



The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Prime Minister
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear The Hon M Turnbull MP

Autism Aspergers Advocacy Australia, known as A4, is disappointed that the Australian Government decided to defraud vulnerable autistic people and that it chooses to discourage autistic people from working.

Your government's latest *debt fabrication* scheme

1. takes money from autistic people who made the effort to get some employment, and
2. sends a clear message to unemployed autistic people that unless they can get a permanent full-time job, they should not try to get work at all.

If autistic people get temporary or part time work, apart from the disincentive of the highest effective marginal tax rate on what they are paid, they will spend their time trying to disentangle themselves from Centrelink's new extortion scheme that fabricates debt for welfare recipients.

Apparently, you *believe* that many people with disability who depend on welfare payments deliberately provide misinformation about their employment to your Department in order to receive payments that they are not entitled to. However, this is not reality ... from what we can see, the Department has complex systems that are difficult for people to comply with and cause frequent data inconsistencies. It is unjust and derogatory for you to ignore the flaws in your systems and blame the consequent mess on welfare recipients.

With this new debt fabrication scheme in place, people who cannot transition to permanent full-time work are better off avoiding temporary or part-time work altogether. Which substantially reduces their prospects for permanent or long-term full-time employment.

People are losing confidence in government and its processes; they come to distrust a government that extorts money that it is not owed.

It seems from numerous media reports, that your government is intent on trying to justify this "initiative" that treats vulnerable people as guilty until they prove themselves innocent.

- Centrelink's automated debt recovery system working 'incredibly well': Minister Christian Porter <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/centrelinks-automated-debt-recovery-system-working-incredibly-well-minister-christian-porter-20170102-gtloqq.html>

- Federal government defends Centrelink automated debt recovery <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/01/03/federal-government-defends-centrelink-automated-debt-recovery>
- Christian Porter defends 'polite' Centrelink debt letters <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/treasury/christian-porter-defends-polite-centrelink-debt-letters/news-story/bf3a95a9960513e9b4b10e5902823128>
- Centrelink debt recovery 'working well' <http://www.skynews.com.au/news/politics/federal/2017/01/03/centrelink-debt-recovery--working-well-.html>

The notorious difficulty contacting Centrelink make complains unlikely or even impossible ... so the claim that just a few complaints made it into the system just shows that people expect making complaints to Centrelink is difficult (nigh impossible) and pointless; people have taken their issues to other politicians, the media, the ombudsman, etc. instead. The avalanche of complaints through those sources support A4's argument. A4 observes that you are unresponsive and unsympathetic to the vulnerable people who your processes caught up in this cruel fiasco. The following links are just some of the media attention:

- ACOSS criticises government's 'appalling' jail threats to welfare recipients <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/07/acoss-criticises-governments-appalling-jail-threats-to-welfare-recipients>
- Centrelink urged to stop collecting welfare debts after compliance system errors <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/14/centrelink-urged-to-stop-collecting-welfare-debts-after-compliance-system-errors>
- Centrelink officer says only a fraction of debts in welfare crackdown are genuine <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/dec/23/centrelink-officer-says-only-a-fraction-of-debts-in-welfare-crackdown-are-genuine>
- Centrelink automated debt recovery process challenged <http://www.smh.com.au/business/centrelink-automated-debt-recovery-process-challenged-20170102-gtl34p.html>
- 'Heartless to the core': autistic man chased by Centrelink debt collector <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2017/jan/04/heartless-core-autistic-man-chased-centrelink-debt-collectors>
- Centrelink debt recovery system failures have 'frightened' recipients, Andrew Wilkie says <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-04/centrelink-debt-recovery-system-designed-by-dunderhead-wilkie/8160990>
- Aussies panicking over Centrelink demands to pay up to avoid debt collector <http://www.news.com.au/finance/money/costs/aussies-panicking-over-centrelink-demands-to-pay-up-to-avoid-debt-collector/news-story/a13ba2f6090aecc7152b5ceb65166315>
- Calls to halt automated welfare debt recovery after errors <http://www.itnews.com.au/news/calls-to-halt-automated-welfare-debt-recovery-after-errors-446002>

- 'Hit with a scary \$25,000 demand': Centrelink debt scandal hits Aboriginal communities <http://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/nitv-news/article/2017/01/04/hit-scary-25000-demand-centrelink-debt-scandal-hits-aboriginal-communities>
- Centrelink debt recovery: Labor calls on audit office to investigate controversial scheme <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-06/labor-calls-for-centrelink-debt-recovery-scheme-investigation/8165712>
- Centrelink debts slashed after welfare recipients speak out in media <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-06/centrelink-debts-slashed-after-welfare-recipients-speak-out/8165794>
- This Man Got A Centrelink Debt For A Time He Wasn't Even On Centrelink <http://www.huffingtonpost.com.au/2017/01/05/this-man-got-a-centrelink-debt-for-a-time-he-wasnt-even-on-cent/>
- Calls for Centrelink debt bungle probe: claims welfare recipients are being wrongly hounded <http://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/business/work/calls-for-centrelink-debt-bungle-probe-claims-welfare-recipients-are-being-wrongly-hounded/news-story/23f7e122610ef7be4217f09ed6c882a3>
- How Centrelink unleashed a weapon of math destruction <http://www.smh.com.au/comment/how-centrelink-unleashed-a-weapon-of-math-destruction-20170105-gtmsnz.html>
- What should you do if you get a Centrelink debt letter? <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/what-should-you-do-if-you-get-a-centrelink-debt-letter-20170104-gtimgl.html>
- 'No apology' from Barnaby Joyce as government doubles down on Centrelink debt clawback <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/no-apology-from-barnaby-joyce-as-government-doubles-down-on-centrelink-debt-clawback-20170106-gtmzaw.html>
- High Farce: The Turnbull Government's Centrelink 'Robo-Debt' Debacle Continues To Grow <https://newmatilda.com/2017/01/06/the-turnbull-governments-centrelink-robo-debt-debacle-continues-to-grow/>
- Centrelink debt letter scandal worsens <http://finance.nine.com.au/2017/01/05/16/25/centrelink-debt-letter-scandal-worsens>
- Flawed Centrelink debt recovery system 'bringing some to the brink of suicide': Andrew Wilkie <http://www.northerndailyleader.com.au/story/4385699/flawed-centrelink-debt-recovery-system-bringing-some-to-the-brink-of-suicide-andrew-wilkie/>
- Welfare recipients told to pay back false Centrelink debt <http://www.themorningbulletin.com.au/news/welfare-recipients-told-pay-back-false-centrelink-/3127727/>
- Centrelink would be 'shut down for fraud' over debt letters, says Malcolm Turnbull's former digital guru <http://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/public-service/centrelink-would-be-shut-down-for-fraud-over-debt-letters-says-malcolm-turnbulls-former-digital-guru-20170108-gtnz12.html>

- 'They don't care about average Australians': Centrelink staffer speaks out about debt controversy <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/they-dont-care-about-average-australians-centrelink-staffer-speaks-out-about-debt-controversy-20170109-gto5lo.html>

A wise man said “The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members”. Shamefully, Australia is treating its most vulnerable very poorly indeed.

Pressurising vulnerable people and cutting welfare leads to deaths, as was shown in Britain over similar policies. Here are a few of the media articles ...

- <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/politics/11828097/Thousands-of-benefit-claimants-died-after-being-declared-fit-for-work.html>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/feb/10/benefits-sanctions-malcolm-burge-suicides>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/28/the-guardian-view-on-welfare-reform-death-and-the-benefit-system>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/27/death-britains-benefits-system-fit-for-work-safety-net>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2015/aug/27/thousands-died-after-fit-for-work-assessment-dwp-figures>
- <https://simonhooper.com/2015/10/12/un-investigating-uk-disability-welfare-reforms-blamed-for-thousands-of-deaths/>
- <http://calumsl.org/>

Please stop the Centrelink *debt fabrication* debacle. Stop denigrating people with disability as this makes employers unwilling to employ them.

Instead, please get the NDIS computer systems working. It's been over 6 months since some of A4's members could login and see their NDIS resource allocation and usage. There is so much work to be done on the NDIS and associated disability policy.

sincerely,



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Yours sincerely

Bob Buckley
 Convenor

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