

Reading Between the lines this week:

1. Dept still doesn't know how many are missing out on government assistance
2. Tax injustice for Australia's poorest
3. Self-regulation of food marketing to children – is it working?
4. Job opportunities at the Centre for Policy Development
5. Events

This week is Anti-Poverty Week, which aims to strengthen public understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty and encourage research, discussion and action. A range of events, activities and resources are available at the Anti-Poverty Week [website](#).

## **Dept still doesn't know how many are missing out on government assistance**

A new survey by the [Salvation Army](#) estimates that around two million, or one in ten, Australians are now living in poverty and that many of them are children.

Earlier this year The Australia Institute released its own [research](#) that found Australians were missing out on millions of dollars in welfare assistance that they are entitled to. Across just four payments, the Parenting Payment, the Carer Allowance, the Disability Support Pension and the Bereavement Allowance, it was found that more than 168,000 Australians were missing out on an estimated \$623.8 million.

Representatives from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Service and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) were asked in Senate Estimates hearings in May whether the department assesses the number of people *missing out* on welfare assistance. Instead, the department stated that it looked very carefully at data to predict expected *uptake* of welfare and how many people were going to be eligible.

In responding, this week, to a question on notice from the hearings in May the department reiterated that it would report the estimated number of people with disability who receive payment and the proportion of primary carers who are receiving Carer Allowance in FaHCSIA's forthcoming annual report.

This response affirmed the suspicion that the government does not actually assess how many people are missing out on assistance that they may be eligible for.

The lack of attention paid to this issue is reinforced by the department's response to The Australia Institute's Freedom of Information request. Our request was refused on the basis that:

*FaHCSIA is not in possession of any data nor is aware of any research that has been undertaken on the general issue of underpayment or non-payment ... I have decided to refuse your request for these documents because all reasonable steps have been taken to find any documents and I am satisfied that they do not exist.*

It appears that FaHCSIA is not concerned with finding those Australians who are doing it hard and falling through the welfare safety net. Instead, its priority is satisfying the requirements of its annual report.

### **Tax injustice for Australia's poorest**

Another area of welfare assistance that would benefit from greater government scrutiny is how the tax system disadvantages those who are trying to rejoin the workforce.

The Australia Institute's report *Removing poverty traps in the tax-transfer system* reveals Australia's poor may face the highest effective marginal tax rates because many of the benefits they receive decrease simultaneously when they return to the workforce. This can lead to an effective marginal tax rate of up to 100%.

During his time in Opposition, Wayne Swan often spoke of his concerns about the high effective marginal tax rates when shifting from welfare to work and this issue was also examined by the Henry Tax Review which made a number of recommendations which have not yet been enacted by the government.

The Institute will submit its paper to the new tax summit which was announced by the government as part of its negotiations with the Independents on forming government. Let's hope that the 'new paradigm' allows the very sensible recommendations of the Henry Review and others to be implemented.

### **Self-regulation of Food Marketing to Children- is it working?**

In Australia, food marketing to children is regulated through a mixed approach of statutory regulations and industry self-regulation resulting in a complex and confusing system, which relies on public complaints to monitor compliance.

Cancer Council NSW has established the [Junkbusters.com.au](http://Junkbusters.com.au) website to assist consumers register their concern about food marketing messages to children. Junkbusters provides information on regulations covering all forms of media, outlines the complaints process and enables consumers to make informed complaints about junk food marketing to children.

Research shows that food marketing contributes to the 'obesogenic' environment in Australia and around the world. The World Health Organisation has called for national and international action to reduce the impact on children of the marketing of foods high in saturated fats, trans-fatty acids, free sugars, or salt.

Systematic reviews indicate that food and beverage marketing influences the preferences and purchase requests of children, influences consumption (at least in the short term), is a likely contributor to less healthy diets and may contribute to health risks among children and youth.

In 2009, the National Preventative Health Taskforce recommended that definitions and criteria for determining unhealthy food and beverages be developed and the impact of voluntary self-regulation be monitored, evaluated and escalated to enforced legislation if the voluntary forms are unsuccessful. Finally, the report recommended the introduction of legislation within four years if those measures are not demonstrated to be effective.

In May 2010, the government response to the report was to continue to monitor the impact of voluntary industry initiatives to ensure their effectiveness in reducing children's exposure to such advertising.

According to recent research children still see the same amount of television advertising for unhealthy foods as they did before industry self-regulation was introduced last year. As well, advertisers are using new forms of marketing such as games embedded with advertising, promotions using social networking sites and viral marketing.

In addition to the academic research demonstrating the failure of the current regulations, Cancer Council believes the most effective way to drive a decision to establish real restrictions in relation to junk food marketing and children, will be via public support. The Junkbusters website will harness this public support and provide an independent indicator of the effectiveness of current regulations and any unmet need for national statutory regulation to reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food marketing.

### **Job opportunities at the Centre for Policy Development**

The CPD is looking for two new research directors to join their team.

For more details on the Public Service Research Director role, [click here](#)

For more details on the Sustainable Economy Research Director role, [click here](#)

### **Events**

#### **Politics in the Pub**

Jeremy Hanson, ACT Shadow Health Minister will debate Michael Moore, CEO Public Health Association of Australia on the topic '**Can you legislate against laziness?**'

Wednesday November 3

5.30 – 6pm start

The Lounge Bar, Level 3, The Uni Pub

17 London Circuit

FREE entry, no RSVP

### **Recent publications**

*Removing poverty traps in the tax transfer system*, D Ingles, 11 October

<https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&pubid=793&act=display>

### **Recent media**

Peak oil and climate must be tackled in tandem, Sydney Morning Herald, 17 September

<http://www.smh.com.au/business/peak-oil-and-climate-must-be-tackled-in-tandem-20100916-15esa.html>

ANZ hit with \$50m suit over fees, Business Day, 23 September

<http://www.businessday.com.au/business/anz-hit-with-50m-suit-over-fees-20100922-15n01.html>