

(The Gender Centre advise that this article may not be current and as such certain content, including but not limited to persons, contact details and dates may not apply. Where legal authority or medical related matters are cited, responsibility lies with the reader to obtain the most current relevant legal authority and/or medical publication.)

# Labor's Social Inclusion Agenda

## A Speech Prior to the 2007 Federal Election

by [Julia Gillard M.P.](#)

Article appeared in Polare magazine: January 2008 Last Update: October 2013 Last Reviewed: September 2015

**O**n 24th November 2007, Australia went to the polls and the Government changed hands from the Coalition, with its regressive policies of repression and removal of human rights, to Labor, who have declared a policy of social inclusion, as enunciated by the Labor Deputy Leader, Julia Gillard in a paper she gave to the [A.C.O.S.S. National Annual Conference](#) two days before the election, when she was Shadow Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations, as well as for Social Inclusion. In her final paragraph Ms Gillard says she intends to do something about "enduring disadvantage". We look forward to fulfilment of this promise.

In her speech Ms Gillard said;

"Firstly, thank you to [A.C.O.S.S.](#) for organising this summit on one of the most important issues in this election campaign - creating a fairer Australia. I am attending today to bring a message from Kevin Rudd about Labor's determination to create a fairer Australia.

As the [A.N.Z. Bank's](#) Saul Eslake and the [Business Council of Australia's](#) Michael Chaney have recently told us: reducing disadvantage is now both a moral and economic imperative for Australia.

Labor strongly agrees. Unlike the Howard Government, we believe that fairness and prosperity are utterly inseparable. And that turning our backs on the disadvantaged will come at a serious cost to our economic future. Too many individuals and communities remain caught in a spiral of low school attainment, high unemployment and under-employment, poor health, high imprisonment rates and child abuse. Too many Australians are socially excluded.

But if we are going to solve the problem of social exclusion we have to develop a new agenda that can bring social and economic policy together to complement each other. That's what Labor intends to do. In my view, such an agenda must have two guiding principles:

- it must tackle the social exclusion of individuals and communities; and
- it must invest in the human capital of all our people, especially the most disadvantaged.

The welfare sector has put these issues on the board. And I want to congratulate you for that great work. But the job's far from done. Should we win Saturday's election, I want you to join the new Labor Government in becoming part of a long-term solution to the problem of social disadvantage.

But with a sense of realism, we can make huge inroads into disadvantage. New advisory and policy coordination bodies will be needed to guide it. If elected a Rudd Labor Government will be the first government to ever have a Minister for Social Inclusion. And today I will be launching Labor's social inclusion policy with the Premier Mike Rann.

To get things moving, Labor in government will establish a Social Inclusion Board that will lead consultation in the community, listening to leading welfare advocates, economists and policy specialists.

Its task will be to advise the Government on what, how and where our major social investment efforts must begin, feeding into the operations of a new Social Inclusion Unit to be established in the Prime Minister's Department.

Let me be clear: our social inclusion initiatives will not be about welfare - they will be an investment strategy to join social policy to economic policy to the benefit of both. For this reason, our Social Inclusion Unit and Board will be made up of serious economic and social thinkers, not just welfare representatives. This won't be a memorial to good intentions - it will be about action and hard-headed economics.

We have to change the way Governments at all levels deliver services to tackle disadvantage. It's going to be about bottom-up not top-down measures to tackle disadvantage - so we will be asking local governments, non-government organisations and businesses to participate in new place-based governance arrangements that bring together Commonwealth, State and local funds in the most effective way to lift up disadvantaged communities.

Labor recognises that education is critical to social inclusion. The fact is that school completion rates among low socioeconomic groups in Australia are far too low. If we're going to compete with other nations we simply have to get more young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to complete twelve years of

schooling and go on to further education and training.

Our goal of getting retention rates back up to 90 percent by 2020 will require big improvements among the most disadvantaged groups. We're going to do it by investing \$2.5 billion to boost trades training in schools.

And we're going to do it by ensuring every child has access to a computer when they're at school - and, when they get home, the computers, broadband, books and other educational resources they need to study, through our education tax rebate for families. In a world of scarce education resources it makes sense to invest funds where they will make the most impact - and this means years 0 to 6.

One of the most significant commitments of our social inclusion agenda is universal preschool education for four year olds. And we're also teaming up with the Brotherhood of St. Laurence to establish fifty community based programs to help parents develop their children's early learning capacities.

Tackling disadvantage also means doing more to help job seekers - particularly those facing the highest barriers to employment. That's why we intend to improve the operation of the Job Network and the Disability Employment Network:

- by focusing more on early intervention;
- by ensuring struggling job seekers get the most intensive assistance; and
- by putting the emphasis on preparing people for sustainable jobs, not simply churning them through a system.

We're going to commit an extra \$20 million to the JET Child Care programs to allow some 10,000 parents who are studying to receive the benefit for two years. And our Social Inclusion Board will be asked to develop a national employment strategy for those with a disability and mental illness.

Of course before we do anything else, we must ensure people have a roof over their heads. 100,000 Australians find themselves homeless on any night. Of these, nearly half are under twenty-four years of age and 10,000 are children aged twelve or younger.

While the services that are funded to assist the homeless do their best - and manage to accommodate more than 12,000 at anyone time in around 7,500 shelters, units and houses - this is not enough to meet demand.

To tackle this, Labor will invest \$150 million over five years to build 600 new houses and units for homeless people across the country. Our aim is to halve the number of people regularly turned away from shelters each night.

We've also been listening to members of the National Housing Affordability Summit and their call for a National Rental Affordability Scheme, which will provide investment incentives for 50,000 new affordable rental properties in return for owners holding rents to 20 percent or more below the market rate.

Perhaps one of the cruellest aspects of the Howard Government's neglect of the disadvantaged was their scrapping of the Commonwealth Dental Health program in 1996. Because the last thing you can afford when you're poor is a trip to a dentist. As a result of that callous decision, today some 650,000 low-income Australians are on public dental waiting lists, some waiting for years in pain.

This is totally unacceptable in a civilised society - and to tackle it Labor is going to spend \$290 million to re-establish the program and treat up to one million patients in the next three years. This is one of Australia's largest public health problems and it is time it was fixed. And it will complement our \$2.5 billion National Health Reform Plan that will work with the states to improve our public hospital system.

## Conclusion

Labor's social inclusion agenda will be as expansive as it is inclusive. Today, I'm asking for your cooperation. I know that many of you have been fighting long battles against some of the most depressing and punitive policy changes of the Howard Government years:

- the abolition of the Commonwealth Dental Health Scheme;
- the slow strangulation of the Commonwealth State Housing Agreements;
- the failures of the Job Network;
- the sheer vindictiveness of breaching rules against the homeless and the ill;
- and the neglect of education; and
- closer to home for some of you - the gagging of advocacy functions which give your communities a voice.

Like you, I'm getting sick of protesting against enduring disadvantage. I want to do something practical to reduce it. A Labor win on Saturday will give all of us here the opportunity to channel our cooperative efforts into a positive strategy that will do just that. And should we win, I look forward to working with all parts of the community sector to start putting our strategy into place.

Thank you."

under the S.A.A.P. program and supported by the N.S.W. Health Department through the AIDS and Infectious Diseases Branch. Polare provides a forum for discussion and debate on gender issues. Unsolicited contributions are welcome, the editor reserves the right to edit such contributions without notification. Any submission which appears in Polare may be published on our internet site. Opinions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the Editor, The Gender Centre Inc., the Department of Family & Community Services or the N.S.W. Department of Health.

---

The Gender Centre is committed to developing and providing services and activities, which enhance the ability of people with gender issues to make informed choices. We offer a wide range of services to people with gender issues, their partners, family members and friends in New South Wales. We are an accommodation service and also act as an education, support, training and referral resource centre to other organisations and service providers. The Gender Centre is committed to educating the public and service providers about the needs of people with gender issues. We specifically aim to provide a high quality service, which acknowledges human rights and ensures respect and confidentiality.