



Messaging Guide



About this Messaging Guide

This messaging guide is based on quantitative and qualitative research conducted by Essential Research in February 2019. Essential Research was contracted by ACOSS to conduct the research and to provide advice on developing this Messaging Guide.

The Messaging Guide is to inform the ACOSS Raise the Rate Campaign and will be made widely available to all those committed to tackling inequality and promoting well-being and economic security in the Australian community. The Guide may be updated over time through new research and consultation.

ACOSS has a strong commitment to informing its advocacy with the experiences of people directly affected by poverty and inequality. We are grateful for the philanthropic support that has enabled us to conduct the research behind this Messaging Guide.

The research has enabled us to listen deeply to the views of people in the community about our income support system, including people who currently or have recently used the system, and people who do not currently have direct experience but whose trust in the system is vital to securing better policy outcomes.

The research to inform this Message Guide included:

- Focus Groups with people who either currently rely or have recently relied on Youth Allowance or Newstart as a primary source of income. People lived in a range of locations including Cairns, Western Sydney and Melbourne.
- A series of polling questions in the Essential Report, a national omnibus poll.



Research Findings

The main findings from the research included:

- The rate of Newstart is a vote changing issue for people who currently receive Newstart or have in the recent past, many of whom would embrace a campaign that humanised their experience.
- While people who have not had to rely on Newstart are relatively ambivalent about the rate of Newstart as an election issue, there was wide acceptance that Newstart should be enough to allow people to find paid work without slipping into a cycle of poverty.
- There was also wide acceptance that people looking for paid work in today's job market face a number of challenges, such as short-term contracts and automation.
- Among people who had received Newstart, there was a strong sense that they felt defined by widely held negative perceptions which undermine their self-esteem.
- Many people who had received Newstart were keen to tell their story of how hard it is to look for paid work without enough to cover the basics and gave examples of the barriers to finding work. Telling these stories will counter negative perceptions.

Messaging principles emerging from these insights:

- We need to fix Newstart to achieve a common objective – getting people through tough times and into suitable paid work.
- The primary focus is about what works (evidence)– it is what is required to achieve the commonly agreed outcome.
- The utilitarian shared value is in supporting people into suitable paid work.



Framing

Raising the rate needs to be framed as the solution to the problem that Newstart is not working, rather than in itself the problem to be solved.

Currently we say:

“

Newstart is too low to support people, it needs to be raised so people don't fall through the cracks into a cycle of poverty.

We recommend a shift to:

“

Newstart is not working – raising the rate will get Newstart working.

Topline Messaging

Australia's income support system was designed to help people when they are going through tough times to support them into suitable paid work.

But Newstart is not working – the rate has not been increased in real terms for 25 years while living costs have gone through the roof.

The current rate of \$40 per day is too low to give people the support they need to scrape by and get through tough times.

Instead of supporting people, the current Newstart rate forces them into a cycle of debt, social isolation and humiliation that undermines their efforts and risks them slipping through the cracks into a cycle of poverty.

Solution

Raising the rate by about \$10 a day, will get Newstart working by allowing people to focus on building the skills they need to take the opportunities to get them through tough times.

It will mean people can focus on their futures rather than having to be totally consumed with their current situation of financial crisis.

Raising the Newstart rate will make the system stronger, giving people the best chance of getting through tough times and finding suitable paid work.

Narratives: Personal stories

Wherever possible talk about people – there are people in community who want a voice, and are prepared to share their stories of what it is like struggling from below the poverty line on Newstart. For too long, public commentary has created a false understanding of who people are who need to rely on income support.

This Campaign is a powerful opportunity for people to connect with each other and with similar experiences, in order to understand what it is like to live on \$40 a day whilst you are struggling to get paid work.

Working with people across the community, we can bring this problem to life, building empathy and, critically, provide a safe place, where other people can share their story too.

People on Newstart are not looking for charity, just a hand up when they need it most.



Juanita

If you are a single parent with three school aged children like Juanita, you know the stress of juggling debts with the need to feed your children. You would know the stress when they need a laptop or textbooks for school, or the desolation when they need to drop out of sport because you can't afford the fees.



Mike

If you are an older worker like Mike, who provided for yourself and your family for more than 40 years you would know the feeling of shame when asking for support.

You would see the efforts that go into finding paid work in a world that seems to have passed you by, as you watch the security you have built slowly whittle away to nothing.



Cassandra

If you had left home to study in the city and follow your dreams like Cassandra, you would feel the daily pressure to get to class when you can't afford the transport fare.

You would know the strain to concentrate when you haven't eaten breakfast, the barriers that emerge when you can't meet with other students.



Storylines

General application to income support

Australia's income support system has stopped working because the current rates of Newstart and Youth Allowance are so low they are no longer supporting people to get through tough times.

The rates do not provide enough to cover the basics for people who are looking for work or studying, let alone for people with a disability or for single parents, who are unfairly being put on the Newstart payment.

Specific application to Newstart

Newstart is not working because it has not been increased in real terms for 25 years.

Australia needs to raise the Newstart rate so people can focus on getting into employment rather than risk falling through the gaps into a cycle of poverty.

Target audience application

Raising the rate of Newstart will give people the support they need while they are working to find a way into suitable employment.

Raise the rate - get Newstart working

Nearly one million Australians receive income support through Youth Allowance or Newstart.

They include young people making the transition from study, single parents of school-age children and older Australians confronting technological change.

They are working hard to break into employment. While they apply for jobs, many are studying or training, sometimes while caring for children or recovering from injury.

But the current rates of income support have not been increased in real terms in 25 years. \$40 per week is just not enough to survive on while people work to get into employment.

If people don't have enough to cover the basics, then Newstart won't work because people will be dealing with financial stress rather than working to build a future.

That's why raising the rate will get Newstart working – delivering the support people need to get through tough times and into suitable employment.



Message Construction

Core Proposition – Newstart is a social good that needs to be strengthened:

Newstart is a critical part of Australia’s income support system

- It makes us different to America where unemployed people and their children are condemned to a life of poverty.
- For Newstart to work it needs to be enough to cover the basics so people, who are looking for work, studying or doing both, at times while caring for children or recovering from injury or illness, can live with dignity and without the stress of juggling debt.

Newstart was designed to provide income support to people looking for paid work

- It should mean a worker who unexpectedly loses their job has a buffer to regroup, reskill and find a way into suitable employment.

Income support works - when it is properly funded

- Providing a payment that covers the basics means people can focus on getting a job rather than worrying about keeping a roof over head or putting food on the table.

Problem – But right now Newstart is not working

Right now Newstart is not working, because it is not providing the support people need to get through tough times:

The Newstart rate has not been increased in real terms for 25 years

- \$40 per day – that’s just 15,000 a year – is not enough to live on – and it makes it harder for someone to do what’s required to find a way into work
- In rural areas, you often need a car to get a job and to get to work. In the city, rents are so expensive that people end up sleeping on the streets
To find a job these days, not only do you need transport and clothing, you need internet access, phone credit and the ability to submit online applications.

The job market is changing, with jobs less secure, and fewer entry level jobs than there used to be

- There is one job available for every eight people looking for paid work.
- With changes such as automation, offshoring and the casualisation of work, many workers face an uncertain future and often jobs require specific skills or knowledge about new technologies.
- Over our lifetime around 70% of us will live in a household that accesses on income support, for a time.



With one in six children living in poverty, Australia can't afford to weaken its income support system through neglect.

- Every child deserves access to the basics, like a roof over their head, food on the table and school supplies. But many are missing out and are at risk of slipping through the cracks into a cycle of poverty.

People with disability and single parents are not getting the support they need

- Newstart does not provide enough to cover the basics for people who are looking for work or studying, let alone for people with a disability or for single parents, who are unfairly being put on the low Newstart payment.

Solution – Raising the Rate will Get Newstart Working

Raising the Newstart rate of income support by about \$10 per day will strengthen the income support system by giving people looking for paid work the best chance to get into suitable employment.

- It means people looking for paid work can focus on applying for work rather than worrying about putting food on the table and putting a roof over their head.
- If we are serious about supporting people into paid work, we need a system that is robust, providing people enough to cover the basics while they re-group, re-skill and find a way into paid work.
- We need to support people with the training and paid work experience they need to get a job in today's changing job market, including older people, people living with disability and people with caring responsibilities, who can face discrimination when trying to get a job.

We need to raise the rate: to get Newstart working.



Key messages for people receiving Newstart

Proposition

Nearly one million Australians, people like you are currently receiving income support.

They include young people making the transition from study, single parents of school-age children and older Australians confronting technological change.

While applying for jobs, you may be studying or training, sometimes while caring for children or dealing with injury or illness.

Problem

If you think it's a struggle to scrape by on Newstart, you are right - \$40 per day is just not enough.

The rate is so low because Newstart and Youth Allowance payments have not had a real increase for the past 25 years.

With the cost of living rising, this is placing undue financial stress at the time you can least afford it.

Solution

Even raising the rate by what most people would consider a small amount, would make a big difference to the lives of people struggling to get by on Newstart.

Raising the Newstart rate will make the system stronger, giving people the best chance of getting through tough times.

Before you vote you have the right to ask your candidates whether they support a stronger, more effective Newstart.



Key messages for people who have received Newstart in the past

Proposition

Millions of Australians have relied on income support at some stage in their lives.

Anyone who has been on that journey knows how important it is to receive adequate support when they are most vulnerable.

Problem

But right now the Newstart rate is too low – \$40 a day which is less than \$15,000 a year – so people out of work don't even have enough to scrape by.

The rate is so low because Newstart and Youth Allowance payments have not been increased real terms for the past 25 years.

With the cost of living rising, this is placing undue financial stress on people at the moment they can least afford it.

Solution

Even increasing Newstart by what most people would consider a small amount, would make a big difference.

It will give people who are on the journey you have taken the best chance of finding a way into suitable paid work.

Raising the Newstart rate will make the system stronger and give them the best chance of working to get into suitable employment.

Before you vote, ask your candidates whether they support a stronger, more effective Newstart.



Specific Language

USE	AVOID	FEEDBACK
A means to an end	An ends in itself	Framing Newstart as a tool rather than an outcome focuses on its purpose. People who rely on Newstart want more than anyone to get suitable paid work.
Income support	Safety net	It's active – it is supporting and helping to lift people, not just catching.
Income support system	Welfare system	The was regarded as the more positive frame.
Income support	Social security	There was low understanding of the term social security.
People struggling to get suitable paid work	Welfare recipients	Active language communicates that people are trying hard to get paid work, but there is only one job for every 8 people looking for more work. Looking for work is work.
Getting through tough times	Out of work	Defined by the destination not current situation.
'Help' people have best chance	'Give' people best chance	People affected are trying. Society's job is to help and support, not make things harder.
Living on \$40 a day – that's the equivalent of just \$15,000 per year	Not enough to get by	Make it explicit – the concrete numbers have an impact – for people receiving Newstart the daily rate matters. For the broader public they see what a low aggregated income this is.
Enough to scrape by without falling through the gaps into a cycle of poverty	A decent / comfortable standard of living	Reflects the cost of living.
Strengthen the income support system so that it works	Increase payments	Focuses on the purpose.