



## **Disability Support Pensions – debunking the myths**

Concerns remain as to whether the Federal Government, with its newfound control of the Senate, plans to reintroduce previously defeated changes to disability support pension (DSP) legislation, which would make it more difficult for people to access the DSP. The Government has not finalised its policy on DSP or other aspects of welfare reform, for this term of Government.

Under the proposed Bill of 2002, people with a disability assessed as able to work for award wages for 15 hours a week would not be eligible for a DSP. The current benchmark is 30 hours.

While MHCC agrees that there is the need to bring more people with disabilities of workforce age into employment, reducing access to the DSP is not the answer. Compared with other wealthy countries, we have a poor record in this area. Only 9% of disability pensioners have income from employment compared with an average of about 30% for other wealthy countries. Constructive debate over reform of disability payments has been further hindered by media reports giving the impression that it is easy to get the DSP and that many people on a DSP don't have a real disability but just have 'bad backs'.

To counter misinformation in public debate, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) has released new research about the DSP. "Many arguments used to justify a crackdown on disability pensions are false or misleading. It's not true that 'it's easy to get the DSP' or that 'governments put people on DSP to hide unemployment,'" said ACOSS President Andrew McCallum. "This research outlines the facts of who is on the DSP and why."

Findings revealed in Ten Myths & Facts about the Disability Support Pension (downloadable from [www.acoss.org.au](http://www.acoss.org.au)) include:

- Most Australians do not support a tough approach to people on DSP.
- It's not easy to get the DSP. Recipients must have a serious medical condition independently assessed by doctors and vocational experts.
- Disabilities of people on DSP are more diverse and serious than 'sore backs'. 33% of people on DSP have musculo-skeletal disabilities (loss of mobility & limbs), 25% have psychological & psychiatric conditions, 11% have intellectual & learning disabilities, 5% circulatory system problems and 21% other conditions.

The doubling of the number of DSP recipients over the past 15 years is due to:

- Increased recognition of disabilities in society and improved identification of disabilities such as mental illness and lower mortality rates after accidents.
- The closure of payments and pensions to older women.
- The decline in of number of low-skilled full time jobs and lack of employer support for people with disabilities.