

Economic Justice Australia Policy Statement on Mutual Obligations

Overview

Economic Justice Australia (EJA) calls for the abolition of the mutual obligations framework in Australia's social security system. This position is grounded in extensive research, empirical evidence, and a commitment to protecting the dignity and rights of social security recipients.

Rationale

Our policy stance is founded on the following key principles:

1. Failure of Current Approach

- The mutual obligations framework has demonstrably failed to achieve its stated objectives.
- Current implementations are primarily punitive rather than supportive.
- Enforcement mechanisms cause significant harm to vulnerable populations.

2. Impact on Individuals

- Mutual obligations have proven:
 - Counterproductive to genuine employment seeking
 - Coercive and damaging to individual motivation, self-esteem and self-efficacy
 - Potentially exacerbating pre-existing health and mental health challenges

3. Systemic Concerns

- Research fails to demonstrate tangible benefits to individuals
- The framework is not truly "mutual"
- Privatisation has led to systemic misuse
- Exemptions are not accessible

Recommended Approach

While advocating for the abolition of mutual obligations, EJA supports:

- A rights-based approach to social security
- Evidence-based interventions that provide real pathways to employment
- Genuine, supportive employment services that are sufficiently resourced to help people find work
- Policies that respect individual dignity

Potential Future Framework

If any form of conditionality is considered, it must:

- Be backed by robust evidence
- Prioritise individual well-being over administrative efficiency
- Provide genuine support rather than impose punitive measures
- Ensure individual choice and agency are preserved

Commitment

EJA remains committed to advocating for a social security system that:

- Offers meaningful employment pathways
- Provides adequate support
- Respects individual dignity
- Eliminates coercive and harmful compliance mechanisms
- Is subject to robust and fair administrative review processes