

Chapter Eight

8

Fostering Participation, Security and Quality Care for all Australians

One of the greatest challenges facing Australian society is the exclusion of large numbers of people—from work, from educational opportunities and from access to basic services. Labor believes that inclusion and full economic and social participation is critical for every Australian to reach their potential. Social inclusion can help to reduce poverty, improve health outcomes, reduce crime and strengthen communities. Labor believes that we can build long-term prosperity without throwing fairness out the back door. In government, Labor will implement long-term strategies to build social inclusion and spread opportunity so that all Australians have the opportunity to be a valued part of their local community and society.

Principles

- 1.** Since the foundation of the Labor Party the attainment of full employment and the improvement of working conditions have been at the core of Labor's philosophy. Employment is the most important source of economic security and opportunity for working age Australians and their families. Labor is committed to achieving full employment—ensuring any Australian who wants a job can find one within a reasonable time.
- 2.** Labor will always pursue full employment as its highest priority.
- 3.** The maximisation of employment opportunities for all Australians is a fundamental objective of Labor's economic policy. To achieve this, Labor is committed to:
 - strong economic growth;
 - increasing the nation's workforce participation rates;
 - investing in the skills of all Australians;
 - making work pay, by addressing the financial disincentives to work resulting from the interaction of the tax and welfare systems;
 - ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are shared and translate into high-wage and high-skill jobs and a lower unemployment rate;
 - improving demand for Australian goods and services both at home and abroad through effective economic, trade and foreign policies;
 - ensuring that economic growth translates into business and job opportunities right across Australia through industry and regional development policies; and
 - effective labour market assistance programs to overcome barriers to effective workforce participation;
- 4.** Labor recognises that there is much more to employment than the official rate of unemployment. In addition to the commitment to a low rate of official unemployment, Labor will also work to ensure positive employment outcomes for Australians that can be measured across a range of indicators.

- 5.** Labor understands that the official rate of unemployment can mask serious problems in the labour market, such as the number of working age people reliant on income support. While the number of people claiming unemployment benefits has dropped, the number of people claiming unemployment benefits for long periods has increased dramatically. Similarly, the number of working age people claiming other forms of income support has risen considerably.
- 6.** Labor also understands that there are many people who would like to work, or would like more work than they can get, who do not appear in the monthly unemployment figures. Many people are working part-time but would prefer to work more and many people are discouraged from seeking a job because of what they perceive to be insurmountable barriers, such as a lack of childcare and inadequate skills.
- 7.** Labor in government will focus on improving outcomes across the range of employment indicators, including the official unemployment rate.

Increasing Workforce Participation

- 8.** Labor is the Party of working Australians and has always understood the value of work. Work, along with family, gives meaning to life.
- 9.** Labor believes that it is a social and economic necessity to maximise participation in the workforce.
- 10.** Labor believes that all Australians should be able to realise their full potential and have the opportunity to build successful and rewarding careers. Workforce participation is a foundation of social inclusion; it creates opportunities for financial independence and personal fulfilment.
- 11.** Labor believes that as well as being good for individuals, increasing workforce participation benefits communities and the economy. Communities are more prosperous and cohesive when those who can work, are working.
- 12.** Labor is gravely concerned about the numbers of jobless households in Australia; the unacceptably high number of children growing up in families where no-one is employed and consequent intergenerational unemployment. Labor considers the cycle of disadvantage resulting from intergenerational unemployment to be unacceptable, and is committed to its reduction. This will require investment in the work skills of parents and youth, local employment solutions, and the guarantee of a good start for young people.
- 13.** Labor believes workforce participation is a key economic challenge for Australia—given the ageing of our population and the chronic skills shortages across the economy. The nation simply cannot afford to have potential workers, who want to work, excluded from the labour force.
- 14.** Labor recognises that Australia has a large pool of under-utilised workers. They include the officially unemployed, those who are working but want more work than they can get, and those who would like to work but don't appear in the official monthly labour force figures.
- 15.** In addition to the goal of an official unemployment rate that is sustainably below five per cent, Labor is committed to increasing Australia's workforce participation rates.
- 16.** Labor understands that these potential workers include people with a disability, young people (particularly early school-leavers), mature age Australians, and parents seeking to return to work. Some live in areas where the labour market is less robust. Many Australians who are not in the workforce face multiple barriers to work participation, including lack of

relevant skills, lack of access to childcare, inadequate social and physical infrastructure and negative employer attitudes.

- 17.** Labor is committed to helping Australians not in the workforce overcome these barriers. Labor believes Australia needs a broader participation agenda that tackles the reasons why some Australians are not participating in the workforce.
- 18.** Labor believes that government should work in partnership with business, unions and the community to develop employment opportunities for groups who are under-represented in the workforce.
- 19.** Labor is committed to meeting the challenges presented by the lack of employment opportunities in particular regions—urban, regional, rural and remote. Labor recognises the geographic dimension of economic disadvantage, and the coincidence of low employment, low growth, lack of educational opportunity and persistent disadvantage in some communities. Labor believes in the importance of engaging local communities to address local problems, and will actively target regions of high unemployment to improve economic, educational and employment opportunities.
- 20.** Labor's approach to increasing workforce participation will include both supply-side policy measures that address the barriers to participation confronting under-represented groups, and demand strategies that encourage employers to provide employment opportunities for these Australians.
- 21.** Labor believes that closer integration of education and training, employment services and income support is the basis for employment and skills development. This is the best insurance policy the nation has against unemployment in the long-term.

Skills - the Key to Participation, Productivity and Prosperity

- 22.** Labor believes Australia's ongoing prosperity will be driven by a skilled workforce.
- 23.** Currently there is a fundamental mismatch in the contemporary Australian labour market between the skills required to take up available jobs, and the skills profile of many potential workers. Investing in the skills of Australians is vital to both individual opportunity and economic prosperity. Employability is critical to the economic security of individuals and families and the nation as a whole.
- 24.** Labor recognises the fundamental link between a person's skills and their employability; people only get a job if they have the skills an employer needs.
- 25.** Labor will give working age Australians the opportunity to regularly update their skills throughout life.
- 26.** Labor knows that investment in skills also helps develop and sustain the nation's capacity for growth and the direction of that growth. It also prolongs the economic cycle by acting as an anti-inflation device by better matching supply and demand for skills.
- 27.** Labor believes government has a clear responsibility to build the capacity of the labour force through investment in skills. Labor will meet this responsibility through the design and content of its labour market programs. Labor is committed to improving the skills of those Australians who are unemployed or at risk of becoming unemployed because skills are the key to employability.

Moving People from Welfare to Work

- 28.** Labor believes that people who can work, should work, and those who can't work should be cared for.
- 29.** Labor understands that while most people want to work, some people will never be able to work due to their particular circumstances.
- 30.** Labor believes that a civilised country like Australia should provide a strong social safety net to ensure people who are unable to work or who are temporarily out of work—and their dependants—can live with dignity and confidence.
- 31.** Labor recognises that the alternative to such a social safety net is increased poverty, isolation, stress and crime resulting in increased social and economic costs to the community as a whole.
- 32.** Labor supports mutual obligation. Mutual obligation is consistent with Labor's belief that if individuals receive support from the community, they should return that support by finding employment as soon as is practicable.
- 33.** Labor believes that the intent of mutual obligation requirements is to encourage engagement, build capacity and to improve—not impede—the possibility of employment. Mutual obligation requirements should serve both the best interests of the individual and the community.
- 34.** Mutual obligation must be a two-way street. Government has a responsibility to do its part through sustaining strong economic growth, investment in skills, the provision of effective labour market programs and reducing the barriers to participation.
- 35.** Labor recognises that different obligations will be appropriate for different people in different circumstances.
- 36.** Labor supports a mutual obligation framework that takes account of people's work capacity and caring responsibilities.
- 37.** Labor believes that some people will benefit from seeking work, while others will benefit from capacity building through training or study.
- 38.** Labor recognises that where a lack of skills stands between a person and a job, the most sensible primary obligation for the job-seeker is to acquire relevant skills.
- 39.** Labor will retain reasonable activity obligations for Newstart recipients, encompassing community work, job-search requirements and training opportunities.
- 40.** Labor believes that mutual obligation requirements must be fair. Labor will provide reasonable avenues for disputes to be resolved and will ensure mutual obligation requirements do not unfairly penalise vulnerable Australians and their dependents.
- 41.** As part of the process of determining participation requirements for a person with a disability, experts with relevant qualifications will be involved in assessing the current and potential capacity of that person.
- 42.** Labor will ensure parents receiving income support payments are able to balance work and family responsibilities. Labor recognises that being a parent is the most important job there is, and that a parent's mutual obligation requirements should be designed to improve their ability to provide for their children, not add complexity to their lives.
- 43.** Labor understands that for many individuals, the move from welfare to work will require significant support and assistance. A range of programs and services are needed to help people who face complex challenges to become work-ready.

- 44.** Labor recognises that the interaction of taxation, income support and family benefits can significantly reduce the incentive to earn private income through increased taxation and the withdrawal of benefits as private income increases. Redressing these financial disincentives is a key component to improving workforce participation. Labor will take steps to boost incentives to move from welfare to work by making work pay.
- 45.** Labor recognises that through their lives many people will change jobs, sometimes lose their jobs, and move from work to welfare. Labor will encourage employers and employees to embrace ongoing training opportunities to improve the job security and work-readiness of the existing workforce. Labor will also ensure that workers who lose their jobs have immediate assistance in finding new employment.

Employment Services

- 46.** Labor believes that employment services play a critical role in assisting and case-managing job-seekers to give them the best chance of gaining employment and building a career.
- 47.** Labor will retain and improve the Job Network and the Disability Employment Network systems as private and community providers of employment services.
- 48.** Labor supports an employment services sector where funding is based on quality performance, and where providers work in partnership with government.
- 49.** Labor is committed to an employment service framework that provides and maintains a nationally accessible, job matching database and delivers customised assistance to the long-term unemployed and those at risk of long-term unemployment. This is achieved through job matching services, case management, opportunities for group participation and targeted access to wage subsidies and community employment schemes.
- 50.** Labor believes that employment services should be designed to give the job-seeker the best chance of a long-term job placement. Labor recognises the risk of an excessive focus on short-term outcomes, which can lead to churning job-seekers in and out of short-term, entry level jobs with little security or opportunity for advancement.
- 51.** Labor believes that job-seekers should not only have the opportunity to get a job, they should have the opportunity to build a career.
- 52.** Labor will provide labour market assistance tailored to the particular needs of the unemployed and their local economies.
- 53.** Labor's initiatives will take account of workers in different stages of their lives, striking an appropriately targeted balance between skills development, work experience, community employment and income support. Labour market assistance will be regularly refined in the light of success rates and experience.
- 54.** Labor aims to develop the capabilities and skills of the unemployed and believes employment services providers should be encouraged, where appropriate, to refer clients to training including vocational education and training.
- 55.** Labor recognises that the Job Network does not always adequately reward early intervention and support, despite evidence that early intervention is the most successful approach. Outcome payments should be designed to reward employment services providers for finding genuinely long-term jobs for people as soon as possible.
- 56.** Labor is committed to improving the transparency, and ensuring the accountability, of employment services systems in the interests of job-seekers, service providers and taxpayers.

- 57.** Labor will encourage a diverse range of specialist and generalist employment services providers to take part in employment services to ensure that appropriate services are available to meet the diverse needs of job-seekers.
- 58.** Labor is committed to adequately addressing the needs of the most disadvantaged in the labour market.
- 59.** Labor will review and adjust relevant contractual arrangements underpinning the Job Network and other employment services, in close collaboration with the industry, clients and the community organisations which work with them, to ensure they are consistent with these objectives.
- 60.** Labor will invest in new programs, more closely integrated with employment services, to assist people facing special disadvantages and multiple barriers to workforce participation. In addition to focusing on skills development, Labor will target specific barriers including:
- poorly located housing, low literacy and numeracy skills, physical and mental health problems, English language difficulties, disability, alcohol and substance abuse, homelessness and lack of access to social services like childcare and public transport;
 - poverty traps where the unemployed receive inadequate financial reward for working that, combined with the tapering of benefits, results in high effective marginal tax rates;
 - cultural barriers and discrimination facing mature age people, those who have been institutionalised and carers returning to the workforce;
 - entrenched structural discrimination against people with disabilities, migrants, and Indigenous Australians; and
 - direct and indirect discrimination against women that results in vertical and horizontal job segregation. Discrimination including sexual harassment and discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy and parenting can limit women's choices in workforce participation.

Promoting the Fairer Distribution of Work

- 61.** There are now large and growing divergences in unemployment rates between different areas of Australia. This combined with growing demands and pressures on those who have jobs means one of the major inequalities in Australia today is the gap between the overworked and the out of work.
- 62.** In generating additional jobs, Labor will pursue innovative measures to promote greater security and a fair distribution of work between regions and individuals in the workforce, focusing on job creation for the most disadvantaged groups.
- 63.** The net effect of economic growth must be the creation of new jobs and not simply longer hours in existing jobs. Labor recognises the significant growth in overwork in many industries and the growing pressure being placed on existing workers, their families and communities. Labor will foster industrial relations and employment practices that enable workers to balance their employment with family and community responsibilities.

Reducing Under-Employment

- 64.** Under-employment, affecting part-time workers who want to work more hours, and workers who want to fully use their skills and qualifications, is also a growing problem. It affects women with dependent children working in low-paid jobs and migrants from non-English speaking backgrounds and is most widespread outside the major metropolitan areas. Increasingly more and more men are among the under-employed. Clearly, under-employed

people need more hours of work and Labor will take steps with employers, unions and the under-employed to bring about work practices that allow the under-employed to maximise their hours of employment.

- 65.** To cope with under-employment, part-time workers need to be treated equally in industrial terms, by obtaining portable entitlements on a pro-rata basis similar to those available to full-time workers. They must also have equal access to promotion and new job opportunities.
- 66.** The under-employed particularly require access to training and career opportunities to assist them to move into better paid jobs or industries guaranteeing them the traditional employment conditions of full-time workers, including holiday pay, sick pay and long service leave.
- 67.** Labor recognises that many under-employed Australians, including part-time and casual workers are forced to survive on low wages and minimal hours of work. The rapidly growing number of workers employed on casual, temporary, irregular and unpredictable hours is placing immense financial and emotional pressure on Australian families. Many workers are forced to seek multiple jobs. It also leads to high employee turnover with a high financial cost to business and the community, reduced investment in training and associated loss of skills in the economy.

Supporting People with Particular Needs

- 68.** Labor supports additional assistance for carers, people with disabilities, migrants and Indigenous Australians in accessing the labour market. Labor will integrate these programs with the mainstream labour market, giving all Australians opportunity for advancement.
- 69.** Labor supports measures such as intensive mentoring and wage subsidies to help Indigenous Australians into employment. Labor will encourage a training and industrial framework that applies to Indigenous employment and which encourages skills development. Labor recognises that the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP), can give Indigenous Australians better access to work opportunities. It can also be a useful tool for developing Indigenous enterprises and provide meaningful work to people in areas where there are limited job and training opportunities. However CDEP should not be used to subsidise employment that would otherwise be funded by Government. Labor is committed to developing job opportunities as an alternative to CDEP.
- 70.** Labor recognises that people with disabilities represent a valued part of our society and have the potential to make a significant contribution to Australia's future. Labor supports programs which address the particular needs of people with disabilities and, in particular, those which encourage skill development.
- 71.** Labor recognises that people with disabilities face serious obstacles in obtaining and holding employment, and in securing opportunities to access education and training.
- 72.** Labor is committed to ensuring that people with disabilities have access to both generic and specialist employment assistance to meet their employment support needs as well as access to a social security safety net. This commitment has the twin goals of ensuring that people with disabilities can earn award wages and have the opportunity for participation in the economy.
- 73.** Labor recognises that people with disabilities employed in supported employment business services (previously known as 'sheltered workshops') and in open employment gain a great deal from their employment experience including the opportunity to interact socially and to

participate in society through employment. These opportunities lead to increased self-confidence and feelings of self-worth.

- 74.** Labor will work with employers, unions and community organisations to increase the employment opportunities of people with disabilities in a fair manner. Labor supports the Supported Wages Scheme, and the development of new programs for people with disabilities. Advances in technology supporting workers with disabilities make it increasingly possible to integrate workers with disabilities into the mainstream labour market.
- 75.** As part of its commitment to increasing and enhancing employment opportunities for people with a disability, Labor will review the current restrictions on the provision of disability employment services.
- 76.** Labor will work with State and Territory Governments and the service sector to explore innovative funding and service models which increase the opportunities for the employment, training, education and community participation needs for people with a disability.

Supporting Young People (15–24 year olds)

- 77.** Labor recognises that young people who leave the education system too early are at risk of being trapped in a cycle of unemployment and lifelong disadvantage. Governments have a responsibility, through investment in education, to equip our young people with the training and skills they need to get decent and secure work.
- 78.** Labor is committed to strengthening and improving the pathways and increasing the opportunities for young Australians to move successfully from school into further education, training and/or employment.
- 79.** Labor is committed to all young Australians achieving an accredited post-secondary qualification.
- 80.** People in this age group require a smooth transition from school to work, through a combination of work experience opportunities including:
 - expanded opportunities for students to access quality vocational education and training (VET) while at school providing genuine pathways to employment and further education;
 - possible TAFE provision of upper-secondary education to early school-leavers;
 - a diverse range of traineeship and apprenticeship opportunities; and
 - targeted case management to more actively assist those at most risk.
- 81.** Labor will ensure that shorter-term, unemployed young people have a variety of pathways to develop skills to assist them back into the workforce. For those who are long-term unemployed or at risk of becoming long-term unemployed, case management is necessary to overcome particular barriers.
- 82.** Labor recognises that one of the barriers to the transition from school into work or further training is the lack of information about available options. To overcome this, Labor will improve communication and coordination between all levels of government, education sectors, industry, employment service providers and community organisations.
- 83.** Labor will support the establishment, through a case by case approach in the independent Industrial Commission, of competency and skill based pay structures for young workers. The priority will be to ensure that young people are treated fairly.

Supporting 25–44 year olds

- 84.** The concept of lifelong learning is now an imperative for working age Australians. People in work need the opportunity to update their skills throughout their working lives. Labor will ensure that working Australians, particularly those at risk of future unemployment, have access to affordable training that can improve their long-term labour market prospects.
- 85.** Labor recognises that improving the skills base of Australian workers is not only in their interests but also in the best interests of employers and the national economy. Reflecting this, Labor will ensure that the costs of training are appropriately shared, including with 94 employers.
- 86.** Just as those in work need to update their skills to maintain employment in the face of change, those without work need assistance to overcome the immediate and longer-term barriers to workforce participation.
- 87.** Labor recognises that many people face difficulties in entering the workforce after long periods of schooling, caring, illness or child rearing. Labor will help people get back into the workforce through school to work programs, pre-work training, increased assistance for carers and access to affordable childcare.

Supporting Australians who are 45 plus

- 88.** Many Australian workers over 45 have suffered through economic restructuring and workforce change. They face particular difficulty in retraining and reskilling during their working lives making it difficult to adapt to economic change.
- 89.** Labor recognises that people who become unemployed later in life can find it difficult gaining new, secure employment. While encouraging ongoing workforce participation, Labor will ensure that obligations placed on unemployed workers who are 45 plus, by mutual obligation programs and intensive job searching, are fair and respect the dignity and self esteem of the people concerned.
- 90.** Labor will develop positive pathways for unemployed Australians who are 45 plus to get back to work. Labor believes there must be a national strategy for assisting and retraining older workers who are at risk of unemployment, before they lose their jobs. This includes improved consultation before redundancies occur and fast tracking the employment services and training provided to older workers in order to minimise the risk of becoming long-term unemployed.
- 91.** Labor believes employment security for older workers is the responsibility of the whole community—including industry, unions, employment service providers, group training bodies and all levels of government. In particular Labor in government will adopt best practice recruitment policies and processes to ensure that older workers are given fair and reasonable opportunities for employment and will open up prospects in government for mature age job seekers.
- 92.** Labor is committed to a national public campaign to promote equal employment practices in the private and non-government sector in relation to older workers. The Commonwealth will seek the cooperation of the State and Territory Governments to review the barriers to timely entry to government supported training for mature age workers who are unemployed.
- 93.** Labor recognises the wealth of knowledge, experience and skills that older workers bring both to their communities and the national economy but also appreciates the particular difficulties older workers are currently experiencing in securing and retaining employment in the labour market. Labor is committed to ensuring that mature age Australians receive

assistance to take up the employment opportunities available. Labor will develop effective options for employment in areas such as human services, environmental renewal, mentoring and volunteer work.

- 94.** With an ageing population, low labour force participation rates among men and women over 45 will become less and less economically sustainable. Labor is committed to working with industry and unions to develop strategies designed to retain and support older employees, including retraining and reskilling.
- 95.** Labor recognises the right of older Australians to retire from the workforce if that is their preference and recognises their ongoing contribution to society throughout their retirement.

Children's Services for All Australians

- 96.** Labor believes that all Australian children deserve the best start in life. Children's services must centre on the needs of all children and the value of each child.
- 97.** Investing in the early years of a child's life delivers strong long-term benefits for children. Labor will put learning and development at the centre of Australia's approach to early childhood care and education. Labor will enshrine in law a right of universal access to early learning programs for all four year olds. This learning would be provided in all forms of early childhood care and education settings as Labor is concerned with the quality of the learning, not where it takes place.
- 98.** Labor will work with the States and Territories in making early childhood education and care a national priority, including expanding provision of integrated, accessible and affordable early learning and care programs, as well as setting a national research agenda for early childhood education and care.
- 99.** Labor believes that children's services must centre on the needs of all children and the value of each child.
- 100.** Labor will develop a long-term national plan for investing in our children. This will include a plan to treat childcare as an early learning opportunity.
- 101.** Labor will work with the States and Territories in setting a national research agenda for early childhood education and care, and using existing evidence about child development to inform all government policy on the early years.
- 102.** Labor is committed to supporting families in the different choices they make about how to balance making an income sufficient for their needs and aspirations, with caring for children:
 - Labor's first concern is to ensure that children grow up in a caring, stable and safe environment.
 - Labor is committed to providing high quality, affordable and accessible formal childcare, and supporting families who choose to care for their children at home.
 - Labor is committed to ensuring that funding of quality childcare supports choice for families in the type of service they can access.
- 103.** Labor believes the Commonwealth government should play an active role in early childhood care and education through planning and funding to ensure that:
 - the supply of places matches demand, including demand for places for babies and children at risk, for children with disabilities, and in outside-school-hours and vacation care services;
 - emerging needs for childcare places are met, in line with changes in the way families balance their working and family lives;

- location and family income are not a barrier to accessing appropriate early childhood care and education; and
 - the childcare sector provides a continuing stable environment for children in communities.
- 104.** Labor will adequately fund the costs of childcare, to ensure that quality early childhood care and education is affordable for the families who choose to use it, and sufficient for childcare providers to operate a viable quality service. Labor will better target assistance to overcome income and location disadvantage in the accessing of childcare.

Provision of Children's Services

- 105.** The provision of children's services is increasingly spread between private and community and other not-for-profit providers. In relation to the mix between private and community and other not-for-profit providers, Labor will:
- target support so as to maintain an appropriate balance between private and community and other not-for-profit children's services to ensure that the needs and choices of Australian families are satisfied;
 - ensure that Commonwealth government funding provided to private and community and other not-for-profit children's services is directed towards improving the quality of those services; and
 - support an effective complaints resolution process to ensure that concerns of parents and workers in children's service facilities are able to be resolved satisfactorily.
- 106.** Labor recognises that parents need flexible childcare which matches their many needs, and that families' needs for childcare can vary.
- 107.** Labor will encourage the development of an appropriate mix of centre-based care, family day care, work-based care, outside school hours and vacation care and occasional care.
- 108.** Labor will support and maintain a viable community-based sector through adequate and appropriate funding, including local government services.
- 109.** Labor will provide capital assistance to expand the provision of children's services, especially by the community sector, targeted at areas of childcare need and work with the community sector to ensure they sustain viable business models for providing quality child care.
- 110.** Labor will encourage and support the development of innovative models of childcare which link to the provision of other services.
- 111.** Labor in Government will coordinate and monitor the provision of work-based and employer-sponsored childcare.
- 112.** Labor's childcare policies will encourage all formal childcare providers to involve parents in the management of childcare services, and will support parents' involvement in the development and implementation of early childhood care and education policies.
- 113.** Labor believes that providing the best future for Australia's children must be the responsibility of all levels of government.
- 114.** Labor will work with the States and Territories to establish a nationally consistent early years learning framework. This framework will be developed with a specific emphasis on play-based learning, pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills, focusing on how to bridge the gap between care and learning.

- 115.** Labor believes that cost must not be a barrier to early childhood education and care, and will work with all State and Territory governments to make early childhood education and care services more affordable for families.
- 116.** Labor will work with the States and Territories to develop an integrated system of childcare and early childhood education, to ensure that all Australian children under school age have access to early childhood education and other appropriate developmental and social activities, provided in a safe environment.
- 117.** Labor will work with State, Territory and Local Governments to ensure that future planning of new schools and other community developments takes account of local child care needs, and seeks to co-locate new child care services on primary school grounds where appropriate.
- 118.** Recognising the contribution early childhood education and care services make to children's development, parent support and early identification of children at risk, Labor will develop an integrated national system of local networks linking services such as preschool, childcare, playgroups, maternal and children's health, early intervention and parental education.
- 119.** To improve early identification of children at risk, Labor will work with the States and Territories to integrate awareness of child protection issues in the ongoing training and development programs for childcare professionals.
- 120.** Labor will establish a national education, care and development curriculum for children aged 0-5 years as a guide to parents which can be used in any type of early education and care facility. Recognising the importance of early childhood education to early learning and successful transition to school, Labor will work with all State and Territory governments to reduce the cost of and increase participation in pre-school education programs.
- 121.** Labor believes all children should have some prior-to-school learning; that price must not be a barrier; and that early learning is one of the best ways to reduce social disadvantage in Australia.
- 122.** Labor will continue to support and expand early childhood care and education for children with special needs and children at risk.
- 123.** Labor supports quality assurance processes within the children's services sector to ensure that high quality service standards are adopted and maintained. Labor supports policies which will ensure that funding provided by government to children's services operators will be directed towards providing high quality services, maintaining the standards of care and providing greater access to the services. This includes:
- improving the monitoring of standards, including a more effective system of inspections by the accreditation agency to ensure that accreditation standards are being met;
 - greater monitoring of compliance with licensing regulations;
 - auditing Commonwealth funding to ensure that all funding is appropriately allocated in all children's services facilities; and
 - addressing the development and retention of workforce skills.
- 124.** Labor will extend the national childcare accreditation system to encourage the provision of high quality care and appropriate professional standards in all formal childcare services
- Labor will ensure that only users of accredited services are eligible for childcare assistance.
 - Labor will work with State and Territory governments to ensure a consistent national framework for the regulation of childcare providers.

- Labor will ensure that a consistent national framework for the regulation of childcare providers focuses on lifting the quality of childcare and will do this by improving childcare regulations in every State and Territory.

Children's Services Workforce

- 125.** Labor will ensure that care and education are provided by appropriately trained and caring staff whose wages and conditions reflect their training and their responsibilities. Labor recognises that there is a growing body of evidence to show that the first five years of a child's life are critical to their educational and social development and that dedicated children's services workers are fundamental to this development.
- 126.** Labor recognises that there is a critical shortage of qualified and experienced children's services workers. Labor will develop strategies to improve the retention and recruitment of qualified children's services workers.
- 127.** Children's services workers are often underpaid and undervalued for the important work they do with Australian children in their vital early years. Wages and conditions of children's services workers often do not reflect their training and qualifications.
- 128.** Labor will support improvements in the wages and conditions of children's services workers, such as dedicated programming time in centres.
- 129.** Labor is committed to improving staff-to-child ratios in childcare centres, to improve quality of care by enabling childcare professionals to develop secure attachments with children.
- 130.** Labor will:
- support wage and pay equity cases in State and federal industrial tribunals;
 - help establish a new career structure and pay scale for children's services workers;
 - developing strategies to improve the retention and recruitment of qualified children's services workers;
 - support Australians wanting to study early childhood education; and
 - support measures to retain trained childcare professionals, including by providing HECS and TAFE fee relief and secondments to childcare policy jobs.
- 131.** Labor aims to improve the quality of education and care in all children's service settings. In determining a new career structure for the industry, Labor will recognise the crucial contribution of all childcare professionals to children's development.
- 132.** Labor will also ensure that there are adequate funding arrangements to:
- meet the necessary improvements in wages and conditions for existing workers and to assist in the recruitment of new qualified workers;
 - encourage qualified workers to rural and remote areas;
 - meet the cost of further education and training for children's services workers; and
 - address occupational health and safety concerns including immunisation and first aid courses for children's services workers and additional cleaning staff.
- 133.** In recognition of the shortage of qualified childcare professionals, Labor will work with State and Territory Governments to phase in a Certificate III in Children's Services as a mandatory minimum qualification for childcare professionals. Labor will:
- Coordinate a national program of recognition of prior learning for experienced childcare professionals to attain formal qualifications; and

- Eliminate TAFE fees for those studying to obtain a recognised Children's Services qualification.

Child Support when Parents Separate

- 134.** Labor believes that child support policy must put the interests of children first, aiming to reduce child poverty, ensuring that both parents contribute to their children's well-being and encouraging both parents to maintain an ongoing role in their children's lives.
- 135.** Labor supports a flexible, national Child Support Scheme which recognises variations in earnings and new family responsibilities and which is administered by an appropriately resourced Child Support Agency.
- 136.** Labor believes the best arrangements for providing for the children of separated parents are those agreed between parents and will encourage those who establish a good payment record to opt out of the Child Support Scheme by agreement, where this is consistent with reasonable maintenance action.
- 137.** Labor will strengthen enforcement and compliance measures to ensure that parents paying and receiving child support cannot structure their financial affairs to avoid their obligations.
- 138.** Labor will regularly evaluate the Child Support Scheme's operation and continue to improve it so it is easily understood, and provides parents with the support required to establish child support arrangements, including mediation services.

Social Security: Past, Present and Future

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- 139.** In the post-war era, Labor governments have been responsible for building a fair and decent social security system which has aimed to:
- support Australian families;
 - protect Australians' living standards, provide income support for those in need and income supplements for families and those with additional costs;
 - give Australians opportunities to improve their lives—investing in individuals' capacities by providing support and incentives to take up work and learn new skills;
 - demonstrate our compassion for those Australians who, because of age, disability or their responsibility for the care of another, cannot support themselves; and
 - deliver flexible assistance in a cost effective way to the taxpayer.
- 140.** Australia's social security system must change to meet the nation's emerging needs and circumstances.
- Working lives have changed dramatically. Australians are now likely to experience periods without a job, are unlikely to have a job for life with one employer and working hours are increasingly unpredictable. Some Australians are working more hours than they want while others work fewer hours than are needed for a decent life. Many people will return to training or education at some stage during their working lives, children are staying at school and at home longer, and many more are going on to post-secondary study.
 - There are more 'transitions' outside of work: Australians change houses, cities, partners far more frequently than they used to—some of these changes are voluntary, some are forced, but they all involve elements of risk that the social security system could anticipate and manage better.
 - Increasingly the benefits of economic growth are not being shared equally and there is a widening gap in opportunities available to people living in particular communities.

- We are living longer and our population is ageing.
- 141.** Labor is committed to preventing and eliminating poverty in Australia, to improving the living standards of all Australians and to reducing inequality between Australians, by providing people with a secure income and access to the services and opportunities they need so that all Australians can live with decency and dignity.
- 142.** Labor is committed to the development of robust whole of government indicators to measure national progress in addressing poverty and improving living standards, including measures of income, health, educational attainment and participation through employment and housing affordability.
- 143.** Labor will ensure that, through an ongoing dialogue with State and Territory Governments, initiatives to tackle poverty and inequality are coordinated and effective in improving the living standards of all Australians.

Security and Opportunity

- 144.** Labor recognises that at times in their working lives some Australians may be unable to support themselves through work. Labor remains committed to a compassionate and fair social security system which offers a basic level of income support to these Australians, in proportion to their need and according to their circumstances and which, above all, encourages and supports them to enter or re-enter the workforce enabling them to enjoy a decent standard of living.
- 145.** Labor believes that the federal government, on behalf of all Australians, has a duty to ensure that no-one is left without the means to a decent life because he or she:
 - is retired and does not have an adequate retirement income;
 - is sick or disabled and unable to work, either temporarily or permanently;
 - is unlikely to find work because of age or disability;
 - has primary responsibility for the care of children or other family members;
 - has lost the support of a partner through separation, divorce or death;
 - is unemployed and seeking work; or
 - is in education or training, or a combination of education and training and looking for work.
- 146.** Labor believes that the social security system also plays a vital role in supplementing low incomes and providing additional help where Australians and their families face increased costs because of the need to provide for children, or to meet the costs of disability, health care, decent housing, and education.
- 147.** Labor will:
 - continue to supplement Australians' incomes to help meet these costs;
 - ensure that the system of assistance for families with dependent children, provided through the tax, social security and education systems, is easy to understand and access and is designed so that people do not face financial barriers to work and are able to get the help they need, when they need it;
 - work to eliminate tax and social security rules that cause families with variations in income to incur large debts and which result in the removal of substantial amounts of additional income earned through overtime; and

- pursue innovative ways to deliver assistance to families to reflect changing roles, responsibilities and work practices so that all families have the opportunity to make free decisions about bringing up their children.

148. Labor believes that the fundamental objectives of government assistance are to support individuals and families through stages of the life cycle or in particular circumstances where support is needed and to facilitate and increase people's access to the opportunities and skills they need to achieve a decent standard of living. Our welfare system is successful when it not only alleviates poverty, but when it provides a platform for people to access education, training and economic opportunities. In this way that the welfare system can change people's lives.

Poverty and Social Exclusion

- 149.** Labor recognises that the causes of poverty in today's society are complex and the experience of living in poverty is multi-dimensional. Poverty means both economic and social hardship—people living in poverty are often marginalised and excluded from mainstream society. People experiencing extreme financial hardship also have reduced access to the health, education and other services that the rest of the community takes for granted.
- 150.** Poverty often breeds poverty—it can be difficult for children growing up in poor households to break the cycle. Labor is committed to preventing and eliminating poverty. Labor is also committed to addressing social exclusion and the inter-generational effects of poverty.
- 151.** Labor will build a welfare system designed to reduce inequality and improve the living standards of all Australians. This requires ensuring all Australians have a secure income and equal access to services and opportunities. Labor will work with the welfare and community sectors to provide assistance to people living in poverty and experiencing financial hardship and social exclusion.
- 152.** Labor will develop robust, whole-of-government indicators to properly measure poverty. Labor will set bold, but achievable targets for the reduction and elimination of poverty and social exclusion, and will establish mechanisms to measure progress towards achieving these targets. National progress in improved living standards for all Australians will be properly measured and will include measures of income, health, educational attainment and participation through employment and housing affordability. Labor will be accountable for meeting the goals it sets.
- 153.** Labor recognises the importance of breaking the cycle of inter-generational disadvantage. Accordingly, Labor's efforts to address poverty will include a major investment of effort in reducing child poverty and deprivation. Labor believes in giving all Australian children the best possible chance in life.
- 154.** International best practice shows that well coordinated, truly national efforts are the only way to properly address poverty and social exclusion. Labor will ensure that, through an ongoing dialogue with State and Territory governments, initiatives to tackle poverty and inequality are well coordinated and genuinely 'whole-of-government'. Labor will also work closely with the community and welfare sectors to ensure that efforts to address poverty and social exclusion are effective.

Helping People Move Forward

- 155.** Labor recognises that, for working age Australians, the best route out of poverty lies in a job with a decent income. Labor believes the social security system should encourage and help people to take up work opportunities to improve their standard of living. Labor will ensure

that those who can combine assistance with work, education or training are always better off.

- As a matter of urgency, Labor will address the poverty traps that see extra earnings immediately clawed back in tax and the withdrawal of social security payments and benefits.
- Labor acknowledges the widening gap between the skills an unemployed person can offer and the skills employers want and will better integrate the provision of income support and job assistance with education and quality training opportunities, particularly in areas of skill shortages.
- Labor recognises the widening disparity of opportunity in many communities, particularly in regional and rural Australia and will act to coordinate and better target resources in these areas.
- Labor will ensure the welfare system takes advantage of the unique resources and expertise found in local communities.
- Labor will pursue new ways to break the poverty cycle and long-term benefit receipt by developing strategies that can help families early and provide links to health, education, childcare and labour market assistance.

The Importance of Creating and Facilitating Opportunities

156. Labor believes in lifelong education and training and recognises that many Australians combine work with education, training and caring responsibilities and that families change the way they balance these tasks over the course of their lives.

- Labor will ensure that people receiving payments can move flexibly between caring responsibilities, study or training and the workforce.
- Labor will build positive incentives into the system to encourage those receiving payments to take up work experience, education and training.

157. Labor acknowledges the important role of quality, affordable childcare for parents who want to take up educational opportunities, re-enter the workforce or increase their hours of work.

Providing Incentives

158. Labor will better integrate the income support and tax systems to:

- minimise the poverty traps where income tests and taxation combine to severely reduce the benefit of earnings; and
- develop new and innovative ways to reward people who find work.

159. Labor recognises that for many disadvantaged job-seekers, removal of barriers such as access to affordable quality childcare and quality training and skills development are equally important to finding work. Labor is committed to removing the barriers facing many of the long-term unemployed, especially sole parents, mature aged, people with disabilities and Indigenous job-seekers and providing incentives in the transition from welfare into work.

Ensuring Adequate Income Support

160. Labor remains committed to providing adequate income support for those who need it. Labor will:

- maintain the benchmark of maximum single adult rates of pension to at least 25 per cent of male total average weekly earnings;

- ensure basic rates are indexed at least twice a year in line with movements in the Consumer Price Index; and
- ensure that those whose only income is provided through the social security system will not have to pay income tax.

Better Delivery of Welfare Services

- 161.** Labor believes that the social security system should be based on recognition of the need to provide adequate and sufficient levels of support to all Australians so that they and their families can live decently with dignity. Accordingly, the social security system should be a flexible and simple system, easy to understand and easy to administer. Labor will continue to reform the social security system so that it meets these benchmarks.
- 162.** A fairer, simpler and more flexible system will mean that people will be able to more readily understand their entitlements and staff will be able to have time to actively assist social security recipients rather than grapple with administrative complexity. Further, the lengthy processes of review and appeal will be reduced. Labor will retain the independent and free review and appeals process.
- 163.** Under Labor, people will be treated with courtesy, respect and understanding by the social security system.
- 164.** Labor will ensure that personal information is protected and will maintain individuals' rights under freedom of information to have access to their personal files.
- 165.** Labor is committed to maintaining Centrelink in full public ownership and ensuring it has the resources necessary to carry out its services effectively. Labor will:
- develop and expand the role of Centrelink in our communities, particularly as a central resource linking people to services and opportunities in local areas; and
 - enhance Centrelink's ability to offer personalised service to individuals who are looking for work.

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Involving the Community

- 166.** Labor believes that effective, high quality welfare services are best guaranteed by an equal partnership between government and the community sector. A Labor Government will:
- work with the community sector to maintain a highly skilled workforce;
 - develop a compact with the community sector to guide the development and delivery of welfare services;
 - ensure that government is held accountable for meeting the goals that are set and the commitments that are made. Partnership with the welfare and community sectors is crucial to successfully delivering effective, high quality welfare services—but it must be genuine partnership—government must not be allowed to abdicate its responsibilities or shift the burden to the community or other sectors; and
 - develop flexible and integrated models of service delivery which are 'place-based'—that is, responsive to the particular needs and circumstances of different communities, including small and rural communities. Labor recognises that a one-size fits all solution will not work.

Valuing Older Australians Principles

- 167.** Labor recognises the vital contribution of older Australians to our community and will encourage and support them to live full, active and independent lives.

- 168.** Labor believes that a secure, adequate income and access to good quality, appropriate health and aged care services when they are needed are essential to older Australians' peace of mind.
- 169.** Labor rejects any suggestion that older Australians are a burden on our society.
- 170.** Labor will continue to encourage and support older Australians to play an active role in the community and to contribute to the development and implementation of the policies that support them to live full, active and independent lives.
- 171.** Labor's policies will recognise, value and support older Australians in their many roles including as:
- experienced and committed workers;
 - active volunteers in many organisations;
 - carers of children and other family members;
 - investors;
 - teachers and students;
 - advisers, guides and mentors to the next generations; and
 - builders of our sense of community.
- 172.** Labor will support comprehensive age discrimination legislation and will ensure government policies do not discriminate against older Australians.
- 173.** Labor recognises the vulnerability of frail, older Australians, especially those with dementia and those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, and will ensure their rights are respected and protected.
- 174.** Labor recognises that systems that encourage healthy ageing will also encourage independence and a greater quality of life. Many more older Australians are now suffering from a range of mental health issues, particularly depression. Labor recognises that programs that encourage older people to pursue an active lifestyle, engage in exercise and mentally stimulating recreational programs will lead to a decrease in medical needs and an increased quality of life.
- 175.** Labor's policies recognise elderly people are vulnerable to abuse including neglect, financial exploitation, psychological manipulation and physical and sexual abuse. Labor will strengthen community understanding of the need to protect our elderly, empower them to withstand abuse and in conjunction with the States and Territories, establish programs to receive and act on allegations of abuse.
- 176.** Labor supports programs which provide lifelong learning opportunities for older Australians. Labor will encourage older Australians who wish to expand their learning horizons to take up educational opportunities.
- 177.** Labor will ensure programs are in place to enable the formal recognition of acquired skills of older working Australians.
- 178.** Labor supports health promotion initiatives which improve the quality of life for older Australians, such as those that encourage older Australians to remain physically active and prevent injury.
- 179.** Labor recognises the need for all services and programs for older Australians to be person-focused and designed to meet their specific and individual needs. Labor will promote equity and access to all programs and services for older Australians.

- 180.** Labor recognises services that enable older people to stay in their homes often depend heavily on a collaborative approach through the three spheres of government, the non-government sector, private enterprise, informal care systems and volunteers. Labor will work with the States and Territories towards coordinating a more collaborative approach to planning and service delivery, to ensure that there is a more integrated approach to funding and equity in the provision of programs and services.
- 181.** Labor will always honour Australia's debt to veterans through programs of compensation, commemoration, income support, health care, aged care and housing assistance.

Opportunity for Older Australians

- 182.** Labor supports programs which ensure that older Australians who wish to remain in the workforce are not discriminated against.
- 183.** Labor will encourage industry to provide continued educational opportunities and adapt work organisation to enable older Australians to continue in the workforce.
- 184.** Labor is committed to increasing employment opportunities for older Australians and addressing negative stereotypes and debunking myths about older workers' suitability and ability to work.
- 185.** Labor will actively promote employment of older workers in the public service.
- 186.** Labor will ensure that the needs of older Australians in the workforce are taken into consideration when developing occupational health and safety policy. This will ensure that older Australians in the workforce are safe and their specific needs are addressed.

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A Secure Income for Older Australians

- 187.** The growing number and proportion of older Australians requires a comprehensive retirement incomes policy which ensures a guaranteed decent minimum retirement income for all Australians.
- 188.** When in government, Labor working with the trade union movement, employers and superannuation providers, established a comprehensive retirement incomes system, based on:
- government guaranteed age pensions with appropriate means testing;
 - compulsory superannuation coverage for all employees; and
 - incentives to encourage voluntary superannuation contributions.
- 189.** Labor will continue to strengthen these three pillars to provide a retirement income system which:
- is universal;
 - guarantees all Australians a decent minimum retirement income;
 - better protects retirement investments;
 - is simple and cost effective to administer; and
 - is fair and equitable in its operation and outcomes.
- 190.** Australia currently has a retirement income system based on three pillars; the basic government pension, compulsory and voluntary superannuation. Labor will continue to promote and develop this system to provide all Australians with a higher retirement income. To achieve this Labor will set clear goals for levels of retirement income, in particular levels of compulsory superannuation.

- 191.** Labor supports a universal retirement incomes system which:
- ensures that no Australian is left without an adequate retirement income; and
 - involves greater integration and coordination of the pensions and superannuation systems, to reduce complexity and enhance stability.
- 192.** Labor supports a guaranteed minimum retirement income:
- based on an income support payment which is at least 25 per cent of male total average weekly earnings, and indexed twice a year in line with increases in the Consumer Price Index; and
 - supplemented by superannuation contributions.
- 193.** Labor supports a retirement incomes system with better security and protection which:
- provides protection and compensation in the event of theft or fraud for both preretirement and post-retirement income products;
 - ensures fees and charges are monitored and capped where appropriate;
 - maximises returns through a competitive environment balanced by the safe, stable, and long-term approach to be delivered by superannuation investment providers; and
 - provides an appropriate balance of regulatory oversight and activity to provide essential protection to fund members through a representative, balanced trustee structure and independent dispute process. Australian Labor Party 44th National Conference
- 194.** Labor supports a simpler retirement incomes system which:
- is streamlined to improve efficiency and minimise all costs;
 - allows superannuation funds to include death and disability insurance;
 - provides some access to lump sum benefits; and
 - allows people to make informed choices about their retirement investment strategies through ongoing education campaigns for the community and superannuation providers.
- 195.** Labor supports a fair, simple, safe and equitable retirement income system which:
- provides taxation treatment of retirement income investments that is fair, equitable and administratively efficient;
 - prevents gender discrimination;
 - provides equitable treatment to same-sex couples including for superannuation;
 - ensures equity and fairness in the division of benefits in the event of the ending of a relationship; and
 - is regularly reviewed to ensure that older Australians share in the growth and prosperity of the country.
- 196.** Labor recognises that women's work patterns mean that many retire with small superannuation investments. Labor supports a retirement incomes system for women which:
- ensures that the work choices women make over the course of their lives do not jeopardise the adequacy of their retirement income;
 - promotes the benefits of superannuation for women through a targeted education campaign which assists women to make informed decisions about their retirement income choices; and
 - encourages and fosters the involvement of women in all aspects of the superannuation industry.

- 197.** Labor will ensure that workers, especially women, employed for a small number of hours per week in part-time or casual jobs, shall continue to receive compulsory superannuation coverage with full vesting from day one, in order to maximise their retirement income.

Caring For Older Australians

- 198.** Labor believes quality aged care is a basic entitlement for all Australians.
- 199.** Labor will continue to plan and fund aged care services, in both community and residential aged care facilities, to ensure the supply of aged care services meets older Australians demand for care.
- 200.** Labor believes that Australians' access to aged care services should be on the basis of their need for care and not on their ability to pay or where they live.
- 201.** Labor will maintain an appropriate balance between community based and residential aged care services, to ensure that older Australians can access the form of care they choose and the form of care they need.
- 202.** Labor will ensure that the planning ratio for the allocation of aged care services reflects the needs of the population and reflects regional requirements.
- 203.** Labor is committed to ensuring an appropriate balance between for-profit and not-for-profit aged care services, allowing older Australians access to the type of care they desire.
- 204.** Labor recognises that older Australians prefer to stay within their own neighbourhoods or communities.
- 132**
- Labor supports the vital services which allow older Australians to remain at home, such as personal care, housekeeping, home maintenance, community transport, meals services, allied health care and programs to prevent social isolation.
 - Labor supports quality assurance processes within the community care sector to ensure that high quality service standards are adopted and maintained.
 - Labor will promote new models of delivering community based services to meet the emerging needs of older Australians.
 - Labor will ensure that any new model of delivering community-based services continues to support not-for-profit providers with a viable business model for delivering community based services.
 - Labor will ensure that community-based care remains affordable and accessible for all older Australians.
- 205.** Labor believes that older Australians who need residential care should be provided with the highest quality care. To ensure high quality services are adopted and maintained, Labor supports the strengthening of the accreditation and monitoring process.
- 206.** Labor supports initiatives which ensure that the aged care workforce has an appropriate mix of professionals including nurses, personal carers, geriatricians, psychogeriatricians and other allied health professionals.
- 207.** Labor recognises the difficult work conditions and pressures faced by the aged care workforce. Labor in Government will introduce minimum staffing levels in residential aged care facilities.
- 208.** Labor recognises there is a critical workforce shortage in the residential and community aged care sector. Labor also recognises that there is a major wage disparity between both nurses and direct care staff working in the residential and community aged care sector, when

compared with the acute care sector. Labor will develop strategies to improve the recruitment and retention of nurses and direct care staff in aged care with a focus on:

- addressing the wage disparity;
- support personal care attendants to receive wages commensurate with their skills and responsibility;
- improving working conditions;
- reducing the paperwork burden;
- addressing career path development;
- ensuring that carers are appropriately trained and/or qualified;
- improving opportunities for further education and training including recognition of prior learning for workers without formal qualification;
- introducing whistleblower legislation to protect staff who raise concerns about care standards;
- ensuring a safe workplace whether it be in a care recipient's home or in a residential aged care facility; and
- promoting aged care as a positive career choice.

209. Labor also recognises that support and administration staff in aged care are essential to the operation of a residential aged care facility and should be acknowledged for their efforts.

210. Labor will support the establishment of career structures and pay scales for aged care workers that will attract and retain quality aged care staff.

211. Labor recognises that many people with disabilities are ageing and require a mix of disability and local aged care services that support their needs. Labor in government will work with the States and Territories to ensure that service systems deliver the mix of services to meet individual needs and ensure that staff receive appropriate training to manage the existing disability as well as the conditions that may develop due to age.

212. Labor will ensure that older Australians in regional, rural and remote areas have comprehensive access to aged care services appropriate to their needs.

213. Labor understands the need to provide culturally appropriate aged care services for older Indigenous Australians and older people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds and will promote the delivery of such services.

214. Labor recognises that the process of accessing care services for older Australians is complex. Labor will simplify and streamline both the process of accessing aged care services and care recipient contributions to that care. The funding structures of residential aged care must be equitable and fair and provide sustainability of the sector.

215. Labor supports an effective complaints resolution process to ensure that residents of aged care facilities and their families are able to resolve their concerns satisfactorily. Further, Labor recognises that some complaints require independent investigation and will provide the necessary legislative framework.

216. Labor will support the people who care for older Australians and will implement new strategies to support carers in their vital work.

217. Labor believes that research into ageing, in particular dementia, and aged care service delivery is essential to ensure that current and future needs of older Australians are met.

- 218.** Labor will improve links between acute and primary health care, aged care and other services so that older Australians have continuity of care and can access the care they need without having to deal with multiple programs and multiple levels of government.

Resolutions

Community Services

Conference recognises that:

- The provision of adequate appropriate social and community services is critical to Australia's social cohesion and the development of a fair and equitable society;
- Our aspirations for a just and inclusive nation must include the delivery of social and community services designed to address disadvantage and promote the inclusion of all;
- Central to a vision for a just and inclusive nation is the development of a highly skilled community services workforce; and
- As a nation we need an urgent and strategic response to the emerging workforce issues in the community services sector -- one of the fastest growing sectors in our economy.

Conference notes that challenges for the community services sector workforce are various:

- Community services are a significant item of government spending yet strategies to address workforce and skills shortages are relatively new or non-existent in most states and territories and nationally.
- There has been an increase in community services employment, yet most workers report a lack of training and career development opportunities.
- Community service workers are particularly needed in rural, regional and remote areas but organisations have increased difficulty recruiting and retaining staff in these areas.
- Volunteers add to the output of community services but also present increased challenges for management and financial planning in organisations reliant on volunteer contributions.
- *WorkChoices* and its labour market deregulation is not conducive to the provision of, reasonable wage rates, attracting and retaining staff, ongoing staff development, and longer term training and workforce planning.
- Overall community sector wages are lower than industry and government averages, and conditions may not include benefits such as portable long service leave, paid parental leave, superannuation and career development.
- The community services sector has shortfalls in the capacity to provide culturally appropriate services to Indigenous Australians, and needs to increase Indigenous employment within the sector.
- The rewards of community service work—interaction with clients—is also an occupational health and safety risk, and training challenge.
- Community service workers need extra support to work with people who have increasingly complex problems and behaviours; their work is largely with Australians who have been left behind by economic change and face social exclusion.

Conference notes that these community sector workforce issues must be addressed through a collaborative and strategic approach involving unions, sectoral peak bodies, employers and federal, state and local governments. Federal Labor is committed to supporting the community sector to continue to provide high quality services to the most vulnerable Australians.