

1 Income status, SAAP clients and homelessness

Homelessness or the risk of becoming homeless is often attributed to a variety of factors. A complex interplay of individual circumstances (such as physical and mental health, substance abuse, legal issues, family or relationship breakdown) and structural factors (such as unemployment, high housing costs) may contribute to the likelihood of a person experiencing homelessness. It is often the structural factors, such as poverty, unemployment and an inadequate supply of affordable housing, that are most commonly identified as fundamentally linked to the issue of homelessness (CACH 2001). An adequate income is among the most basic of structural needs. Within the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP), homeless clients or those at risk of becoming homeless consistently report financial difficulty as one of the main reasons for seeking assistance.

This report analyses the income circumstances of the SAAP population using data collected in the Income Issues Collection 2000 and the Client Collection 1999–00 (refer to Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 for an outline of the National Data Collection and Income Issues Collection). It concludes with time-series analysis from the Client Collection 1996–97 to 2000–01. This chapter contains a brief discussion of the Australian system of income support and payment structures. In addition, the circumstances of the population groups in this study—people born overseas, youth and women escaping domestic violence—are described with regard to SAAP and the wider welfare system. The report relies in part on the Client Collection data, as data from the Income Issues Collection were of variable quality. Chapter 2 discusses the income circumstances of clients from the Client Collection. Chapter 3 provides details of SAAP agency participation and the completeness of the data collected in the Income Issues Collection during 5 May to 30 June 2000. Chapter 3 also discusses the income circumstances of clients receiving government payments and clients with no income source. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 outline the income circumstances of migrant clients, young people, and women escaping domestic violence, respectively. Finally, Chapter 7 provides data on changes in the income status of SAAP clients over time, from 1996–97 to 2000–01.

1.1 Income status within SAAP

There is a wide range of payment categories within the Australian system of income support. While there is a degree of uniformity across payment rates and eligibility criteria, the system has become more complex in the last decade (FaCS 2000:1). In recent years, several payments have undergone changes in terms of target group and entitlements. The SAAP Data Research and Advisory Committee (DRAC, now the SAAP Data Sub-committee), in conjunction with peak bodies and service providers, identified that these changes had the potential to affect the level and frequency of support required by some of the larger SAAP sub-populations. In September 1999 the DRAC commissioned the SAAP NDCA to investigate the income circumstances of SAAP clients. The Income Issues Collection working group sought to focus the collection on the sub-set of SAAP clients that had no income or very limited income upon accessing services. These clients were identified as migrants, young people and women escaping domestic violence. Young people have been identified as being at high risk of having no or very low income due to family circumstances and regulations restricting

entitlements to income support. The risk of homelessness is also elevated for women and children escaping domestic violence who may find themselves without accommodation and an income source when fleeing their prior circumstances. Migrants were identified as a group for investigation because of the 2-year waiting period policy for recently arrived migrants before they can access government payments and services, introduced in 1997. As such, the number of newly arrived migrants accessing SAAP services had the potential to increase due to the particular problems of residential status restricting migrant peoples entry into the labour market as well as the issue of restricting government income support. Concerns about the potential for cost shifting between the Commonwealth and State and Territory SAAP funding departments as a consequence of withholding income support to newly arrived migrants also highlighted migrants as a group of special interest.

There are several other Commonwealth income support policies that have been identified as having the potential to affect SAAP clients in addition to the 2-year waiting period for newly arrived migrants mentioned above. The introduction in 1998 of mutual obligation requirements, is also a policy of concern to the SAAP sector. The Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) is currently researching how mutual obligation requirements have affected homeless people. However, the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Homelessness (CACH) 2001 consultation paper suggested that the particular problems faced by homeless people are not always taken into account when mutual obligation arrangements are worked out or when breaches are penalised (CACH 2001). Further, CACH identified a danger that people will be punished simply for being homeless, compounded the fact that many homeless people do not fully understand their obligations or rights of appeal within the income support system (CACH 2001:21).

Previously, the income status of SAAP clients has made up only a small portion of analysis in SAAP NDCA reporting. The Income Issues Collection was therefore designed and implemented, and sought to identify the circumstances of SAAP client groups with no income or low income within the context of the income support system, as well as investigating SAAP usage from the perspective of income status alone. The analysis attempts to draw out the reasons for clients having no source of income in order to broadly inform debate on the 'pathways' that lead people to SAAP. It also seeks to establish why they have sought help through SAAP instead of elsewhere in the welfare safety net.

Overall, the most common reason amongst SAAP clients for seeking assistance in 1999–00 was financial difficulty (39%) (AIHW 2001b:348), supporting the view that income is of key importance to the issue of homelessness.

1.2 The Australian income support system

One of the main functions of the Australian system of social protection is to provide income support to the economically disadvantaged or people deemed to be at greatest risk of falling into involuntary poverty. In 1999–2000, the Australian income support system comprised:

- 'twenty-two income support payments divided between two classes: pensions and benefits...An individual cannot receive more than one income support type at a time;
- eleven payments in respect of dependent children. These are not mutually exclusive and most are elements of an umbrella-category Family Allowance;

- rent assistance, paid at maximum rates according to family composition; and
- four income supplements.’ (Whiteford 2000:14)

The number of the Australian population receiving income support has increased significantly in the last 30 years.¹ During the period 1969 to 1999 the number of Australians receiving some type of income support payment increased from 1.1 million to 4.7 million (ABS 2001a:166). On top of the 4.7 million, another 1.2 million people receive Family payments only (FaCS 2000:1). Over the past 30 years there has also been a major shift in the demographic make-up of income recipients.

Historically, the main income support recipients have been of retirement age, and although this is still the largest area of government spending, a large increase in workforce-aged recipients has occurred (FaCS 2000:37). The proportion of the workforce-aged population receiving income support increased considerably, from 4% to 21%, between 1969 and 1999 (ABS 2001a:166). In the lowest 25% of income groups, most were single, few were employed and most relied on government pensions and allowances as their principal source of income (ABS 2001b:252). The increase in income support recipients of workforce age since 1969 has been influenced by a number of social changes, such as: the rise in unemployment and the decline in full-time employment opportunities; an increase in the number of sole parent families; and an increase in the number of young people participating in further education, in response to changes in the labour market and unemployment rates (ABS 2001a:166).

1.3 Pensions and benefits—current arrangements and recipients

The income support payments of key interest to this report are predominantly managed by FaCS, with the exception of Abstudy assistance for Indigenous clients, which was managed by the then Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA, now the Department of Education, Science and Training). FaCS payments can be broken down into three categories: payments for older people, the sick and people with disabilities or their carers; labour market allowances and the parenting program; and family assistance. All income support payments are adjusted in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI) on a regular basis. This report utilises *A Guide to Commonwealth Government Payments 20 March to 30 June 2000* (Centrelink 2000) in the explanation of payment structures and eligibility, in conjunction with other FaCS documentation. It is important to recognise that the payment rates outlined in this report relate to the period in which the Income Issues Collection was run; payment rates and some program structures have since changed with the introduction of the GST on 1 July 2000. For example, Family Allowance has now been replaced with the Family Tax Benefit scheme.

There are no Commonwealth government payments that specifically target homeless people, although the vast majority of such people depend on the government payments they are eligible for as their primary source of income during episodes of homelessness (CACH 2001:19). Up until July 1998, young people in housing crisis were assisted via the Independent Homeless Rate payable on several benefits and allowances, namely Newstart,

¹ In this section, income support refers to those payments that are intended to meet a person’s core requirements, such as age pension, parenting payments and student assistance. Supplementary payments such as family allowance and child care assistance are excluded.

Austudy and Youth Training Allowance (AIHW 2001:213). However, from July 1998 these programs were merged to create an all-encompassing Youth Allowance. The Independent Homeless Rate was discarded at this time and entitlement assessments under Youth Allowance are now made based on an 'at home' and 'away from home' payment rate system which assesses a young person's level of dependence on their parent/guardian. For young people and other groups on low incomes additional financial assistance is available via the Emergency Relief Program and some housing programs which provide loans sufficient to pay bonds for rental properties. However, the repayment of such loans from income support payments in conjunction with the high cost of daily living and ongoing rental payments makes it exceedingly difficult for some recipients to establish independence. Further, people experiencing homelessness may find it difficult to access, and maintain their access to, benefits and allowances because of difficulties surrounding administrative arrangements and the expectations of mutual obligation. A survey in 1994 by the then Department of Social Security reported that homeless people often had trouble negotiating the administrative system, particularly in terms of establishing proof of identity, being unable to provide a forwarding address for correspondence and in opening a bank account (CACH 2001:21). The survey also found that the homeless were mistrustful of the system, that their understanding of it was poor, and that low levels of literacy and limited access to transport made it even harder to make payment claims. Consequently, it was found that many homeless people did not make full use of the department's programs, failing to take up benefits they were eligible for (Prosser & Groth 1994 in CACH 2001:21).

To follow is a brief synopsis of eligibility, pay structure and a statistical overview of income support payments and recipients of interest to this report. Table 1.1 provides a concise outline of each of the income support payments (and payment rates) of relevance to this report and therefore should be referred to in conjunction with the text, which seeks to provide a broader statistical background and brief history of each of the payments.

Disability Support Pension

To be eligible for a Disability Support Pension a person must be at least 16 but under Age Pension age, be assessed as having a physical, intellectual or psychiatric impairment and be unable to work for at least 2 years due to the impairment, or be permanently blind (Table 1.1). Disability Support Pensions are not subject to a parental means test, but are subject to an income test for those over 21, except for people who are permanently blind. Payments vary depending on age, whether the person is living independently, at home, is single or part of a couple. For those over the age of 21 the payment rate is the same as the Age Pension.

Over the past few decades the proportion of the Australian population receiving the Disability Support Pension has increased significantly and has been attributed to several factors. These include: structural changes in the Australian labour market; the ageing of the population and associated increase in the incidence of disability; changed eligibility criteria for disability payments; and loss of access to other forms of equivalent income support, such as the Wife Pension and the Widow Pension (FaCS 1999:6). As at June 1999, males made up the majority of Disability Support Pension recipients, at 65%, as has historically been the case. Three-quarters of Disability Support Pension recipients were aged between 40 and 64 years (75%) and the vast majority (84%) were receiving the maximum rate of payment.

Youth Allowance

Youth Allowance is provided to young people under the age of 25 who are students, and to those under 21 years of age who are looking for employment or who have been temporarily incapacitated for work or study (Table 1.1). Fifteen-year-olds considered to be independent, for example homeless young people, can also receive this benefit as long as they are undertaking study or a combination of approved activities. To receive Youth Allowance, a person must be an Australian resident. If they are a newly arrived migrant, there is a 2-year waiting period before this benefit is paid.

For young people who are not deemed to be living independently, a parental means test applies. The rate of payment varies considerably, depending on whether the person is deemed dependent or independent, single, single with children, partnered with or without children and whether they are under or over 18 years of age. A complex range of tests relating to family actual means, parental income and assets, as well as personal means testing of the recipient, affect the amount of income support a person can receive under Youth Allowance. Payments begin to reduce in increments for dependent young people whose parent(s) income exceeds \$23,800. The assets test means that, if parents have assets in excess of \$414,500, their dependants cannot receive Youth Allowance. After the parental income and assets tests are done, a personal income test is applied to students and to the unemployed working on a casual basis. The income-free area, or maximum amount a Youth Allowance recipient can earn without having deductions made from their payment, is \$60 per fortnight for the unemployed and \$230 per fortnight for students. Fortnightly deductions are also made if the recipient has a loan under the Student Financial Supplement Scheme. The scheme provides loans to students of between \$500 and \$7,000 per annum, and repayment of the loan affects the amount of fortnightly payment a Youth Allowance recipient receives, in conjunction with parental and personal means testing.

Youth Allowance in its current form was implemented in 1998 and replaced Austudy, for people under 25 years, Youth Training Allowance, Newstart Allowance for the unemployed under 21 years, and Family Allowance for secondary students aged 16 and 17 years attracting more than the minimum rate of payment (ABS 2001b). The new Youth Allowance was introduced in response to community concerns about the need for income support arrangements that addressed the changing labour market conditions, the need for increased flexibility, simplicity and the removal of certain disincentives to study (FaCS 1999a:35). In 1999 approximately 388,000 people received Youth Allowance payments (FaCS 1999a:38). There were more females on Youth Allowance (52%) than males (48%) and the majority of recipients were aged 18 years or over (60%). More Youth Allowance recipients were receiving a dependent rate of payment (69%) than independent (31%), and the vast majority were not earning an income from any other source (93%). Most of payments were provided to full-time and part-time students (79%), while 21% were either looking for work, undertaking training or were incapacitated.

Newstart Allowance

Newstart Allowance is provided to unemployed people 21 years and over, but under Age Pension age, who are capable of undertaking, available for and actively seeking work (Table 1.1). The same Australian residency or newly arrived migrant criteria apply as for Youth Allowance. Newstart Allowance is subject to an income and assets test of the recipient, and varies depending on whether the person is partnered, single with or without children, or single and aged 60 and over. Advances of up to \$500 may be available to some

people and those participating in Work for the Dole may be entitled to an additional payment of \$20 per fortnight.

When the new Youth Allowance program was implemented in 1998 so was a retargeted Newstart Allowance program. Unemployed persons aged 16 to 20 years previously receiving Newstart Allowance were moved to the Youth Allowance program. Newstart recipients are required to provide a fortnightly activity statement to advise on possible changes in circumstance and their job search activities. As of 1998, mutual obligation requirements were put in place requiring unemployed persons aged 18–24, who had been unemployed for 6 months or more, on either Newstart or Youth Allowance to supplement their normal job search efforts with one of a range of activities (FaCS 1999a:39). These activities include part-time work, training, voluntary work, Work for the Dole, job search training and intensive employment assistance. In July 1999 mutual obligation was expanded to include those aged 25–34 who had been unemployed for 12 months or more, and most recently (February 2002) has been extended to include people aged 35–39, with involvement in the program optional for job seekers aged 40–49 (Brough 2002).

There were almost twice the number of Newstart recipients as Youth Allowance (approximately 629,000), of which 71% were male and 29% female (FaCS 1999a:39). The greatest proportion of Newstart recipients were aged 18–24 years (20%) and 25–29 years (18%). Most recipients were single (71%) and were born in Australia (74%). The mean duration of allowance receipt was 107 weeks or just over 2 years, and 88% of recipients had no other income apart from Newstart Allowance.

Special Benefit

The payment of Special Benefit is discretionary and the circumstances in which this payment may be granted are dependent upon factors such as age, physical or mental disability, domestic circumstances or any other reason over which the person has no control (FaCS 1999a:54). The applicant must be an Australian citizen or be the holder of a temporary visa of various subclasses (Table 1.1). For other newly arrived migrants the 2-year waiting period applies before they can receive the benefit.

Rates of payment for Special Benefit recipients are in line with Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance but cannot exceed the maximum rates of these payments. Income and assets tests apply to the Special Benefit but, unlike other allowances, there is no free area and the benefit amount is reduced by one dollar for each dollar of income.

The majority of Special Benefit recipients received income support because they did not residentially qualify for the Age Pension (56%), 'other cases' long term (13%) or as a consequence of their newly arrived migrant or temporary visa status (13%) (FaCS 1999a:55). In total there were 11,808 people receiving a Special Benefit in 1999, of which 56% were female and 44% male. Sixty per cent of recipients were aged 65 or over, with the next largest group being 25–34 year olds (11%). The most common places of birth for Special Benefit recipients were all outside of Australia but within the Asia Pacific region, most commonly China (21%) and Vietnam (13%). Ninety-nine per cent of recipients had no other form of income.

Parenting Payment (single and partnered)

Parenting Payment is available to the primary carer of a child or children under the age of 16, irrespective of marital status (Table 1.1). Payments are different for sole parents and

partnered parents. Income tests vary depending, for example, on whether the partner of the Parenting Payment applicant is already receiving another form of government payment.

Parenting Payment in its current form was introduced in March 1998 to incorporate the previous Sole Parent Pension and Parenting Allowance (ABS 2001b:262). Over the last 20 years the proportion of people receiving the Parenting Payment (single) pension has steadily increased (FaCS 1999a:59). In 1999, 93% of people receiving this payment were female, though the proportion of males receiving it increased from 2% in 1980 to 7% in 1999. Most male Parenting Payment (single) recipients were aged between 30 and 49 years (76%), compared with females who were most commonly aged 20–39 years (73%). The majority of Parenting Payment (single) recipients were receiving a full payment (78%). More than 90% of people receiving the Parenting Payment (partnered) allowance were female. People on Parenting Payment (partnered) can either receive the basic rate, which occurred in 63% of cases, or the additional rate (37%). Nineteen per cent of recipients were the partner of a Newstart Allowance recipient and 14% were the partner of a low-income earner. Overall there were almost double the number of Parenting Payment (partnered) recipients (622,321) than Parenting Payment (single).

Family Allowance

The purpose of the Family Allowance is to assist with the costs associated with raising children. Family Allowance was, prior to the introduction of the GST on 1 July 2000, payable to all primary carers of children under the age of 16 whose family or sole parent income fell below the ceiling rate of income, which in 2000 was \$67,134 (Centrelink 2000) (Table 1.1). Family Allowance was phased out when the GST was introduced and has now been replaced by Family Tax Benefits A and B.

Approximately half of all Family Allowance recipients receive the minimum rate (FaCS 1999a:70). Unlike all other payments that have been discussed, the proportion of people receiving Family Allowance has declined. Reasons for this relate to the increased targeting and change in eligibility criteria of other payments as well as in the Family Allowance payment. In 1999 there were approximately 1,800,000 recipients of Family Allowance, providing for almost 3,500,000 children. Of the 1,800,000, approximately 925,000 families were receiving Family Allowance payments above the minimum rate, with some 72% receiving the allowance free of the income test because they were also receiving some other form of income support. Of those receiving Family Allowance, 38% had one child and only 9% had 4 or more children.

Abstudy

Abstudy is provided to Australian residents who are studying and identify as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. The rate of payment varies substantially depending on the circumstances of the individual. These include whether the student is under or over 16, in State care and/or foster care, living away from home, independent with or without children or a partner, and the pay scale also varies across age cohorts. There are many incidental associated allowances also available, particularly to those living away from home and those studying at a tertiary level. Like Youth Allowance, student Financial Supplement loans are available. Personal and parental income tests, family assets test, family actual means test and assets tests for independent students all apply to Abstudy as for Youth Allowance.

Community Development Employment Projects

The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme is funded by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and offers participants the opportunity to work or perform a community service for wages, as an alternative to unemployment benefits (Table 1.1). ATSIC provides grants to community organisations to undertake community-managed activities and pay wages to workers. Any activity that is deemed to benefit the community can be a CDEP (ATSIC 2001). CDEPs are available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged between 15 and 65 years who are eligible for unemployment benefits or Parenting Payment (single). In addition to the wages the CDEP participants earn, Centrelink also provide supplements if a person is a registered CDEP participant, receiving CDEP scheme wages and qualified for a Centrelink income support payment (Centrelink 2000).

As at June 1999 there were approximately 260 CDEP organisations funded and supported by ATSIC with more than 32,000 participants, two-thirds of whom were located in remote areas of Australia (ATSIC 2001). CDEP is now the Commonwealth's largest Indigenous program and it is estimated that CDEP employs approximately 25% of the Indigenous workforce. In 1999-00 CDEP funding through ATSIC was approximately \$400 million, with two thirds of the cost offset against the income support payments which CDEP workers would otherwise receive.

1.4 Main population groups with income issues

Financial difficulties are not always alleviated by the government income support system and financial difficulty is consistently reported as one of the main reasons for SAAP clients seeking assistance. Income support for migrants, young people and women escaping domestic violence may be insufficient to remove the significant risk to these groups of homelessness. While SAAP clients receiving government payments make up a large proportion of the analysis within this report, clients with no income are also of prime importance. In particular, the analyses attempt to draw out reasons for clients having no source of income, why they have been caught by SAAP instead of elsewhere within the welfare safety net, and how they may differ in their support needs from those receiving government payments.

In its survey of SAAP agencies, the Australian Council of Social Service reported that service providers identified poverty, inadequate levels of income support and rising levels of need for emergency financial relief as a crucially important set of issues facing SAAP clients (ACOSS 2000). Service providers also expressed concern that changes in government policy relating to income support payments, rules, entitlements and Centrelink administration had contributed to a perceived increase in demand for assistance.

The effect such policy changes have had on SAAP clients and the reliance on income support when trying to re-establish independent living after SAAP assistance has also been identified as problematic (CACH 2001). The CACH report stated that income support may not be sufficient to meet the costs of daily living as well as the cost of accommodation. This is particularly true in capital cities or locations where the cost of accommodation tends to be higher and can account for 30-50% of an individual's income which, on top of the bond and rent in advance, makes finding affordable accommodation almost impossible (CACH 2001:19). The margin of financial safety is diminished even further by income security policies that require beneficiaries to exhaust their savings before they can receive income

support. The combination of relatively low income security payments and relatively high housing costs over a number of years is reported to have left many recipients locked in situations of dire poverty (CACH 2001:21). Therefore, reliance on government income support can cause difficulties for those who are homeless or at risk of being homeless and can increase the complexity of support needs within SAAP.

For other population groups, income support may not be available at all, as is the case for many newly arrived migrants and for young people deemed ineligible on the basis of age or parental means testing. The CACH report comments that 'The assumption that people in these groups will be provided for by their families and communities is often wrong' (CACH 2001:21).

People born overseas

Eleven per cent of SAAP clients in 1999–00 were from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (AIHW 2000b:14). People from these backgrounds are under-represented in the SAAP client population, compared with other Australians. It is not known whether this is because they experience homelessness less than other groups or because they are unaware of the services available to them. However, it has been suggested that overseas-born SAAP clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and, in particular, those aged 25 or over are more likely than other SAAP clients to have no income (CACH 2001:68). SAAP agencies surveyed in 2000 identified refugee and migrant policies as having some influence on the increased demand for service delivery (ACOSS 2000:20). It was also reported that newly arrived migrants are experiencing hardship and making increased claims on service delivery organisations as a result of the 2-year waiting period for Centrelink benefits. In terms of income issues, newly arrived migrants can sometimes be eligible for Special Benefits and are therefore thought to make up a significant proportion of these recipients.

Young people

Young people, or those aged under 25, make up approximately 37% of the entire SAAP population (Table 2.3). Income is one of the many factors that place young people at risk of homelessness; hence, the support needs and income source of this group in SAAP have been selected for analyses in this special collection report.

In recent years unemployment has risen among Australian youth, with a decline in unskilled jobs and a corresponding increase in the necessity for further education due to demand for workers with post-secondary qualifications (CACH 2001:56). Further to this, the government has increased the age of dependence to 24 years, restricting eligibility for income support through parental means testing. It is thought that many young people seeking to establish independence and relying on entering the private rental market have had their access to stable and affordable accommodation considerably narrowed by these changes to income support eligibility. Young people over the age of 16, in most cases, or over the age of 21 in the case of Newstart, are eligible to receive all payments selected for analysis in the Income Issues Collection. However, Youth Allowance is of particular importance when examining the income circumstances of young SAAP clients.

One program designed to assist young people, especially those in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, is Reconnect. The objective of Reconnect, a community-based early intervention program for young people who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, is to improve the level of their engagement with family, work, education, training and the

community (AIHW 2001b:329). While the program includes all sections of the community, the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is ensured through the selection process for the program. In the period from December 1999 to June 2001, 5,656 young people commenced support with Reconnect. As at June 2001, 89 Reconnect services were operating in high-need communities across Australia and further communities where services were expected to be announced progressively over the next year. However, at the time of the Income Issues Collection the program had not been fully implemented. The impact of such a program will need to be reviewed in the future.

Women escaping domestic violence

Almost one-quarter of all SAAP clients attended agencies targeting women escaping domestic violence (AIHW 2000b:16). Since 1996 domestic violence has been the main reason for seeking assistance in approximately one-quarter of all support periods (Chapter 7). Particularly high numbers of women of Indigenous Australian origin make up the population of SAAP clients escaping domestic violence. Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds escaping domestic violence are also slightly over-represented compared with the total proportion of SAAP clients from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, though not to the same degree as Indigenous Australian women. Language and cultural barriers can compromise the ability of women from Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to access and maintain income support or to secure employment within the labour market. In addition, women escaping domestic violence may be ineligible for or receive greatly reduced income support payments due to their partner's income status, even though they may be estranged.

Like young people, women escaping domestic violence are entitled to receive any of several of the government payments investigated in the Income Issues Collection. However, Parenting Payment and Family Allowance are of particular importance when assessing the income status of women escaping domestic violence. The potentially significant numbers who may find themselves without an income source upon leaving their partner is also of importance to this report.

Table 1.1: Summary of government income support payment eligibility and criteria investigated in the Income Issues Collection 2000^(a)

Government payments	Basic conditions of eligibility	Residential qualifications	Basic rates of payment^(b)	Income and assets tests
Disability Support Pension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aged 16 or more but under Age Pension age. Assessed physical, intellectual or psychiatric impairment. Unable to work for at least next 2 years due to impairment, or are permanently blind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be an Australian resident. Qualifying residence exemption if arrived as a refugee or under special humanitarian program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Equivalent to Age Pension for those over 21, ranging from \$310.50 pf to \$372.00 pf. Under 21 payment ranges from \$224.40 pf to \$346.70 pf. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal income and assets tests apply to this payment. No income or assets test for recipients who are permanently blind.
Youth Allowance Youth Allowance in its current form has been in place since 1 July 1998.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full-time students aged 16–24 years. Unemployed aged under 21 years, looking for work or combining part-time study with job search. Independent 15 year olds above school leaving age (e.g. homeless). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be an Australian resident or have served a newly arrived migrant waiting period of 104 weeks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payments range from \$148.00 pf to \$354.10 pf. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parental income test, personal income test, assets test and family actual means test all apply to this payment.
Newstart Allowance Newstart in its current form has been in place since 1 July 1998.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aged 21 or more but under Age Pension age. Unemployed and capable of undertaking, available for and actively seeking work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be an Australian resident or have served a newly arrived migrant waiting period of 104 weeks. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payments range from \$299.10 pf to \$358.70 pf. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal income and assets tests apply to this payment.
Special Benefit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In financial hardship and unable to earn a sufficient livelihood for themselves and dependants due to reasons beyond their control. Ineligible for any other income support payment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian resident, or holder of temporary visa of various subclasses. Available to newly arrived migrants after 104 weeks waiting period, unless substantial change in circumstances beyond their control since making an irrevocable decision to come to Australia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Generally as for Newstart Allowance or Youth Allowance. Rate of payment may be reduced if in receipt of free board and/or lodgings, or receiving other forms of support. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal income and assets tests apply to this payment. There is no free area; the payment is reduced by one dollar for each other dollar of income.
Parenting Payment (single and partnered) Parenting Payment in its current form has been in place since March 1998.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must have qualifying child under 16 (single and partnered parents). Can be paid to only one member of a couple. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be an Australian resident or have served the newly arrived migrant waiting period, or be a refugee, or have become a sole parent while an Australian resident. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sole parents receive up to \$372.00 pf. Partnered parents receive up to \$299.10 pf. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal income and assets tests apply to both single and partnered parents. Different rules apply where a partner receives a pension.
Family Allowance Family Allowance was phased out as of 1 July 2000 and replaced with Family Tax Benefits A and B.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be caring for dependent child(ren) aged under 16, or aged 16–20 or 21–24 who are ineligible to receive Youth Allowance or a Prescribed Education Scheme Payment (such as Abstudy). Paid to parent, guardian or approved care organisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent/guardian must be an inhabitant of Australia. Child must be an inhabitant of Australia or a dependent child of an inhabitant and living with that person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Payments range from \$24.00 pf to \$132.00 pf, depending on the age of the child. The minimum rate per child aged 0–17 is \$24.00 pf, and \$50.00 pf per child aged 18–24. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal income and assets tests apply to this payment.
Abstudy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be a student of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent according to the Abstudy definition of Aboriginality, and studying an approved course at an approved education institution. Student must not be in receipt of other government assistance for study. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must be an Australian resident. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Living allowance payments range from \$20.40 pf to \$358.70 pf. School term, fees, incidentals, and fares allowances are also payable amongst others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal income test, parental income test, family assets test, family actual means test, independent students assets test and independent students partner income tests all apply to this payment.
Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants are paid wages from CDEP organisations. They may also receive some additional assistance from Centrelink if they are listed on the CDEP participant schedule, receiving CDEP wages and qualified for Centrelink income support payments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The residence qualifications applying to the primary income support payment for which the CDEP participant is otherwise qualified. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDEP participant supplement is \$20.00 pf. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> CDEP participant supplement income test, income test for add-on assistance and assets test all apply to this payment.

(a) Details listed in this table are the more basic requirements of the income support payments. The complete list of eligibility, residential qualifications, rates of payment, and income and assets tests can be found in the source document.

(b) Rates of payment for all pensions and allowances vary based on age, marital or de facto relationship status, number of children being cared for, at home or independent rates.

Source: Centrelink 2000.

