

Stillbirth Foundation Australia 2020 Federal Pre-Budget Submission

Introduction

Stillbirth Foundation Australia is pleased to make this submission to The Treasury regarding the Australian Government's Budget for 2019-2020. It is based on the positive impact the proposed change will make to up to 2,200 Australian families each year who experience the tragedy of stillbirth.

About Stillbirth Foundation Australia

Stillbirth Foundation Australia is a non-profit organisation with a mission to reduce the incidence and impact of stillbirth through research, education and advocacy. We are an organisation that represents the voices of parents of the 1 in 137 births that end in stillbirth, and we are 100% community funded.

The Foundation funds medical research into causes and prevention of stillbirth, and social research to measure the its impact on the Australian economy, on bereaved parents and the wider community.

About Stillbirth

Stillbirth is defined as the death of a baby that occurs after 20 weeks' gestation or 400 grams of birth weight. Six babies are stillborn every day, which is twice the national road toll, and a number that has not changed in the past two decades. Stillbirth is one of the most devastating and profound events that any parent is ever likely to experience. It is 30 times more common than Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), but stillbirth receives far less public or government attention than other infant and childhood deaths. Moreover, the sorrow and sadness associated with a stillbirth has a profound rippling effect across communities that is long-lasting and is acknowledged to have significant social, emotional and economic impacts.

Background

In 2018 the Senate Select Committee on Stillbirth Research and Education, chaired by Senator Malarndirri McCarthy, heard that a lack of coordination, consistency and awareness regarding stillbirth is leading to a lack of meaningful reduction in the number of stillbirths in Australia. The committee issued a [report](#) on 4 December that same year, which included 16 recommendations including:

Recommendation 1: The committee recommends that the Australian government reviews and amends the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth) and provisions relating to stillbirth in the National Employment Standards (NES) to ensure that:

- *provisions for stillbirth and miscarriage are clear and consistent across all employers, and meet international best practice such as those contained in the Ausgrid Enterprise Agreement; and*
- *legislative entitlements to paid parental leave are unambiguous in recognising and providing support for employees who have experienced stillbirth.*

Recent Developments

On 27 November the Senate passed a [motion](#) that called on the government to adopt all 16 recommendations of the 2018 Senate Committee final report. Additionally, it called on government to:

- extend eligibility for bereavement payments to parents of stillborn children, and
- increase stillborn baby payments for second and subsequent stillbirths to be commensurate with the entitlements for a first stillbirth.

Stillbirth Foundation Australia has been in contact with the office of Senator the Hon Anne Ruston, Minister for Families and Social Services, to secure endorsement for this motion, and the recommendations of the Senate Select Committee final report. The Coalition Government supported the motion, along with support from Labor and the Australian Greens.

The table below outlines the current entitlements and the intended amendments (in red/pink):

	Birth of Child	Stillborn	Death shortly after birth
Family Tax Benefit	Up to \$186.20 per fortnight in FTB Part A. Not payable if income is above \$104,184 for families with one child under 12 years of age.		
FTB Bereavement Payment		<i>When a child dies, a family can continue to receive FTB Part A for that child for up to 14 weeks. The amount paid is the family's income tested rate of FTB Part A, up to \$186.20 per fortnight.</i> <i>Not payable if income is above \$104,184 for families with one child under 12 years of age.</i>	When a child dies, a family can continue to receive FTB Part A for that child for up to 14 weeks. The amount paid is the family's income tested rate of FTB Part A, up to \$186.20 per fortnight. Not payable if income is above \$104,184 for families with one child under 12 years of age.
Newborn Supplement and Newborn Upfront Payment	Only payable if not receiving Parental Leave Pay. Combined amount is up to \$2,239.86 for the first child (and each child in a multiple birth) and up to \$1,120.56 for subsequent children. Paid with a family's FTB Part A. Income test the same as FTB Part A		Only payable if not receiving Parental Leave Pay. Combined amount is up to \$2,239.86 for the first child (and each child in a multiple birth) and up to \$1,120.56 for subsequent children. Paid with a family's FTB Part A. Income test the same as FTB Part A
Stillborn Baby Payment		Only Payable if not receiving Parental Leave Pay. \$2,239.86 for a first stillborn child or each stillborn child in a multiple birth and \$2,239.86 \$1,120.56 for a subsequent stillborn child (from a different pregnancy). \$1,119.30 differential in the rate payable. Estimated income of the individual and partner does not exceed \$63,174 for the <u>six month</u> period beginning on the day the stillborn child is born.	

Economic Impact of Changes

The table below outlines the estimated impact of these changes to the federal budget, as well as our assumptions, as listed in source notes.

Bereavement payment extended to families of stillborn babies	
\$186.20/fortnight for 14 weeks	\$1,303.40
Eligible families/year (assumes 2,200 stillbirths/year, 85% of families eligible ¹)	1,870
Estimated liability/year	\$2,437,358

¹ Source: "Disadvantage quintile of mother's area of usual residence". Stillbirths and neonatal deaths in Australia 2015 and 2016, AIHW. pg 2.

Bereavement payment equality for subsequent stillbirths	
Payment differential	\$1,119.30
Eligible families (assumes 2,200 stillbirths/year. 20.3/1,000 recorded as subsequent stillbirths ² & all families eligible)	44
Estimated liability/year	\$49,249

More important than the relatively small cost to Australian taxpayers, extending the bereavement payment to families of stillborn babies and equalising the payment for subsequent stillbirths will go a long way to validate and acknowledge that parents of stillborn babies are still parents who go through their pregnancies expecting to take their babies home from hospital, not leave with empty arms and a giant hole in their hearts. Moreover, women still must endure not only the psychological effects of a silent birth but also post-partum physical changes that all new mothers experience, from lactation to hormonal changes, to healing from a caesarean section. To not have their babies or their roles as parents recognised compounds their existing loss unnecessarily. For a very small additional outlay, the Federal Government has the opportunity to acknowledge these parents and support them in their time of great loss.

Thank you for considering this budget submission and should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Warm regards,



Leigh Brezler
Chief Executive Officer
Stillbirth Foundation Australia

² Source: "Previous stillbirth". Stillbirths and neonatal deaths in Australia 2015 and 2016, AIHW. pg 10.