.4 million per year is allocated to the department to ensure ongoing provision of secretariat and administrative supports.

Committee membership is an unpaid appointment. Members contribute their time and expertise in kind. Interviewees noted that the willingness of members to devote substantial time and effort reflects their commitment to improving economic inclusion outcomes and strengthening the evidence-base for policy reform. While not remunerated for their participation, members are remunerated for any travel expenses related to the work of the Committee.

Some Committee members expressed a desire for more reporting on expenditure related to procurement and consultation activities. This could be achieved through the introduction of quarterly expenditure reporting.

Recommendation 2: The department should introduce quarterly expenditure reporting to the Committee.

4.3 Procurement

Procurement of research, consultation and other support for the Committee is undertaken by the department on the Committee's behalf. Funding available for these activities is appropriated to the department, which holds the relevant financial delegations and procurement authority. Consequently, the department is responsible for conducting procurement activities and must do so in accordance with the requirements of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*[8] and the Commonwealth Procurement Rules[9].

While the department is responsible for the procurement process, the Committee retains responsibility for determining its research priorities and identifying the evidence and support required to inform its work.

As part of the report development process, the Committee agrees on priority topics and identifies areas where additional research, consultation or specialist expertise is required. The Committee works closely with the department to develop research proposals, using research proposal templates that articulate the objectives, scope and intended outcomes of commissioned work.

The Committee's input is used by the department to formulate procurement documentation and undertake the necessary market engagement activities, including preparation of the Approach to Market. This model seeks to balance the Committee's role in defining and shaping research requirements with the department's responsibility for meeting government procurement obligations.

Undertaking procurement processes on behalf of the Committee requires effective communication and information sharing between the Committee and the department. Interviewees noted that expertise in economic inclusion is concentrated among a relatively small number of organisations, individuals and researchers.

While this concentration of expertise assists in identifying capable providers, it can also create challenges around potential conflicts and probity risk. Committee members sign a Conflict of Interest Declaration as part of the onboarding process which requires them to take reasonable steps to avoid any conflict of interest (real or perceived) in connection with their role on the Committee.

These arrangements support transparency and help safeguard the integrity of procurement and decision-making processes. Interviewees acknowledged the work of the department in managing and balancing these challenges.

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[8] *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (Cth).
[9] Department of Finance, Commonwealth Procurement Rules, Australian Government, 17 November 2025.

While some interviewees expressed dissatisfaction that procurement activities are formally managed by the department, others acknowledged the importance of maintaining separation between the Committee's role in identifying research needs and the department's role in conducting procurement activities and exercising delegated authority.

> **"I think we're getting better at how from an arm's length we get the department to do things"**

Contracts are actively managed throughout their life in accordance with internal departmental processes, the contract terms and risk management requirements. Ongoing contract management provides assurance that contracted services are delivered in accordance with agreed expectations, timelines and quality standards while supporting the Committee's research and consultation needs.

Supporting Committee members to better understand the procurement requirements and processes used by the department, particularly when onboarding new members, was suggested. Strengthening the Committee's understanding of procurement requirements would improve collaboration between the Committee and the department, ensure members are aware of their roles and responsibilities and support more effective planning of research and consultation activities.

Recommendation 3: The department should formally articulate the procurement process as part of Committee governance and onboarding arrangements.

5. Committee functioning and secretariat support

This section examines how the Committee functions in practice, including its decision-making processes, working arrangements and the support provided by the secretariat and government departments. It outlines the mechanisms through which the Committee develops its advice and presents observations regarding the effectiveness of current arrangements, areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

5.1 Committee operations

The Committee operates on a reporting cycle aligned with the preparation of its report and advice to government ahead of each federal Budget. The Committee typically meets monthly by videoconference and holds one in-person meeting each financial year. The Secretary of the Treasury and the Secretary of the department attend as ex-officio members. As Joint Ministers of the Committee, the Minister for Social Services and the Treasurer are required, under the Act (subsection 24A)[10], to attend at least one Committee meeting per financial year.

At the commencement of each reporting cycle, members consider the outcomes of the federal Budget and discuss emerging issues, potential topics and the overall framing of the report. These discussions inform the Committee's agreement on priority areas for the upcoming report. The Chair guides these discussions and confirms agreed priorities and next steps.

The Act (subsection 8(6))[11] enables the Joint Ministers to direct the Committee to consider specified matters within the scope of its legislated functions, which the government has utilised regarding the focus on workforce participation in the Committee's 2024 report.

Once priorities are established, the Committee commissions research and forms smaller subcommittees to progress individual topics. These subcommittees engage with stakeholders, lead detailed analysis and develop report content using a range of evidence.

In addition to commissioned research, the Committee draws on existing academic literature and consultation with people with lived experience and sector stakeholders. The Committee also accesses information from across government, including modelling and technical advice, with government experts providing data, policy advice and quality assurance.

[10] *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023* (Cth). Part 2 subsection 24A. [Joint Ministers to attend meetings]
[11] ibid. Part 2 subsection 8(6). [Direction by Joint Ministers]

Draft chapters and recommendations are circulated for review and refined through an iterative process before being considered by the full Committee. The Committee adopts a consensus-based approach to the development of its final recommendations.

Interviewees generally described the Committee as operating effectively, with members working together to develop its advice and recommendations. The Committee's meeting arrangements were seen as effective in progressing its work. In particular, the use of subcommittees was identified as a strength, enabling more detailed discussion of complex issues and supporting the development of report content. The Chair was consistently identified as effective in facilitating discussion, managing differing perspectives, clarifying areas of agreement and maintaining focus on the Committee's work program.

While views on the Committee's operation were generally positive, some interviewees suggested that there needed to be more opportunities for debate and contestability of ideas. The one hour monthly meetings were seen as providing less opportunity for deeper debate. Longer workshops and in-person meetings that provide more dedicated time for substantive discussion were identified as mechanisms that could support greater contestability of ideas and more in-depth consideration of policy issues. Developing mechanisms to manage differing member viewpoints on recommendations in the final report is also essential.

> **"Yeah, in an hour, we were trying to cover where we were up to on four to five different topics. You get sort of 10 or 15 minutes, pretty fast and furious, and it's pretty functional.**
>
> **…**
>
> **So, I think some longer, better supported, better framed sort of meetings where we thrash it out, maybe in subgroups on different topics."**

The Committee has already begun addressing this through the introduction of longer subcommittee sessions. Continuing this approach more broadly with structured workshops, topic-focused discussions and longer form engagement could further enhance the contribution of members' expertise.

Interviewees also observed that the Committee has matured since its establishment. Examples provided included refinement of consultation approaches, strengthening the evidence-base through commissioned research, developing more established processes for setting priorities and report development, and stronger engagement with stakeholders, researchers and government departments.

The Committee also undertook activities to reflect on its long term effectiveness and future direction. In 2024, members participated in discussions regarding the Committee's intended contribution by 2030 and considered international examples of advisory bodies addressing poverty and economic inclusion. This included engagement between some of the Committee members, the Chair and secretariat of the Canadian National Advisory Council on Poverty.

While these discussions and external engagements provided valuable insights into the Committee's future role and effectiveness, interviews identified further areas for improvement. Some interviewees noted that the workload of the Committee has been disproportionate, with a small number of members undertaking substantial drafting and report development. It was suggested that differing levels of organisational resources and support backing for some members can influence the extent to which individuals are able to contribute to drafting, research and report development activities.

Some interviewees also raised concerns regarding members' capacity to participate in all Committee activities. It was acknowledged that individual circumstances can impact participation at meetings and in consultation activities and the ability to contribute to report development. Several members emphasised the importance of ensuring Committee processes support equitable participation.

Committee activities should be designed and delivered to support equitable participation by all members. This includes identifying and addressing accessibility and location-related barriers to participation, such as the needs of members with disability and travel considerations for members in regional or remote locations. Reasonable adjustments should be implemented where required to remove barriers to participation, maximise member engagement and support effective contribution to the Committee's work.

Recommendation 4: The Committee's activities should be designed and delivered to ensure in depth consideration of policy options and support equitable participation by all members.

5.2 Secretariat and departmental support

The Review found that the Committee is well supported by the secretariat, which provides administrative and operational assistance across a range of functions, including meeting coordination, logistics, stakeholder engagement and report production.

Interviewees consistently highlighted the value of support provided by departmental analytical and policy teams. Access to modelling, data and evidence was considered an important contribution to the Committee's work helping inform its analysis and recommendations.

> **"Last year I worked closely with the DSS modelling team for one of the parts of the chapter on income adequacy and they were really great to work with as well, very professional…"**

A recurring theme in interviews was the value of additional support for report development and drafting. Several interviewees considered that increased drafting support would resolve the disproportionate workload of the Committee, allowing members to devote more time to strategic thinking, policy analysis and providing expert advice.

Interviewees noted that the department has previously provided resources to support policy and drafting assistance. This arrangement was viewed positively, helping to address capacity constraints while also providing professional development opportunities for departmental staff. Conversely, some interviewees cautioned the need to balance any support provided by the department, ensuring it is structured to manage perceptions of the department influencing the Committee's recommendations or advice to government.

Recommendation 5: The Committee should identify the best way to access additional support for report development and writing. This could be sourced internally from within the department or externally through a funded procurement arrangement.



6. External engagement

This section outlines the external engagement undertaken by the Committee to inform topics of focus. This includes engagement with people with lived experience, stakeholder organisations and relevant government agencies and experts to support the development of the Committee's advice.

6.1 Lived experience

The Committee utilises a range of mechanisms to capture the perspectives of people with lived experience. Individuals interviewed as part of this Review consistently identified lived experience engagement as a core component of the Committee's work and an important source of insight informing the Committee's advice. A key challenge for the Committee is ensuring that engagement captures a sufficiently broad, diverse and representative range of lived experience before narrowing its focus to specific topics and solutions.

For the 2023-2024 Interim report, the Committee used the expertise of four organisations to facilitate consultation sessions with a diverse range of community members, namely the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, the Australian Council of Social Service, Single Mother Families Australia and Disability Advocacy Network Australia. These consultations engaged culturally and linguistically diverse communities, young people, older Australians, people with disability, women with caring responsibilities and individuals with experience accessing income support and employment services support.

This approach was generally viewed as successful in capturing a broad spectrum of lived experience perspectives. However, interviewees also noted that the consultations were insufficiently targeted to provide the level of insight required to directly inform the Committee's policy deliberations and recommendations.

In response to these limitations, the Committee adopted a revised consultation model for the 2025 report. This model involved targeted, topic-specific consultations with small groups of people with lived experience to generate detailed insights into particular issues. The Brotherhood of St. Laurence was contracted to establish and facilitate these consultation groups. A similar approach was subsequently used for the 2026 report.

> **"So I think … we need to go deep. We need to bring people into deep conversations and we need to go out and sit with people. I think that's valuable. Some broader based, quick discussions, not valuable at this point in the process."**

Interviewees generally recognised that the revised model provides greater depth, more focused discussion and more targeted input into the Committee's work. However, some concerns were raised regarding whether the model captures the full range of experiences relevant to economic inclusion.

Limitations associated with the current consultation model highlighted by several interviewees included:

- repeated engagement with similar participant groups, potentially limiting the diversity of perspectives
- insufficient representation of individuals whose experiences fall outside severe or entrenched disadvantage
- reduced opportunities for participants to raise issues beyond the predefined consultation topics
- limited involvement of people with lived experience in setting Committee priorities, with engagement occurring primarily after priorities have been established.

> **"The Committee does need to be a bit mindful about how targeted it becomes in its consultation."**

Some interviewees expressed a need for greater representation of voices of people currently living in poverty, as well as Indigenous representation. There was, however, differing views regarding how this should be achieved. Suggested approaches ranged from membership of people with lived experience on the Committee to strengthening existing consultation and engagement mechanisms.

Interviewees also emphasised the importance of ensuring that lived experience engagement is meaningful and gives participants genuine opportunities to influence the Committee's work. This includes creating opportunities for people with lived experience to identify emerging issues and challenges, contribute to the development of Committee priorities and to shape policy discussions and advise on potential solutions.

The ongoing refinement of consultation processes demonstrates the Committee's commitment to ensuring its work is informed by people with lived experience. Nevertheless, maintaining broad, representative and meaningful engagement remains an ongoing challenge.

> **"You learn about their experience navigating the system, and you think about ways that you can improve that. Learning about the kind of diversity of experiences, which helps you to think about program design that might be more tailored to people's individual circumstances."**

One potential opportunity is to better leverage existing lived experience evidence already collected by government service delivery agencies, including Services Australia, the National Disability Insurance Agency and other relevant bodies. Information gathered through surveys, administrative data and consultation mechanisms could provide the Committee with access to a broader and potentially more representative evidence-base. This approach could also reduce duplication of effort, strengthen connections with service delivery agencies and improve understanding of implementation challenges and service-user experiences.

Another option suggested by interviewees was developing a forward work plan that incorporates lived experience engagement earlier in the policy development process (see Recommendation 9, Section 7.1).

Recommendation 6: The Committee should ensure it accesses broad enough perspectives from people with lived experience as it continues to evolve its engagement approach.

6.2 Organisation engagement

Over the past two years, the Committee has engaged with community groups, advocacy organisations and research institutions to strengthen its evidence-base and inform report recommendations. This engagement has provided an opportunity to gather policy insights, research findings, stakeholder perspectives and evidence on the experiences of people interacting with the social security system.

The stakeholder engagement process is undertaken collaboratively between the Committee and the department. Based on suggestions from Committee members, the department develops a proposed list of organisations for engagement. The final list is endorsed by the Committee, with the department responsible for managing logistics, meeting arrangements and requests for submissions.

For its 2025 and 2026 reports, the Committee engaged with 27 organisations across a range of sectors, including community, advocacy and research organisations. This engagement included meetings with 19 organisations and submissions from 16 organisations, with several organisations contributing through both processes.

In addition to targeted consultation activities, organisations can express their interest in engaging with the Committee through a registration process available on the Committee's webpage on the department's website. This provides an additional avenue for stakeholders to contribute evidence and perspectives to the Committee's work.

Engagement with the Committee was seen as beneficial for organisations in helping to build a shared understanding of issues affecting economic inclusion and supporting more effective understanding in relation to the Committee's recommendations. Some interviewees suggested that greater public visibility of the Committee's forward work program could further enhance stakeholder engagement by improving awareness of emerging priorities and providing organisations with greater opportunity to contribute relevant evidence and insights. This issue is discussed further later in this report.

> **"It's incredibly difficult to get change within the social security system. It's particularly difficult to get money and legislative reform because it's a politically loaded space. It's very expensive and it's very complex."**

Interviewees also acknowledged the significant role played by organisations operating within the economic inclusion sector. Many of these organisations invest in research, data collection and policy development that could be further leveraged by the Committee. Greater utilisation of existing research was seen as an opportunity to reduce duplication of effort while strengthening the Committee's evidence-base.

> **"…being able to produce research notes that we can share along the way as the Committee are writing their report, even if we haven't been commissioned to do any kind of work for them, very keen to share our insights as we produce them because that is our skill set, that's our focus."**

While engagement with organisations was viewed positively overall, several interviewees suggested the Committee would benefit from a broader range of perspectives, including with business and employer representative organisations, labour market stakeholders, industry groups and workforce representatives. It was also suggested the Committee should have stronger engagement with think tanks, policy specialists and other independent experts.

> **"To have an effective discussion around trade-offs, you actually do need people who are comfortable talking outside their area of expertise. This is the role of think tanks."**

Expanding engagement across these groups was viewed as an opportunity to provide additional insights into economic participation, labour market dynamics, policy design considerations and the practical trade-offs associated with reform options.

Recommendation 7: The Committee should consider opportunities to expand the diversity of external perspectives informing its research and recommendations.

6.3 Government engagement

Interviewees across government departments highlighted the value of engagement with the Committee through the annual full-day workshops, as they provide an opportunity to test ideas, share perspectives and contribute to discussions on policy issues, emerging challenges and possible recommendations.

Early engagement with government experts during report development and the formulation of key topics was identified by many as a key opportunity to improve the quality and impact of the Committee's advice. Engaging relevant agencies during the formative stages of the Committee's work was seen as a means of incorporating a broader range of expertise, testing policy options and enhancing stakeholder ownership of emerging recommendations.

This approach was considered particularly valuable for issues that cut across multiple policy domains, including housing, health and education. Interviewees pointed to previous engagement on employment services reform as an example of how early collaboration with government stakeholders can strengthen analysis and improve the relevance of recommendations. The Committee should consider opportunities to provide more targeted advice that complements existing work undertaken by government and aligns more closely with relevant reform processes, while maintaining its independent advisory role.

There was strong support among interviewees for more proactive and sustained engagement with key government policy and delivery stakeholders throughout the year. Increased engagement with Ministers and parliamentarians and broader engagement across government departments and service delivery agencies could strengthen the Committee's influence and improve the likelihood of recommendations informing policy outcomes.

While the Committee has undertaken engagement activities at later stages of the report cycle, interviewees considered that greater impact could be achieved if this engagement occurred earlier and continued throughout the development of reports. A more continuous engagement approach was viewed as preferable to relying primarily on publication of the annual report as the principal mechanism for communicating recommendations and influencing policy.

Some interviewees suggested the Committee could increase its policy impact by communicating emerging findings during policy and budget development processes. Earlier dissemination of insights by releasing discussion papers, position papers or interim products would enable stakeholders to consider the Committee's analysis before policy positions become settled.

> **"If they did things like position papers or something like that, where they could release things a bit earlier in the cycle..."**

Several interviewees suggested that formal briefings for parliamentarians on priority issues could build support for recommendations ahead of report publication. Earlier engagement with parliamentarians was seen as a means of increasing awareness of key issues and facilitating informed discussion of the Committee's findings and proposals.

Interviewees noted that the Committee's recommendations appear to have been most influential where they align with existing government priorities and reform agendas. Employment services reform was frequently cited as an example of an area where alignment with government priorities contributed to greater consideration and uptake of recommendations.

At the same time, interviewees emphasised the importance of preserving the Committee's role as an independent provider of evidence-based advice. While consideration of government priorities may enhance the practical impact of recommendations, interviewees recognised the need for the Committee to remain focused on providing independent, evidence-based advice regardless of political considerations.

The involvement of senior officials from the Treasury and the department was also viewed positively by interviewees. Their participation was seen as helping to elevate discussions within government, increase awareness of emerging issues and recommendations, and strengthen connections between the Committee's work and broader policy development processes. This engagement was considered particularly valuable in supporting internal government consideration of the Committee's analysis and promoting greater visibility of its emerging findings and recommendations.

Recommendation 8: The Committee should undertake earlier and more sustained engagement with departments, Ministers and the budget process to improve the Committee's influence.



7. Effectiveness of the Committee

This section considers the effectiveness of the Committee in supporting its legislated objectives and influencing discussion on economic inclusion and disadvantage. It examines the strategic framework that guides the Committee's work, including priority setting and forward planning, as well as the communication and promotion of Committee outputs. The section also considers the Committee's broader influence and impact on policy development and public discussion.

7.1 Strategic framework and work program

In its 2024 report, the Committee introduced an Economic Inclusion Framework (the Framework) centred on four domains: economic security, equal opportunities, the equitable sharing of economic growth, and efficient and responsive government. The Framework was intended to provide a broader lens for assessing economic disadvantage and to guide both the Committee's recommendations and its future work.

Since its introduction, the Framework has informed the Committee's selection and assessment of report topics. For example, in the 2025 report, the Committee explicitly linked its areas of focus to the Framework's core domains, reflecting a broader conception of the factors that influence economic inclusion.

The Committee envisaged the Framework as a living document that would evolve in response to new evidence, changing circumstances and emerging policy challenges.

> **"…I would like us to say, where's the country going? How are we going to take everyone with us? And what should we be doing to make sure that comes true?"**

Some interviewees consistently emphasised the value of the Committee maintaining a sophisticated and transparent framework for understanding economic inclusion. They highlighted the importance of clearly identifying the drivers of economic disadvantage, emerging risks and priority cohorts, noting that a well-developed framework can provide greater transparency around how priorities are selected, the outcomes the Committee seeks to influence, and the contribution of individual recommendations to those outcomes.

It was suggested the Committee should combine a long term, high level strategic framework with more detailed examination of specific policy issues. Such an approach would guide topics of focus and enable recommendations to be situated within a coherent economic inclusion agenda. In addition, this approach would support recognition of the interconnected roles of housing, health, education, disability, employment services and other systems in shaping economic inclusion outcomes.

Members interviewed indicated that, as part of the development of its 2027 report, the Committee is considering opportunities to strengthen and refine the Framework and ensure it remains fit for purpose.

> **“The Committee has the potential to really set an economic inclusion agenda for Australia.”**

There was consistent feedback that the Committee's annual reporting cycle creates compressed timeframes for consultation, research, analysis and report development. A common suggestion was that the Committee adopt a longer term strategic framework and forward work program that identifies priority issues over multiple years. This would provide greater scope for deeper analysis while preserving the annual reporting cycle, and could support longer term planning, research commissioning and engagement with government and stakeholders.

> **"I think if the Committee had a more formal work plan over a longer period of time, that would really help."**

Some interviewees also suggested that the Committee's strategic priorities and forward work program should be made publicly available and regularly reported against. In their view, this would improve transparency around the Committee's longer term objectives and the basis for its work program.

Recommendation 9: The Committee should ensure it utilises a robust economic inclusion framework alongside developing and publishing a structured multi-year work program.

7.2 Communications and promotion

There was broad agreement that the Committee's reports are of a high standard and continue to be influential. Interviewees noted that the reports are widely used by stakeholders, including community organisations, researchers, academics and policymakers. The Committee's work was also seen as providing an important source of independent analysis and recommendations on economic inclusion issues, helping to validate and reinforce findings and recommendations advanced by other organisations, including community and advocacy groups.

Interviewees further highlighted the value of the research undertaken and commissioned by the Committee to support its work. The accompanying research reports, which are published alongside the Committee's reports, were seen as making a meaningful contribution to the public evidence-base on economic inclusion. Interviewees noted that these reports provide detailed analysis of complex policy issues and generate evidence that can be drawn upon by governments, researchers, community organisations and other interested parties well beyond the Committee's annual reporting cycle.

It was observed that media attention and public interest in the Committee were stronger in its early years, contributing to greater visibility of its work and recommendations. However, many considered that public attention has diminished over time.

Some interviewees expressed concern that the Committee's reports and recommendations have a relatively limited public profile and suggested there may be opportunities to increase the visibility and impact of the Committee's work. Several noted that more active communication and engagement could help ensure the Committee's findings reach a broader audience and contribute more effectively to public and policy debate.

To complement *Recommendation 9*, interviewees suggested that the Committee could consider publishing its forward work program and providing updates on its activities throughout the year. This was seen as a way of improving public understanding of the Committee's work, increasing transparency around its priorities and maintaining engagement between reporting cycles.

Several interviewees also suggested that the Committee could adopt a more proactive communications approach, including the publication of position papers, discussion papers or other interim products. Such outputs could be used to communicate emerging findings, contribute to policy discussions and sustain engagement on issues relevant to economic inclusion throughout the year, rather than relying solely on the annual publication of its report.

> **"You need to think about influence throughout the year, not just when the report lands."**

Further suggestions included aligning communications activities with the Committee's longer term priorities and forward work program. They considered that a more strategic approach to engagement with researchers, community organisations, advocacy groups and other policy stakeholders could help amplify key messages and extend the reach and influence of the Committee's work.

> **"We need a communications plan. And we should be proud of this work."**

8. Reports

This section examines the Committee's reports and advice to government, including the development of report content, the issues and priorities addressed through successive reports, and the presentation of recommendations. It considers the extent to which Committee reports support the provision of timely, evidence-based advice to government and explores stakeholder views on opportunities to enhance the accessibility, relevance and impact of future reports.

8.1 Development of the reports over time

Since its inception, the Committee has delivered four reports to government and a total of 53 recommendations. A number of report recommendations have been taken up in part or in full by government. The Committee assesses government responses to its recommendations as part of its reporting process, providing an ongoing mechanism to monitor progress.

The Committee's legislated areas of focus, outlined in Section 3.1 of this report, include:

- economic inclusion, including approaches to boost economic participation
- the adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments, including options to boost economic inclusion and tackle disadvantage
- options to reduce barriers and disincentives to work, including in relation to social security and employment services
- options for tailored responses to address barriers to economic inclusion for long term unemployed and disadvantaged groups, including place-based approaches at the local level, having regard to the split between Commonwealth, State, Territory and local government responsibilities
- the impact of economic inclusion policies on people with barriers to work, including people with caring responsibilities, Indigenous persons, people with disability, and on gender equality, and the trends of inequality markers in Australia and international comparisons.

Examination of the Committee's reports to date demonstrates that these legislated priorities have remained central to its work program and recommendations.

Reports have addressed the adequacy of Australia's income support and social service systems, highlighting their impact on poverty, economic participation and social inclusion. A recurring priority has been the adequacy of the JobSeeker Payment and related working-age payments. The Committee has also considered the need for changes to indexation arrangements in relation to Commonwealth Rent Assistance and the Remote Area Allowance to better reflect rising living costs and support people experiencing financial hardship.

Broader structural reforms aimed at reducing poverty and strengthening economic inclusion have also been covered. Key areas of focus have included reducing child poverty through family payment reforms, improving access to affordable and high-quality early childhood education and care by removing barriers such as the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test, and addressing concentrated disadvantage in communities.

Some Committee recommendations have been taken up in part or in full by government. Recommendations contained in the 2023 report were reflected in significant policy reforms, including the abolition of ParentsNext and the introduction of Parent Pathways from 31 October 2024. Similarly, recommendations from the 2024 and 2025 reports were viewed as contributing to the development of the government's early childhood reform agenda. Other recommendations from the Committee were reflected through the 2024-25 Budget, including a 10% increase to the maximum rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, reforms to employment services and changes to Carer Payment participation rules.

Interviewees consistently highlighted the role of housing, health, education, disability, employment services and other system interactions in shaping economic inclusion outcomes. This reflects the Committee's view that economic inclusion is influenced by a range of interconnected policy settings extending beyond the income support system alone. However, some cautioned not to duplicate the role of existing specialist bodies and expert organisations (for example: the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute and Australia's Disability Strategy Advisory Council).

> **"JobSeeker payment is linked to housing, health services, education and other things that are impacting social and economic inclusion for people."**

There was support for a broader focus on pathways to participation and the barriers preventing workforce and community engagement, as economic inclusion extends to keeping people in work.

8.2 Presentation and recommendations

The Committee's reports are recognised for their comprehensive, rigorous and evidence-based analysis. Interviewees consistently acknowledged them as making a valuable contribution to the evidence-base on economic inclusion and informing policy discussions across government and the broader community.

As an independent advisory body, the Committee provides recommendations designed to support both transformative reform and practical policy improvements. Interviewees recognised the importance of this independence, while also noting the ongoing challenge of balancing robust, evidence-based recommendations with an awareness of government priorities, implementation constraints and fiscal considerations.

Notwithstanding this positive assessment, several interviewees suggested more focus was needed on strengthening the depth of analysis, evaluating what works, and providing greater examination of policy trade-offs, implementation considerations and prioritisation in the context of fiscal impacts.

> **"I saw the last one [report], and I was kind of surprised that pretty much every one of the recommendations was increase that payment…with very little discussion of the trade-offs involved, you know, the cost to government."**

Changes to the structure, length and presentation of reports were seen as ways to improve accessibility, usability and the overall impact of the Committee's advice. Consideration should be given to having a more focused, shorter report that addresses new areas the Committee has investigated each year.

Interviewees highlighted the value of distinguishing new recommendations from previous recommendations and demonstrating progress over time. It was also suggested the Committee could enhance the accessibility and impact of its reports by developing shorter supporting products that communicate key messages.

> **"Maybe because the reports are so big, the conventional media doesn't necessarily focus on them or find them easy to process."**

Some interviewees noted that government actions consistent with Committee recommendations are not always publicly attributed to the Committee, making it difficult to demonstrate impact. Interviewees suggested greater visibility of recommendation uptake and government responses may help strengthen understanding of the Committee's contribution to policy development.

It was further suggested that the government should formally respond to recommendations made by the Committee, however, as the Committee is an advisory body its recommendations are non-binding on government.

Reports currently include an assessment of government responses to Committee recommendations. The Committee could build on this approach by creating a separate report that monitors previous recommendations. This would provide visibility of progress over time, more clearly distinguish ongoing recommendations from new proposals and allow future reports to focus more clearly on emerging issues, analysis and advice to government, while still having a mechanism to show progress over time.

The Committee's reporting timetable is closely linked to federal Budget processes and legislative requirements. Interviewees noted that the timing of the 2025 federal election, which resulted in the Budget being brought forward to March 2025, affected the timing of the Committee's reporting cycle. The 2026 report represented the first report prepared under the permanent Committee's standard reporting arrangements.

While those interviewed recognised the need to align reports with established budget processes, some suggested that the Committee could complement its annual recommendations with a longer term reform agenda.

Such an approach could involve maintaining a suite of reform proposals that build progressively over time and remain available for government consideration across multiple budget cycles. This would provide greater continuity between reports and enable the Committee to articulate a clearer long term vision for improving economic inclusion.

Together, these suggestions reflected a broader view that reports should focus more clearly on new work and emerging issues, while progress against existing recommendations is monitored separately.

Recommendation 10: Each year, the Committee's report should be divided into two separate reports: a primary report focusing on new areas of inquiry, highlighting emerging evidence and presenting new recommendations; and a separate report outlining progress against previous recommendations.

9. Concluding remarks

This Review found that the Committee has been effective in fulfilling its legislative functions and has established itself as an important source of independent advice on economic inclusion and disadvantage. Since its establishment, the Committee has evolved and adapted its approach, continuing to build its processes, evidence-base and engagement activities. Its reports and commissioned research are widely regarded as high-quality, evidence-based contributions to policy discussions on economic inclusion and disadvantage.

The Committee's membership, expertise and independence were consistently identified as key strengths, underpinning the quality, credibility and authority of its advice. While the Review found that the Committee is functioning effectively, it also identified opportunities to strengthen its arrangements and ways of working. The recommendations include measures to broaden the perspectives informing the Committee's work through earlier and more sustained engagement, strengthen support for member participation and contribution, and improve the clarity of governance arrangements through formal guidance on key Committee processes.

The Review also identified opportunities to strengthen the strategic focus, accessibility and impact of the Committee's advice. Recommendations include the development of a multi-year work program to support longer term planning and priority setting, and changes to the structure of reporting to allow greater focus on new and emerging issues separating its annual progress reporting against previous recommendations and related government actions. Taken together, these measures are intended to support a more transparent, strategic and influential advisory function, enabling the Committee to continue making a valuable contribution to policy development and public debate on economic inclusion and disadvantage.

Appendix 1: Review Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference – First Review of the *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023*

The review will examine the operation of *Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee Act 2023* (the Act) and consider whether the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (the Committee) is carrying out its functions effectively.

Scope

The review will examine and make recommendations about the operation of the Act, with reference to:

1. **Establishment and functioning of the Committee**: This will include:
    a. Whether the Committee is operating as intended. This includes how the Committee is meeting its legislative objectives to provide advice to Ministers on matters related to Australian Government policies, programs and responsibilities for enhancing economic inclusion and participation.
    b. Membership of the Committee, including how the membership contributes to the effectiveness of the Committee and the advice provided to government.
    c. The extent to which the Committee provides timely, evidence-based reports ahead of each Federal Budget on economic inclusion and disadvantage.
2. **Effectiveness** of the **Committee** in carrying out its function. This will include:
    a. Adequacy and clarity of governance arrangements.

Governance and deliverables

The Minister has appointed independent reviewer Ms Liza Carroll PSM to undertake the review.

The reviewer will provide a final report to the Minister no later than 8 December 2026.

The Minister must table a copy of the report in each House of the Parliament within 15 sitting days of that House and after receiving the report.

The review will consult with:

- the Chair and select Committee members;
- the Minister for Social Services and the Treasurer, and or their representatives;



- the Committee secretariat and other relevant public servants in the Department of Social Services, the Treasury and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and other relevant departments and agencies,
- the shadow treasurer and Minister for Social Services, and other Senators and Members of Parliament as considered appropriate, and
- other stakeholders as required.

The reviewer will be supported by the Department of Social Services.



Appendix 2: Stakeholders consulted

Category	Stakeholder
Committee Chair	The Hon Jenny Macklin AC
Committee Member	Professor Jeff Borland AO, Department of Economics University of Melbourne
Committee Member	Professor Kay Cook, School of Social Sciences, Media, Film and Education, Swinburne University of Technology
Committee Member	Associate Professor Ben Phillips, Centre for Social Research Australian National University
Committee Member	Professor Peter Whiteford, Crawford School of Public Policy Australian National University
Committee Member	Mr Matthew Cox, Executive Director, The Bryan Foundation
Committee Member	Dr Travers McLeod, Executive Director of the Brotherhood of St. Laurence
Committee Member	Dr Cassandra Goldie AO, CEO, Australian Council of Social Service accompanied by Charmaine Crowe, Program Director, Social Security, Australian Council of Social Service
Committee Member	Ms Melinda Cilento, CEO, Committee for Economic Development of Australia
Committee Member	Professor Bob Breunig, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University
Committee Member	Ms Emily Carter AM, CEO, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre
Department Officer	Ms Katrina Chatham, Branch Manager, Participation and Supplementary Payments, Department of Social Services
Department Officer	Mr Ben Peoples, Group Manager, Participation and Family Payments, Department of Social Services
Department Officer	DSS secretariat
Department Officer	Mr Matt Flavel, Deputy Secretary, Social Security Stream, Department of Social Services

Category	Stakeholder
Ex-officio	Mr Michael Lye, Secretary of the Department of Social Services
Ex-officio	Ms Jenny Wilkinson PSM, Secretary of the Treasury accompanied by Damien White, Deputy Secretary, Fiscal Group, Treasury
Minister for Social Services	The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations	The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP
Parliamentarian	Senator David Pocock, Independent and Chief of Staff.
Parliamentarian	Senator Penny Allman-Payne, Australian Greens
PMC	Dr Steven Kennedy PSM, Secretary, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Organisation	Ms Terese Edwards, CEO, Single Mother Families Australia
Organisation	Mr Gianni La Cava, Research Director, e61 Institute
Organisation	Ms Kate Allingham, CEO, Economic Justice Australia and Ms Sally Cameron, Senior Law Reform Officer, Economic Justice Australia



Appendix 3: Full list of report topics

All reports can be viewed on the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee webpage (https://www.dss.gov.au/committees-councils-groups-and-panels/committees/economic-inclusion-advisory-committee).

Report	Key focus areas	Legislative requirement addressed
2026 report	• Adequacy of payments - JobSeeker and Remote Area Allowance • Housing and rental stress - Commonwealth Rent Assistance • Family payments - Improving Australia's system of family payments to reduce child poverty • Employment services reforms • Poverty measurement • Deep and persistent disadvantage: an update	• Adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments, including options to boost economic inclusion and tackle disadvantage. • Options to reduce barriers and disincentives to work, including in relation to social security and employment services. • Options for tailored responses to address barriers to economic inclusion for long term unemployed and disadvantaged groups. • Impact of economic inclusion policies on people with barriers to work, including people with caring responsibilities and on gender equality. • Trends of inequality markers in Australia and international comparisons.
2025 report	• Increasing JobSeeker and related payments • Addressing Housing Stress • Increasing the Remote Area Allowance • Addressing Family and Domestic Violence • Measuring Poverty • Reform of Employment Services • Reform of Early Childhood Development Services	• Adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments, including options to boost economic inclusion and tackle disadvantage. • Options to reduce barriers and disincentives to work, including in relation to social security and employment services. • Impact of economic inclusion policies on people with barriers to work, including people with caring responsibilities, Indigenous persons, people with disability, and on gender equality. • Trends of inequality markers in Australia and international comparisons.



Report	Key focus areas	Legislative requirement addressed
2024 report	• Increase JobSeeker and related working age payments and improve the indexation arrangements • Increase the rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance • Create a new employment services system • Implement a national early childhood development system and abolish the Activity Test for the Child Care Subsidy • Renew the culture and practice of the social security system to support economic inclusion and wellbeing	• Economic inclusion, including approaches to boost economic participation. • Adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments, including options to boost economic inclusion and tackle disadvantage. • Options to reduce barriers and disincentives to work, including in relation to social security and employment services. • Impact of economic inclusion policies on people with barriers to work, including people with caring responsibilities and on gender equality.
2023-2024 Interim report	• Adequacy of income support payments • Transition into full employment • Rewiring investment into place of recognised disadvantage • Reforming services and systems that compound disadvantage • Setting economic inclusion for the long term	• Economic inclusion, including approaches to boost economic participation. • The adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments, including options to boost economic inclusion and tackle disadvantage. • Options to reduce barriers and disincentives to work, including in relation to social security and employment services. • Options for tailored responses to address barriers to economic inclusion for long term unemployed and disadvantaged groups, including place-based approaches at the local level. • The impact of economic inclusion policies on people with barriers to work and disadvantaged groups.



Appendix 4: Full list of Committee Members

Role	Representative	Organisation representing	Membership period
Chair	The Hon Jenny Macklin AC		December 2023 – Current
Member	Professor Jeff Borland AO	University of Melbourne	December 2023 – Current
Member	Professor Bob Breunig	Australian National University	December 2023 – Current
Member	Ms Emily Carter AM	Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre	December 2023 – Current
Member	Ms Melinda Cilento	Committee for Economic Development of Australia	December 2023 – Current
Member	Professor Kay Cook	Swinburne University of Technology	December 2023 – Current
Member	Dr Cassandra Goldie AO	Australian Council of Social Service	December 2023 – Current
Member	Dr Travers McLeod	Brotherhood of St. Laurence	December 2023 – Current
Member	Ms Donnella Mills	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation	December 2023 – Current
Member	Associate Professor Ben Phillips	Australian National University	December 2023 – Current
Member	Professor Peter Whiteford	Australian National University	December 2023 – Current
Member	Mr Matthew Cox	The Bryan Foundation	December 2023 – Current
Member	Ms Leah van Poppel	Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS	December 2023 – Current
Former member	Sally McManus	Australian Council of Trade Unions	December 2023 – August 2026
Former member	Dr Angela Jackson	Impact Economics and Policy	December 2023 – April 2025
Former Member	Mr Bran Black	Business Council of Australia	December 2023 – April 2024

Role	Representative	Organisation representing	Membership period
Ex-officio	Mr Michael Lye	Secretary of the Department of Social Services	December 2024 – Current
Ex-officio	Ms Jenny Wilkinson PSM	Secretary of the Treasury	June 2025 - Current
Former ex-officio	Mr Ray Griggs AO CSC	Former Secretary of the Department of Social Services	December 2023 – December 2024
Former ex-officio	Dr Steven Kennedy PSM	Former Secretary of the Treasury	December 2023 – June 2025

Appendix 5: Interim Committee Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference

Purpose

The Government has committed to establishing an Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee before the end of 2022 to provide non-binding written advice on economic inclusion, including policy settings, systems and structures, and the adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments ahead of every Budget.

Membership

The Committee will have up to 14 members, including a Chair, and will include social security academic experts, representatives from key relevant advocacy organisations, unions, business peak bodies, the philanthropic sector and economists.

The Prime Minister will appoint an interim Committee ahead of the introduction of legislation in 2023 for the establishment of a permanent Committee. Under legislation, members will be appointed by written instrument and hold office on a part-time basis for the period specified in the instrument, which must not exceed 3 years. Members are eligible for reappointment.

Members are able to nominate a person for the Minister for Social Services' agreement to attend the meeting in the member's place, if the member is unable to be present at the meeting.

Scope

The Committee will consider and provide advice and proposals on:

a) Economic inclusion, including approaches to boost participation through policy settings, systems and structures, in the social security system and other government programs and policies.
b) The adequacy, effectiveness and sustainability of income support payments, including options to boost economic inclusion and tackle disadvantage.
c) Options to reduce barriers and disincentives to work, including in relation to social security and employment services.
d) Options for tailored responses to address barriers to economic inclusion for long term unemployed and disadvantaged groups, including place-based approaches at the local level.
e) The impact of economic inclusion policies on gender equality, including consideration of work being undertaken by the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce.
f) The trends of inequality markers in Australia, and any other relevant advice.

The Committee's report to Government should include supporting discussion and analysis. In providing advice on these matters, the Committee will have regard to the Government's fiscal strategy, existing policies, and the long term sustainability of the social security system.

Timing

The Committee will meet at least every quarter, with the first meeting of the interim Committee in December 2022. The Committee will present its first report to Government prior to the 2023-24 Federal Budget and report on a yearly basis.

High level recommendations are to be released publicly (with the timing to be agreed between the Chair and Ministers) but must be no later than 14 days prior to each Budget being handed down. To inform Government deliberations for Budget, the Committee's advice would be required in February to March 2023.

Administration

Secretariat support for the Committee will be provided by the Department of Social Services (DSS). DSS and other government departments, including the Treasury and the Department of Finance, will provide advice and information to the Committee.

Meeting agendas and papers will be shared at least three days before each meeting, and action items recorded and addressed at the next meeting.

List of members

Members of the Committee	**Organisation representing**
Hon Jenny Macklin	Chair
Professor Jeff Borland	University of Melbourne
Ms Emily Carter	Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre
Professor Kay Cook	Swinburne University of Technology
Mr Matthew Cox	The Bryan Foundation
Dr Cassandra Goldie	Australian Council of Social Service
Dr Angela Jackson	Impact Economics and Policy
Mr Travers McLeod	Brotherhood of St. Laurence
Sally McManus	Australian Council of Trade Unions
Associate Professor Ben Phillips	Australian National University
Ms Leah van Poppel	Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS
Ms Jennifer Westacott AO	Business Council of Australia
Professor Peter Whiteford	Australian National University

Ex-officio members	Department
Dr Steven Kennedy PSM	Secretary of the Treasury
Mr Ray Griggs AO CSC	Secretary of the Department of Social Services

*Mr Bran Black, Business Council of Australia, became an interim Committee member in September 2023 when Ms Jennifer Westacott resigned.