

## **Information from The Benefit Rights Service about Welfare Working Group's reported recommendations**

The long awaited report from the Welfare Working Group has been released and contains recommendations which could significantly change the delivery of welfare in NZ. There has been some coverage of this in the media, I will try to list the recommendations and some of their implications, this is not a comprehensive list.

- An unrelenting focus on work, based on the assumption that everyone has the capacity to work, even the sick and disabled unless they can prove otherwise.
- A target to remove 100,000 people from welfare by 2021.
- Establishment of a crown entity "Employment Support New Zealand"
- More work testing for parents, with an expectation of part time work (20 hours) when the youngest child is 3, moving to full time (30 hours) when the youngest child turns 6. (this is for couples not just sole parents)
- Also a strong disincentive for parents on a benefit to have additional children, the suggestion is free long term contraceptive for parents on welfare, and if a parent does have another child while on a benefit that they be expected to look for work once the child is 14 weeks old.
- Encouragement for Doctors not to sign medical certificates (as being on a benefit will make the patient sicker).
- Your medical records being available via a file sharing system.
- The abolition of the Independent Youth Benefit, any such youth will have their benefit paid to a responsible adult or nominated community organisation.
- The suggestion that some people have their benefits managed by a community organisation, and that people be given a card which allows spending on approved items only.
- There is a recommendation for tougher sanctions including a two week stand-down period to be applied after people re-comply, if they have failed the work test.
- The old chestnut of a Single Core Benefit, this time named a Jobseeker Allowance, which pays all benefits at the rate of Unemployment Benefit, essentially this is a thinly disguised benefit cut!
- Work testing for almost all people with illness or disability issues.
- "Voluntary" A&D treatment, but where refusing to go would result in a sanction.
- Stronger enforcement of Limited Employment Locations policy.
- An accommodation payment which reduces after six months.
- A lowering of the abatement threshold (\$20 is suggested as the new threshold)
- Replacing hardship assistance: Advances, Special Needs Grants, Temporary Additional Support, with a regionally administered capped discretionary fund.
- More regular reassessment of people's circumstances.

We will be working hard to stop negative changes to the benefit system but we need your help.

We need people to step up and manage a database, and people to be on the database ready to help with protests media and other actions.