



## Senator the Hon Anne Ruston

Minister for Families and Social Services  
Senator for South Australia  
Manager of Government Business in the Senate

Ref: MC20-014423

Mayor David O'Loughlin  
Mayor of Prospect  
President of the Australian Local Government Association  
8 Geils Court  
DEAKIN ACT 2600

Dear Mayor O'Loughlin

Thank you for your letters dated 21 August 2020 to myself and the Minister for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and Minister for Government Services, the Hon Stuart Robert MP, regarding motions presented for your 2020 National General Assembly.

Motions 30 and 143 relate to income support. The Government is acting decisively in the national interest to support households and businesses and address the significant economic consequences of COVID-19.

The Australian social security system is a taxpayer-funded, non-contributory system based on the concepts of residence and need. In making spending decisions, the Government has to balance the need to support vulnerable Australians with the need to ensure that the sustainability of the social security system is maintained over the long term.

Working age payments are designed to provide a safety net for people who require financial assistance, while maintaining incentives for people to join the workforce. The Government has extended the temporary Coronavirus Supplement from 25 September 2020 to 31 December 2020. The initial rate of the Coronavirus Supplement was set at \$550 per fortnight until 24 September 2020. From 25 September 2020 to 31 December 2020, the supplement has been adjusted to \$250 per fortnight to reflect the gradually improving economic and labour market conditions.

The Government has changed the JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (other) income tests to improve incentives for individuals to re-enter the workforce or take on additional work as the economy recovers.

From 25 September 2020, the personal income test for JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance (other) temporarily changed to a \$300 per fortnight income free area and a 60 cent taper for income above the free area. This is an increase to the previous income free areas for JobSeeker Payment and Youth Allowance, which has allowed recipients of these payments to earn more before their rate of payment is affected.

The Government is closely monitoring the health, economic and social impacts of COVID-19 and will continue to take a measured approach as the situation evolves.

Motion 50 calls on Australian governments to recognise and treat gambling harm as a public health issue; acknowledge the link between gambling harm, mental ill-health and other comorbidities; include it in public and health frameworks and strategies; and address gambling harm through effective harm minimisation and prevention policies, led by public health professionals.

The Government takes gambling harm to Australians seriously and recognises the impact gambling can have on consumers, their families and communities. That is why on 30 November 2018, the Government announced the joint Commonwealth, state and territory National Consumer Protection Framework for online wagering (National Framework) in Australia.

The National Framework provides – for the first time – strong, nationally consistent protections for consumers of Australian interactive wagering services. It consists of ten measures, which aim to reduce the harm that can be caused by online wagering to consumers. The measures provide people with easy-to-use tools and information to better control their gambling from a voluntary opt-out pre commitment scheme through to a national self-exclusion register.

The first six measures have already been implemented by states and territory governments. The final four measures include activity statements, consistent gambling messaging, staff training, and the National Self-Exclusion Register.

To reduce gambling harm, the Government also provides funding for financial counsellors to help people, their families and friends affected by problem gambling. The Government has committed nearly \$14 million over two and half years to 30 June 2021 specifically for problem gambling financial counselling. As part of the 2020-21 Budget, the Government has made the problem gambling financial counselling an ongoing program from 1 July 2021.

This is in addition to more than \$76 million to 30 June 2023 for general financial counselling services and support, including the National Debt Helpline.

The National Debt Helpline provides a single contact point for people to access financial counselling, either immediately on the phone or via referral to face-to-face services. Services are voluntary, free and confidential for gamblers and their families. The National Debt Helpline can be contacted on 1800 007 007 or at [www.ndh.org.au/](http://www.ndh.org.au/).

The Government also encourages state and territory governments, who have the primary responsibility for gambling regulation in Australia, to have strong harm minimisation measures in place. State and territory governments are responsible for the regulation of legal forms of gambling, including poker machines, in Australia.

Motion 73 calls on the Government to investigate opportunities for place-based social investment and service integration reforms that reflect the collective impact model, in an effort to tackle complex social issues in Australia.

The Government's Stronger Places, Stronger People initiative is a place-based collective impact initiative being implemented in partnership with state and territory governments and 10 communities across Australia. Local government has a very important role to play in the initiative.

Stronger Places, Stronger People recognises that no single policy, government department, organisation or program can solve the complex and interconnected problems facing most people living in communities where poverty and disadvantage is concentrated, and that solutions that offer most promise will be achieved through an integrated policy and investment approach, executed through locally tailored, evidence driven solutions to local problems in partnership with local people.

The Government is investing \$35 million over five years in Stronger Places, Stronger People, and there will also be co-investment from state and territory governments, and in some cases philanthropic organisations.

Seven Stronger Places, Stronger People communities have been announced. These include Logan, Rockhampton and Gladstone in Queensland, Bourke in New South Wales, Burnie in Tasmania, the Far West Region of South Australia (including Ceduna) and Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory.

The Government values the Australian Local Government Association's commitment to tackling complex social issues in Australia through place-based collective impact, and recognises the strength of this approach in enabling community driven resilience and response during the coronavirus crisis.

Motion 113 calls on the Federal and State Governments to increase funding for appropriate and accessible mental health services particularly within growth and interface areas.

Supporting mental health is among the Government's highest priorities. In addition to the Health portfolio's \$5.7 billion estimated expenditure on mental health in 2020-21, the Social Services portfolio also delivers a range of funding, programs and services that positively affect health and wellbeing, particularly for vulnerable Australians.

In the October 2020-21 Budget, the Government is providing \$45.7 million over four years from 2020-21 to expand the Individual Placement and Support program under the Youth Employment Strategy to assist vulnerable young people with mental illness to participate in the workforce.

As at 30 June 2020, there were 37,795 people with a primary psychosocial disability being supported under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) with committed supports averaging \$74,000 per participant. Commonwealth, state and territory governments and the National Disability Insurance Agency are working collaboratively to improve access to, and coordination of, supports for people with psychosocial disability in the NDIS and mainstream supports outside the NDIS.

Family Mental Health Support Services (FMHSS) is a child-focused family inclusive program providing early intervention and non-clinical supports for children and young people who are affected by, or at risk of, mental illness.

101 services across Australia are providing counselling, family interventions, peer support, home based support, education and skills development and community capacity building. In 2020-21, the Department of Social Services is providing \$42.850 million to 53 FMHSS providers across Australia. Providers are currently funded to 30 June 2021. Future arrangements for this program are connected to the broader directions for the Families and Children Activity.

The Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources (DISER) has provided the following information in relation to Motion 127 as these issues fall outside of my portfolio responsibility.

The Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010 (Premises Standards) is a legislative instrument made under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA). The Premises Standards aim to provide ‘people with disability’ with dignified and equitable access to buildings, and provide certainty to industry that they are complying with the DDA.

Schedule 1 of the Premises Standards, known as the Access Code, sets the performance requirements and technical specification for which a building certifier, building manager or building developer is required to comply to avoid access related discrimination.

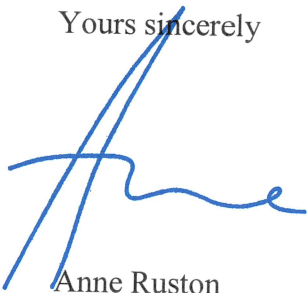
The Access Code is replicated in the National Construction Code and is enforced through state and territory building laws and regulations, which have constitutional authority for building regulations.

Enforcement of the Premises Standards is through the existing DDA complaints mechanism. The Australian Human Rights Commission has the power to investigate and conciliate complaints of unlawful discrimination on the grounds of disability.

DISER and the Attorney-General’s Department have policy responsibility for the Premises Standards.

In line with its legislative requirements, DISER has commenced its second five-year review of the Premises Standards. The review is a mechanism through which to consider changes to accessibility requirements for public buildings, including ground floor shopfronts, the provision of continuous accessible path of travel between pedestrian entrance and a new part of a building and where lessee concessions may apply

Yours sincerely



Anne Ruston

11 / 11 / 2020