



Ms Jane Stanley
Coordinator
Council of Single Mothers and their Children, Victoria
54 Victoria Street
CARLTON SOUTH VIC 3053

Dear Ms Stanley

Thank you for providing the opportunity to outline the views of the Coalition on the important issues facing your members. On behalf of the Coalition Members of Parliament and candidates I have attached a response to your recent survey.

The Coalition believes Labor has made the future of all Australians more uncertain.

On top of their billion-dollar waste on school buildings, their mismanaged home insulation fiasco and their soft border protection policies, Labor is growing Australia's debt by \$100 million per day.

They even removed an elected Prime Minister to suit their own political interest.

The Coalition is taking a stand in the best interest of Australia's future.

We will end the waste, repay the debt, stop the taxes, stop the boats and ease the pressure on Australian families.

Throughout the election campaign we will be progressively announcing policies outlining our commitments for Australia's future. These policies will cover a number of issues canvassed in your survey.

Once announced, our policies will be available at www.liberal.org.au and www.nationals.org.au.

Thank you for helping us to communicate the Coalition's commitments to your members.

Yours sincerely

Brian Loughnane
Federal Campaign Director

Response to Council of Single Mothers and their Children

Sole Parent Family and Social inclusion

- 1a. What plans does your party have to increase income support payments (Newstart Allowance and Parenting Payment Single) to the same amount as other pensions and when will these plans be implemented?
 - 1b. Single mothers already have a high level of participation in the labour market, but to ensure the care of their children need secure, part-time, family friendly jobs during school hours. What strategies will your party implement to ensure the increase in supply of these jobs?
 - 5a. What does your party intend to do to ensure that the one in five families headed by a single parent feel like valued, respected members of Australian society?
 - 5b. What plans does your party have to remove compulsory Income Management?
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Parents, single or otherwise, will benefit from a stronger economy. A Coalition Government will deliver real reductions in government debt, ease pressure on interest rates and the cost of living for parents. We will end the waste and save money the way parents do – by not wasting it.

Despite the continuing pressure of cost of living pressures on Australian parents, Labor has governed in their own political interest, not the national interest - and as a result has made the future of all Australians more uncertain and unstable.

Labor is doing nothing to ease the pressure on Australian parents. They have presided over six interest rate rises in just ten months and continue to put upward pressure on interest rates with record budget deficits. This pressure is particularly challenging for single parents.

Labor has scrapped its election promise to build 260 new childcare centres and has cut the maximum childcare rebate by more than \$250 per child.

Its great big new tax on mining will cost jobs, hit superannuation and lead to even higher electricity and consumer prices.

Labor has done nothing to bring down rising fuel and grocery prices.

Now, more than ever parents need the support necessary to help them through these increasingly challenging times.

Where people have the capacity to work, the Coalition believes that Newstart is generally the most appropriate payment to support them. The former Coalition Government introduced measures which ensured that single parents were paid Parenting Payment Single until their youngest child turns eight, whilst also assisting them find work from when their youngest child turns six. This was because the Coalition recognised that some single parents may not be able to find work immediately. This aspect of the Coalition's reforms provided single parents with a higher rate of payment for two years while they look for their first job. Our reforms ensured that, when combined with paid income, single parents are better off than if they received only Parenting Payment Single.

If elected, the Coalition will monitor the level of income support payments. Whilst the first priority of a Coalition Government will be to address the legacy of debt and deficit left by Labor, we will be mindful of the financial burden single parents face in raising their children.

The Coalition believes that the best form of welfare is a job. Meaningful work not only alleviates poverty, but provides dignity and self-worth.

As part of our Welfare to Work reforms in Government, the Coalition introduced the Employer Demand communications initiative. This promotes the benefits of employing single parents to employers and encourages employers to consider taking on a parent as a part of their workforce.

In addition, where single parents were required to take steps to find a job, the former Coalition Government instructed providers of the former Australian Government Employment Services to conduct these activities during school hours or at other times deemed suitable by the parent. Similarly, parents didn't have to take up an offer of employment if it was outside school hours and no suitable child care was available.

The Coalition remains committed to assisting parents with principal child raising responsibilities through initiatives such as the restoration of funding to occasional care and Paid Parental Leave, which will allow women take leave for six months. This is vastly superior to Labor's paltry 18-week scheme, which is paid at minimum wage and does not even include superannuation. Ours is a genuine social and economic reform that will encourage women to return to the work force, if they wish, after the birth of their child.

The Coalition supports income management but is concerned at the Labor government's watering-down the highly successful measures introduced by the Coalition in the Northern Territory. These measures delivered substantial benefit to those living in 73 Indigenous communities across the Northern Territory.

Income management is designed to support long term intervention strategies which provide a safer, better future for children.

The experience of welfare quarantining in the Northern Territory raises the question of whether it should be implemented elsewhere. Quarantining 50 per cent of payments would not impact on responsible beneficiaries but would help ensure that there is food on the table and a roof over people's heads.

A Coalition Government will carefully review the operation of the current form of quarantining after July next year when it has been in operation for 12 months with a view to extending it more widely across Australia. Consideration will be given to extending it to further regions on a trial basis or more generally across Australia.

The Coalition supported Labor's second-rate income management scheme which has been rolled out across the Northern Territory because we believe a second-rate scheme is better than no scheme at all.

Child Support and Family Law

- 2a. How will your party ensure that child support payments are collected on time and in full?
- 2b. Child Support payments are often reduced as a result of the minimisation of taxable income. What policies will your party implement (and when) to ensure that Child Support payments are based on the true financial position of payer parents, and an accurate assessment of the level of care provided?
- 3a. Despite legislative provisions, serious concern remains regarding the ability of the system to ensure the safety of women throughout family law proceedings. What measures will your party take to guarantee women's safety?
- 3b. What changes will your party be making to the Family Law legislation to guarantee a child's best interests, ensuring their right to safety and stability are paramount to all cases? How will you ensure that the work of all family law practitioners and professionals prioritises the safety and stability of children?

The Coalition recognises that unfortunately some paying parents must be forced to pay their child support. To this end, a Coalition Government will ensure that the Child Support Agency (CSA) works closely with paying parents to help them meet their obligations.

Taxable income of both parents is a valid starting point for assessing how much child support needs to be transferred between parents. Consequently, the former Coalition Government increased funding from 1 July 2006 to enable the CSA to work with the Australian Tax Office to increase the number of tax returns being lodged. Lodgement of tax returns provides up to date income information and also provides tax refunds that can be applied to any outstanding child support payments.

It is acknowledged that in some instances taxable income is not a true reflection of either parent's financial situation. To address this issue, the former Government increased funding to the CSA to allow more investigations into parents' income as well as to provide for increased debt collection activities.

The Coalition is committed to ensuring increased community awareness of domestic violence and sexual assault against women and in Government established a 24 hour confidential helpline to provide immediate assistance to women in need.

We support the work of the White Ribbon Foundation in taking action to combat violence against women. The only response to such violence is to stamp it out. A Coalition Government will work with state and territory agencies to ensure allegations of violence and abuse are promptly and thoroughly investigated.

The *Shared Parental Responsibility Act*, introduced by the Coalition in 2006, makes the right of children to know their parents and the protection of children from harm the primary factors for the consideration of courts. It also includes a specific provision which allows the court, when making a decision in the best interests of a child, to consider the extent to which each of the child's parents has fulfilled, or failed to fulfil, his or her responsibilities as a parent. This includes the extent each parent has taken, or failed to take, the opportunity to spend time with the child, communicate with the child and participate in decision-making about major long-term issues in relation to the child.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) report released this year found that the 2006 family law reforms had a positive outcomes for families, parents, and children.

A Coalition Government will continue to monitor family law to ensure the best outcomes for children remain the paramount consideration.

Housing

4a. How does your party plan to increase the availability of affordable, secure housing for single mother families?

Real and practical solutions are required to combat homelessness. To this end, the Coalition will take a lead role in providing enhanced education and training opportunities for young Australians. This support will include increasing and expanding the Education Tax Refund to provide real assistance to parents and help ease pressure on family budgets. Unlike the Government's rebate which is limited to books, computers and uniforms, the Coalition's rebate provides a more enhanced list of claimable items including school fees and levies, excursion costs, tutorial and music lessons as well as books, computers and uniforms. Importantly, the Coalition's rebate is higher than that offered by the Rudd-Gillard Government and starts 1 January 2011 in time for the new school year.

The Coalition's *Real Action Plan for Better Mental Health* recognises younger Australians bear the brunt of mental illness. Many of these young people end up on the streets. Evidence shows that with early and targeted intervention treatment, many are able to overcome their problems, return to health and lead socially and economically productive lives. This measure provides \$1.5 billion towards 20 new Early Psychosis Intervention Centres, 60 additional youth *headspace* sites and 800 acute and sub-acute early intervention beds. It builds on the Coalition's 2006 investment of \$1.9 billion for services for people with a mental illness, their families and carers. That investment was the biggest investment into mental health of any government in Australian history.

We are also strongly committed to combating illicit drug use, including the trafficking and distribution of drugs and the provision of treatment services to help people get off drugs. In Government we will give unequivocal support for the fight against the use of illicit drugs and recently announced an additional \$93.1m to increase customs inspections of air and sea ports to crack down on drug importation.

Despite spending \$20 billion on so-called 'housing initiatives', housing affordability has actually declined; rental and mortgage stress have increased under the Labor Government.

The Coalition wants to take a tougher line with state governments that refuse to release an adequate supply of land for new homes. We will work more closely with state and territory governments to ensure a more appropriate rate of land release.

We will also put downward pressure on interest rates. Labor's debt and deficit has contributed to six interest rate rises in the last eight months and reducing Labor's \$57 billion deficit and paying down the debt are key priorities for the Coalition.

In Government, we will also reduce red tape and barriers to supply to ensure that we keep the great Australian dream of owning your own home within reach. And we will ensure local Government and local Communities have their say about what's going on in their own backyards.