Perceptions of Poverty in WA

Summary findings from research report

August 2020
Executive summary

The findings in this report show the community has deep empathy for their fellow Western Australians. More than two million of us – nearly 75 percent – support a permanent increase in the JobSeeker rate.

At the same time, almost all of us believe we would need at least $500 per week just to meet the basic essentials of life, such as food, housing, transport and bills. The base rate of JobSeeker is just $282 per week.

When the rate went up by $225 per week with the addition of the Coronavirus Supplement, people were finally able to meet their basic needs and afford things like healthy food, new clothes, car repairs or medical procedures.

After September 2020, the Supplement will reduce to $250 per fortnight – bringing JobSeeker down to $408 per week. This is well below the poverty line in Australia of $457 per week for a single adult.

When people are experiencing poverty, they cannot afford life’s basic needs.

As leading community service providers and the peak body for social services, we wanted to better understand the community’s views and understanding of these issues to inform public policy.
Findings

What is poverty?

The poverty line in Australia is $457 per week for a single adult. This is based on the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) definition of living in poverty as 50% of median income.

When people are experiencing poverty, they cannot afford life’s basic needs

Is poverty acceptable?

Nearly all Western Australians agree that poverty in Australia is unacceptable in any form

64% agree government should provide a guaranteed minimum income for all Australians

“We are a wealthy country and our people should not have to struggle to feed their children and put a roof over their heads.”

Male, aged 70
Perth Metro

Findings

Paying for necessities

Necessities are things like insurance, utility bills, clothes, food, medication, rent/mortgage, internet access and transport.

1 in 4 people surveyed haven’t been able to pay for a necessity in the last 3 months

56% of people on JobSeeker could not afford a necessity in the past 3 months

This is most likely for:

- 18-49 year olds (60%)
- People living in the mid-west (43%)
- Those currently on government payments

Western Australians aren’t sure what weekly amount means an adult is living in poverty.

More than 4 in 5 agree we should look after people in need

Almost 3 in 5 strongly agree this should be the case

When asked how much they would need just to live, over 2 in 5 say they would need more than $500 per week

By contrast, most people (69%) estimate the essential budget of someone in poverty to be under $500 per week

There is a clear gap between the money we perceive we need just to live, versus how much we think someone needs to live when they are experiencing poverty

This means we underestimate what it means to live in poverty
Findings

**JobSeeker**

The following information was provided to respondents:

JobSeeker is the main income support payment for people aged 22 to 65 years who are unemployed and looking for work, or who are sick or injured and are unable to do their usual work or study for a short time.

Since the outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19), the Australian Government has increased the payment amount and made the payment available to Australians whose work situation has changed because of the outbreak.

When asked to estimate the essential budget of a single adult living in poverty, the median amount provided by respondents was **$398 per week**.

73% of respondents estimated the base rate of JobSeeker to be above the actual rate for a single adult.

**Findings**

**MEDIAN JOBSEEKER ESTIMATE**
**$398 per week**

**MEDIAN PERSONAL BUDGET ESTIMATE**
**$500 per week**

**JOBSEEKER CORONAVIRUS SUPPLEMENT PAYMENT**
**$558 per week**

**ACTUAL JOBSEEKER BASE RATE**
**$282 per week**

Western Australians believe the base JobSeeker rate should be more than the current rate.

**73% of Western Australians believe the rate should be much higher**

The main reason given is that the current rate is simply too low to live on.

This belief is shared across the political spectrum, regardless of respondents’ voting intentions.

"Expecting people to live on such a small amount is degrading and ridiculous and Australians should be ashamed for allowing it to happen."

Male, aged 77
Perth Metro
“$282 a week is encouraging poverty. The rent or mortgage payments will take up the majority of this amount. These people will end up homeless or hungry.”

Female, aged 28
South West