

ABOVE THE LINE

Perceptions of Poverty in WA

Summary findings from
research report

August 2020



About

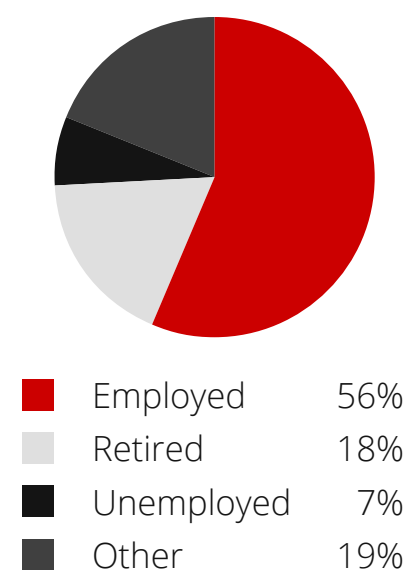
This report outlines the key findings from recent independent research into the perceptions of poverty and JobSeeker in Western Australia.

The research was commissioned by a coalition of community service providers – Anglicare WA, Communicare, Foodbank WA, Ruah Community Services and Uniting WA – together with WACOSS.

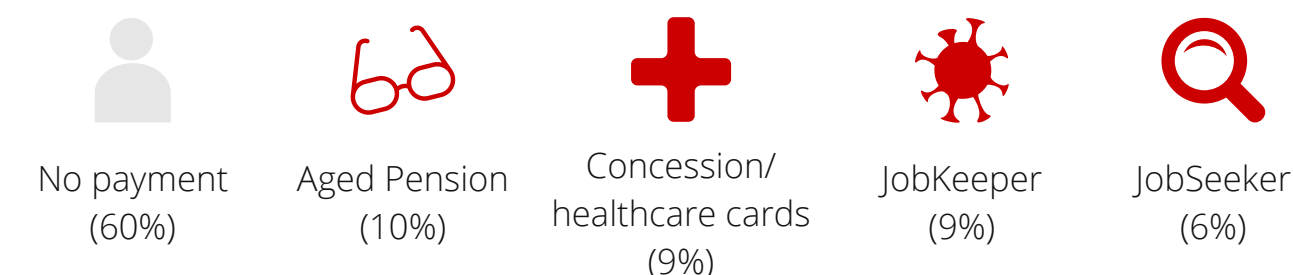
This summary report has been prepared by the commissioning agencies.

Respondent profile

Employment status



Government payment breakdown



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The survey

The survey was conducted by Painted Dog Research from 17-29 June 2020. The online survey was completed by 1,043 adults (18+) who live in Western Australia.

Quotas were applied on age, gender and location to ensure the sample was statistically representative of the WA population.

Why we need this research

The WA community has varying degrees of informed knowledge about poverty and social security payments such as JobSeeker, yet we also have a broad range of opinions.

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

Executive summary

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

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

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

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

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

This means that people regularly go without food, or eat just one meal a day so that their children can eat.

People in poverty often have insecure or unsafe accommodation, or they live from week to week juggling bills which keep stacking up.

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"There are so many Australians that have experienced inter-generational poverty (and other kinds) due to no fault of their own."

Female, age 24
Great-Southern

Findings



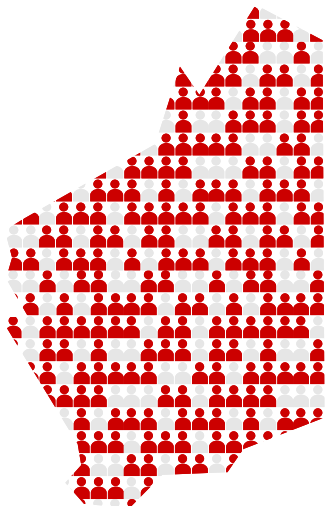
What is poverty?

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

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

Is poverty acceptable?

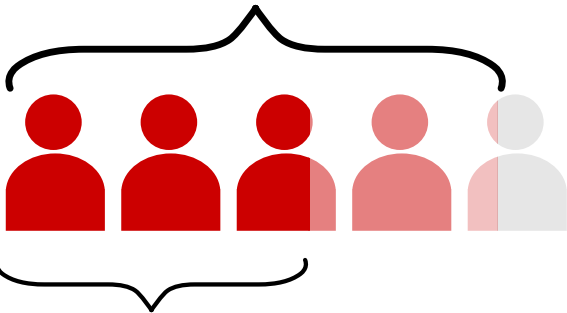
Nearly all Western Australians agree that poverty in Australia is **unacceptable in any form**



64%

agree government should provide a **guaranteed minimum income** for all Australians

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



Almost 3 in 5 **strongly agree** this should be the case

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

Male, aged 70
Perth Metro

Findings



Paying for necessities

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

1 in 4

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

This is most likely for:

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

56%

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

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



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



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

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

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

Findings

JobSeeker

The following information was provided to respondents:

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

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

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Findings

It's clear:

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

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73%

of Western Australians believe the rate should be higher than \$282 per week



believe it should be much higher

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



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

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

Male, aged 77
Perth Metro

When asked to estimate the essential budget of a single adult living in poverty, the median amount provided by respondents was

\$398 per week

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

MEDIAN JOBSEEKER ESTIMATE
\$398 per week

The OECD define the poverty line in Australia as

\$457 per week

for a single adult

3 in 5

Western Australians say that the base rate of JobSeeker is lower than they expected.

34% say it is much lower than expected

MEDIAN PERSONAL BUDGET ESTIMATE
\$500 per week

2 in 5

Western Australians correctly estimated the Coronavirus Supplement payment for a single adult

The median figure of \$528 is relatively close to the actual figure of \$558

By contrast, when estimating the base rate of JobSeeker only

27%

of respondents were in the ballpark, estimating \$201-300 per week

JOBSEEKER CORONAVIRUS SUPPLEMENT PAYMENT
\$558 per week

Overall, only

1 in 10

people believe the base payment of JobSeeker is adequate for basic living

ACTUAL JOBSEEKER BASE RATE
\$282 per week

**"\$282 a week is encouraging poverty.
The rent or mortgage payments will take up
the majority of this amount.
These people will end up homeless or hungry."**

Female, aged 28
South West

Research carried out by
Painted Dog Research

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For more information

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