JOBS AVAILABILITY SNAPSHOT

TENTH EDITION

Anglicare Australia
in every Community

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December 2025

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Anglicare Australia's Jobs Availability Snapshot attempts to show what the job market is really like for those facing the greatest barriers to work – those who may not have qualifications or experience to draw on, those trying to re-enter the workforce after a long break, or those living in regional or remote areas. Anglicare Australia's Jobs Availability Snapshot was first published in October 2016. This is the tenth edition. Preferred citation:
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Introduction

Every year, Anglicare Australia's Jobs Availability Snapshot asks a simple question: are there enough jobs for the people who need them most?

This year's answer exposes a stark reality. In August 2025, there were 25 people with barriers to work competing for every entry-level job advertised in Australia. This is the highest ratio recorded since this Snapshot began. Even if every available vacancy were filled by someone who has been out of work for a year or more, 96 percent would still miss out.

The evidence shows that unemployment is not caused by a lack of motivation or effort. It is caused by a lack of opportunity. The people struggling most to find work are those with the fewest options: older Australians, people with disability, and those without formal qualifications or recent experience. Many live in regions where the local economy has shifted away from industries that once offered stable, accessible jobs.

For too long, employment policy has assumed that if people look hard enough, they will find work — that unemployment is a matter of personal readiness rather than structural mismatch. Yet the data in this year's Snapshot tells a different story. Entry-level jobs now make up just eleven percent of all advertised roles, and their numbers are falling faster than any other category. The job market is leaving behind those who need its opportunities most. At the same time, Australia's social security system is failing to protect people from poverty, with JobSeeker and other working age payments failing to cover the basic cost of living.

This year's Jobs Availability Snapshot exposes a widening gap between Australia's economic success and its promise of opportunity. It shows that unemployment is a structural problem, not a personal one, and that government policy must respond accordingly. To close this gap, governments must create quality, entry-level jobs that give people genuine pathways into work. They must overhaul employment services to replace punitive compliance with practical, voluntary support that helps people overcome real barriers. And critically, they must raise the rate of income support payments, so that nobody is forced to live in poverty while they search for work.

These reforms would not only help people into work. They would strengthen communities, reduce inequality, and make the economy more inclusive and resilient.

The findings of this Snapshot are a call to leadership. Australia can choose a system that punishes people for being out of work, or one that invests in their potential. The evidence is clear. When people are given real opportunities and a fair income, they seize them.

Methodology

Anglicare Australia's Jobs Availability Snapshot investigates whether the labour market is creating the right opportunities for people with barriers to work, and whether Government policies are helping people overcome those barriers. It compares data on the number of people with barriers to work with the number of suitable job advertisements in the chosen sample month.

The 2025 Snapshot analysed jobs availability over the month of August 2025. The Snapshot utilises three Federal Government datasets:

- The Australia and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations which is a typology of all potential positions in the labour market by the qualifications, skill levels, and experience required;
- The Internet Vacancy Index which examines the distribution of advertised vacancies by skill level; and
- The Department of Social Services Income Support Recipient report, which provides monthly figures on income support payment recipients and demographics, such as the length of time spent on payments.

Entry-level jobs

This Snapshot identifies entry-level jobs using the Occupation Standard Classification for Australia (OSCA). The OSCA is a skill-based classification system that categorises legal jobs available in Australia by the skill levels they require. It lists each job type according to five skill levels:

- Level 1: Bachelor degree or higher qualification, or at least five years of relevant experience
- Level 2: Associate Degree, Advanced Diploma or Diploma, or at least three years of relevant experience
- Level 3: Certificate IV, Certificate III with at least two years of training, or at least three years of relevant experience
- Level 4: Certificate II, Certificate III, or at least one year of relevant experience
- Level 5: Certificate I, compulsory secondary education, or on-the-job training.

The Snapshot focuses on Level 5 jobs. These roles require little formal education or experience, making them the most accessible to people who have been out of work for a year or more, are seeking extra hours, or lack formal qualifications.

These entry-level roles play an important role in the overall functioning of Australia's labour market. They provide opportunities for people to gain work experience and develop foundational, transferable skills that can be applied across different sectors and industries, increasing their long-term employability.

Job advertisements

The Internet Vacancy Index (IVI) collates job vacancies advertised online across Australia and rates them according to OSCA skill levels. It counts online job advertisements posted on SEEK, CareerOne and Workforce Australia online job boards during the reference month. While the IVI does not capture jobs advertised through other platforms or informally, it can also mask the number of vacancies such as when a single advertisement is placed for a bulk recruitment round.

These variations do not affect the reliability of the IVI in measuring shifts in job vacancies. It continues to be used by the Government to measure vacancies. The Snapshot uses the IVI to calculate the number of entry-level jobs nationally, and in each state and territory.

People with barriers to work

This Snapshot draws on data from the Department of Social Services (DSS) on the length of time people have received the JobSeeker payment. JobSeeker is the main income support payment for people aged 22 to the Age Pension age who are looking for work. Most people receive it because they are unemployed, but some are looking for extra or better-paid work because their current income is too low.

For this Snapshot, people are considered to have barriers to work if they have been on the JobSeeker payment for at least a year. This does not mean that everyone receiving JobSeeker has barriers to work. Instead, the one-year mark is used to identify people who have been unable to secure or keep steady employment despite meeting their mutual obligation requirements, such as job searching and training.

There are many reasons why people face barriers to work. Some are returning to the workforce after caring for family members, while others live with health conditions or disabilities. Some may have limited formal education, poor English proficiency, or be older jobseekers struggling to find suitable roles. Others live in areas where there simply aren't enough jobs. Over time, long-term unemployment can deepen these barriers. People can lose skills and professional networks, while stigma from employers makes it even harder to find work. The longer someone remains on income support, the more difficult it becomes to secure and sustain employment.

Limitations

The Snapshot focuses on Level 5 jobs. These roles require little formal education or experience, making them the most accessible to people who have been out of work for a year or more, are seeking extra hours, or lack formal qualifications.[1] This means that the actual number of people facing barriers to employment is likely higher than the data suggests, and the experience of someone with barriers to employment is likely to be even more difficult than our findings show.

Snapshot findings

Jobs advertised

In August 2025, there were 203,010 jobs advertised on the Internet Vacancy Index (IVI). Of these, 22,784 were classified as skill level 5. These are entry-level roles that require little formal education or experience. They made up just 11.2 percent of all advertised jobs.

Table 1. Number and proportion of job advertisements by OSCA skill level, August 2025

Skill level	No. of job advertisements	Proportion of jobs advertised
1	72,647	35.8%
2	23,575	11.6%
3	31,930	15.7%
4	51,146	25.2%
5	22,784	11.2%
Total	203,010	

Table 2. Number of job advertisements by OSCA skill level, 2022 and 2025

Skill level	No. of job advertisements August 2025	No. of job advertisements August 2022	Percentage change
1	72,647	102,705	-29.3%
2	23,575	31,406	-24.9%
3	31,930	42,479	-24.8%
4	51,146	80,952	-36.8%
5	22,784	38,952	-41.5%
Total	203,010	296,152	-31.5%

Job advertisements have been declining steadily since 2022, when COVID-19 restrictions began to ease following the rollout of vaccination programs. The sharpest drop has occurred for entry-level roles, with Skill Level 5 roles falling by 41.5 percent since August 2022. This is compared with a 29.3 percent decline in high-skill (level 1) jobs and a 31.5 percent decline overall. The proportion of entry-level roles has nearly halved since two decades ago (Figure 1), underscoring a profound shift in the skills employers seek.

This downward trend is likely to continue. As automation and artificial intelligence advance, tasks once performed by people are increasingly mechanised.[2] Entry-level roles are among the most vulnerable because they often involve routine or standardised tasks. For instance, employment of checkout operators and cashiers has fallen by 20.6 percent over the past five years,[3] reflecting the rise of self-service technology.

The JobSeeker caseload

In August 2025, 887,795 people were receiving JobSeeker payments. This is a 7.2 percent increase over the previous year (Table 3). The rise reflects a cooling labour market., with Australia's unemployment rate reaching 4.3 percent. This is the highest level since April 2022.[4] With unemployment staying above four percent since early 2024 and the cash rate remaining high,[5] further growth in JobSeeker numbers is likely as businesses scale back hiring.

Figure 1. Percentage of entry-level jobs advertised, 2006-2025

Of those receiving JobSeeker, 64.9 percent had been on the payment for at least a year. This is up 2.8 percentage points since 2024. This not only shows that more Australians are relying on income support, but that they are staying on it longer.

Table 3. JobSeeker Caseload, 2024 and 2025

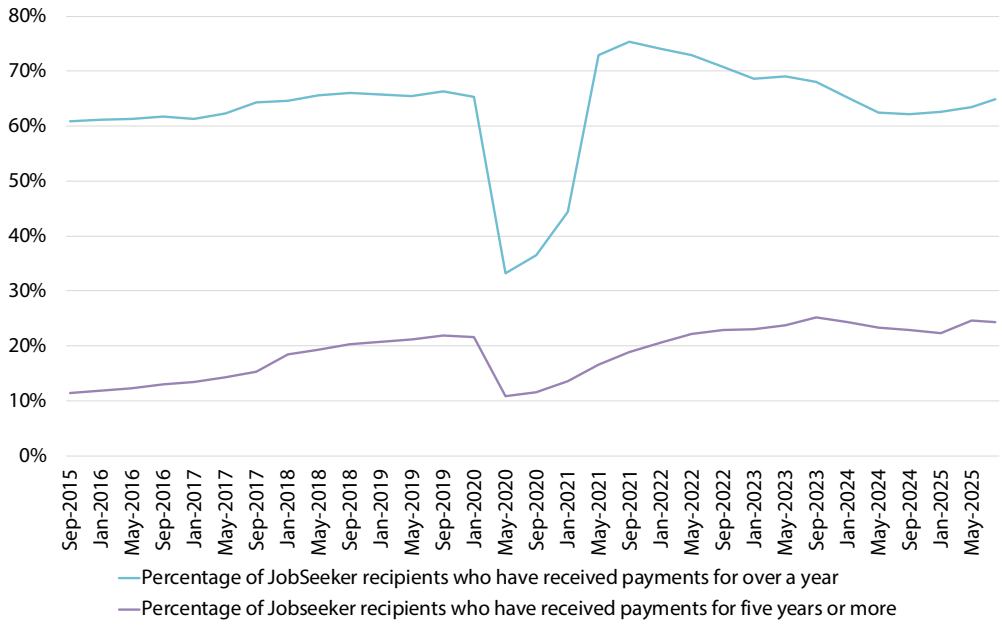
JobSeeker caseload	August 2025	August 2024	Percentage change
Number of JobSeeker recipients	887,795	828,545	+7.2%
Recipients with payment duration of a year or longer	576,570	514,160	+12.1%
Percentage of recipients with payment duration of a year or longer	64.9%	62.1%	+2.8%

The average duration on JobSeeker is now 172 weeks, or more than three years. Women remain on the payment longer (186 weeks) than men (161 weeks), likely reflecting breaks in employment due to caring responsibilities. Nearly one in four JobSeeker recipients have been on the payment for five years or more, up from one in ten a decade ago (Table 4 and Figure 2).

Table 4. Duration on JobSeeker payments, by sex

By Duration on payment	August 2025 (Female)	August 2025 (Male)	August 2025 (Total)
Total Recipients	402,430	485,365	887,795
Under 1 year	133,535	177,690	311,225
1-<2 years	78,865	101,880	180,750
2-<5 years	80,145	99,270	179,415
5-<10 years	72,000	74,585	146,580
10 years+	37,890	31,940	69,825
Average duration on payment (weeks)	186	161	172

Figure 2. Percentage of long-term Jobseeker recipients, 2015-2025



Ratio of people with barriers to work to entry-level jobs

In August 2025, there were 25 people with barriers to work for every entry-level job advertised. This is the highest ratio recorded since the Snapshot began in 2016 and highlights the scale of structural unemployment. In simple terms, only about four percent of those with barriers to work could find an entry-level job even if every vacancy were filled by someone in that group.

Table 5. Ratio of people with barriers to work to entry-level jobs, August 2025

Number of people with barriers to work	Number of entry-level (skill level 5) jobs advertised	Ratio of people with barriers to work to entry-level jobs
576,570	22,784	25:1

This ratio understates the true level of competition. People without work barriers do apply for entry-level positions. Even if we consider only those receiving JobSeeker payments, there are still 39 people for every entry-level job. The competition is even more intense in the Northern Territory and Tasmania, with 73 and 51 JobSeeker recipients respectively competing for each available entry-level position.

Table 6. Ratio of people with barriers to work to entry-level jobs, August 2025

Jurisdiction	Ratio of Jobseekers to entry-level jobs
Australian Capital Territory	23:1
New South Wales	40:1
Northern Territory	73:1
Queensland	31:1
South Australia	43:1
Tasmania	51:1
Victoria	48:1
Western Australia	36:1
Australia	39:1

Entry-level roles also attract students, young people, and people seeking second jobs. Positions such as sales assistants, checkout operators, fast-food cooks, cleaners, and café workers are common first jobs for young people.[6] A survey by the South Australian Commissioner for Children and Young People found that most young workers are concentrated in food and hospitality (31 percent), fast food (17 percent), supermarkets (14 percent), and retail (13 percent).[7]

Rising living costs are also driving more people to take on multiple jobs. In June 2025, 6.4 percent of employed Australians held more than one job, up from 5.7 percent a decade earlier.[8] Many of these additional roles are casual or part-time, which further limits opportunities for those who are unemployed.

Moreover, most entry-level positions are insecure and low-paid. Around one in four casual workers would prefer a permanent job, but only about one in fifteen succeed in securing one.[9] This means that even when people with barriers to work find employment, they often cannot earn enough to exit the welfare system.

Income among JobSeeker recipients

It is important to note JobSeeker is not limited to those without work. It also supports people earning very low wages. In August 2025, more than one in five (21.4 percent) JobSeeker recipients reported income from employment (Table 7), on top of the weekly rate of $396.80.

This shows that even where work is available, it is often insecure, underpaid, or insufficiently reliable to provide a stable livelihood. Many people with barriers to work remain reliant on JobSeeker to supplement low wages or irregular hours, reinforcing that underemployment and income insecurity are structural features of the labour market, not individual failings.

Table 7. JobSeeker recipients, by income

	No reported income	Reported income
Number of people	697,685	190,110
Percentage of JobSeeker recipients	78.6%	21.4%

JobSeeker demographics

Economic conditions alone do not explain the growing number of long-term JobSeeker recipients. Even before the pandemic, the proportion of people on payments for more than a year was rising. This is despite almost three decades of continuous economic growth. This points to structural barriers that prevent some groups from finding or keeping work.

Table 8. JobSeeker recipients, by demographics

	Number of JobSeeker recipients August 2015	Number of JobSeeker recipients August 2025
Partial capacity to work	219,280 (27.3%)	372,275 (41.9%)
Aged 65 and over	0 (0%)	55,080 (6.2%)
Female	375,990 (46.8%)	402,430 (45.3%)
First Nations	75,730 (9.4%)	117,530 (13.2%)

Older Australians

The most striking demographic change is the sharp rise in older Australians receiving JobSeeker. In 2015, none were aged 65 or over. By 2025, 55,080 people, 6.2 percent of the caseload, were receiving JobSeeker. This is due to the Age Pension age increasing from 65 to 67.[10] Many who would once have qualified for the pension are now on the lower JobSeeker rate instead.

Older workers bring valuable skills and experience,[11] but often face age discrimination, health challenges, and caring duties that make it harder to find suitable work. Many entry-level roles are physically demanding, and mature workers are at greater risk of injury.[12] National data show that people aged 55-64 take a median 33 weeks to find a job.[13] This is more than twice as long as those aged 25-44. Recognising these barriers, the Government provides a slightly higher JobSeeker rate for singles aged 55 and over after nine months on payment, reflecting that older people remain on income support around 25 percent longer than younger recipients.[14] However, it is important to note that there is anecdotal evidence that ageism in the workplace begins in the mid-forties. When combined with longer periods out of work, the impacts of ageism can be devasting for someone's chances of re-entering the workforce.

People with disability

People with disability are significantly over-represented among JobSeeker recipients. Around 41.9 percent are assessed as having a partial capacity to work. This is almost double the disability rate in the general population.[15]

This is partly the result of tightened eligibility for the Disability Support Pension (DSP) between 2012 and 2023. The requirement that conditions be "fully diagnosed, treated and stabilised" excluded people with episodic, fluctuating, or progressive conditions. Although the test was eased slightly in 2024, the criteria remain restrictive. Claimants must achieve an impairment rating of at least 20 points on one table or across multiple impairments plus participation in a support program.[16]

The effect is clear, with over 40 percent of DSP claims being rejected in 2024–25,[17] forcing many people with disability onto the lower JobSeeker rate. These recipients are also more likely to face long-term unemployment. Within Disability Employment Services, nearly half (48.6 percent) of participants have been out of work for more than three years.[18]

First Nations People

First Nations people now make up 13.2 percent of the JobSeeker cohort, up from 9.4 percent in 2015. The higher rate reflects enduring structural inequities, including racism, discrimination, intergenerational trauma, poverty, and unequal access to education and employment opportunities. These factors limit job prospects and make it harder to secure stable work.

Policy implications

Public policy has long assumed that if people are looking for work, the jobs must be there, and that with the right incentives, every person out of work can find a job. The findings of this year's Jobs Availability Snapshot show that this is not the case. For hundreds of thousands of Australians, the problem is not a lack of effort or willingness to work. It is that the jobs available simply do not match the skills of the people who need them most.

In August 2025, there were 25 people with barriers to work competing for every entry-level job advertised. That figure alone challenges the central assumptions in Australian employment policy: that unemployment is a matter of individual motivation or employability. The evidence tells a different story. The number of people seeking entry-level work has remained consistently high, while the availability of these jobs has collapsed. Entry-level positions now make up just eleven percent of advertised vacancies. This is less than half the share they held fifteen years ago.[19]

The labour market is shifting in ways that lock out people who do not have formal qualifications, recent work experience, or the right networks. Yet these are the same people who rely most on employment services and income support. The result is a growing divide between those who can navigate an increasingly complex job market and those who cannot. The Snapshot shows that 65 percent of people receiving JobSeeker have been on the payment for a year or more, and that almost a quarter have been receiving support for five years or longer. These are not short-term jobseekers cycling through temporary spells of unemployment. They are people who are being completely left behind.

Despite these trends, Australia's policy framework remains grounded in the belief that all unemployment can be solved through better training, tougher compliance, or greater personal effort. Employment services are structured around the idea that every jobseeker can compete equally for every vacancy, regardless of their background, skills, or circumstances. Yet for most, there are simply not enough suitable jobs to compete for. Those that do exist are too insecure or too poorly paid to offer a sustainable livelihood.

This mismatch between the people seeking work and the jobs that exist is not just a market failure. It is a policy failure. It reflects a long-standing neglect of what economists call the "demand side." These are the actual creation of suitable jobs. For decades, governments have focused almost exclusively on supply-side measures: helping individuals become more "job-ready", enforcing obligations, and contracting private providers to manage compliance. Meanwhile, little has been done to stimulate the creation of the kinds of jobs people can actually do.

The results are clear. The decline in entry-level employment has persisted even during periods of economic growth. The share of long-term recipients has continued to climb, regardless of the broader unemployment rate. This pattern shows that economic growth alone cannot guarantee inclusion. Even when the headline unemployment rate falls, many people remain locked out of secure work because the structure of the labour market has shifted away from them.

Automation and technological change are accelerating this shift. Roles once considered traditional entry points into the workforce, such as checkout operators, clerical assistants, or basic administrative roles, are disappearing or being replaced by technology. In their place, new jobs often require higher qualifications, digital literacy, or specialised training. Without deliberate intervention, the people most in need of work will be the least likely to benefit from the jobs of the future.

These changes have profound implications for policy. It means that long-term unemployment cannot be solved by continuing to pressure individuals to search for non-existent jobs. It means that current employment programs, built around obligations and penalties, are addressing the wrong side of the equation. The problem is not a lack of willingness to work, but a lack of suitable and sustainable work available.

The evidence also highlights how inadequate income support traps people in poverty while they look for work. More than three-quarters of JobSeeker recipients have no income from employment. Even among those who do, the low pay and insecure nature of their jobs mean they continue to rely on income support to survive. This reality undermines the notion that income support is a temporary bridge back into full-time work. Instead, it has become a long-term support for people in casual, part-time, or marginal employment. This is a symptom of the growing precarity of the labour market.

Taken together, these findings show that Australia's employment system is failing in two crucial ways. First, it is not creating enough suitable jobs for people with barriers to work. Second, it is punishing people for failing to find jobs that do not exist. To address these failures, we need a fundamental shift in how we think about unemployment.

Government policy must start with the recognition that joblessness is a structural failure, not a personal one. We need to reorient the employment system around three core principles:

» **Creating quality entry-level jobs**. This is especially valuable in sectors such as aged care, disability support, and other parts of the care economy, where demand for workers is growing and where many people with barriers to work could build meaningful careers.

» **Overhauling employment services**, replacing punitive compliance systems with voluntary, supportive programs that focus on real outcomes.

» **Ensuring income adequacy** by raising the rate of JobSeeker and related payments so that people can live with dignity while they search for work, train, or care for others.

These reforms are not simply about fairness. They are about making the economy work better for everyone. Every person who is excluded from the labour market represents untapped potential, including skills, experience, and energy that our communities and workplaces need. As Australia faces an ageing population, a care workforce shortage, and new economic transitions, we cannot afford to leave that potential untapped.

Recommendations

Create quality, entry-level jobs

Australia cannot reduce long-term unemployment without creating more jobs that people can compete for. The results of this Snapshot are clear: there are not enough entry-level opportunities for people with limited experience or qualifications. These are the roles that give people their first foothold in the labour market, providing a chance to build skills, confidence, and financial stability. Yet they are disappearing faster than any other type of job.

In August 2025, just eleven percent of advertised positions were classified as entry-level. That figure has been falling for over a decade. The number of entry-level vacancies has dropped by almost a quarter since 2022, and by nearly two thirds since the early 2000s.[20] For people who have been out of work for a year or more, the decline is devastating. Even if every available entry-level role were filled by someone in that group, 96 percent would still miss out.

This shortage is not inevitable. It is the result of policy choices. Successive governments have prioritised incentives for employers and programs designed to "activate" jobseekers, while neglecting the question of whether the right kinds of jobs exist. The private sector has not filled the gap, because there is little commercial incentive to create entry-level roles that require training, mentoring, or flexible arrangements. That means government investment is needed to build pathways into work for people who are being left behind.

Building pathways through the care economy

Aged care, disability support, early childhood education, and community services are all sectors where demand for workers is rising rapidly. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety estimated that Australia will need at least 130,000 additional full-time equivalent aged care workers by 2050, a 70 percent increase on current levels.[21] Similarly, the expansion of the National Disability Insurance Scheme and growth in home and community care are driving unprecedented demand for skilled and compassionate staff.[22]

These are not marginal or "make-work" roles. They are meaningful jobs that provide stability, purpose, and long-term career prospects. They are also jobs that can be tailored to suit people with barriers to work, including older Australians, people with disability, and parents returning to the workforce. Many Anglicare Australia members are already demonstrating how this can be done.

Programs such as Benetas' SPARK Aged Care Apprenticeships show what's possible when employers invest in values-based recruitment, supported training, and mentoring. Similarly, Anglicare Tasmania's inclusive employment model has helped people without formal qualifications gain their first experience in the care sector through flexible shifts and on-the-job learning. These approaches deliver lasting benefits for both workers and employers, helping address chronic workforce shortages while opening doors for people who have struggled to find a place in the job market.

Expanding these kinds of programs would create a double dividend, meeting workforce demand while tackling long-term unemployment. The federal government should work with care providers, unions, and training organisations to design a national framework for entry-level pathways in the care economy, including funded traineeships that combine paid work with accredited training; secure, properly paid positions in aged, disability, and community care; and localised partnerships that match jobseekers to employers based on regional need.

Such initiatives would require long-term funding and stability. Too often, short-term pilot programs disappear just as they begin to succeed. A genuine job creation strategy would move beyond temporary subsidies and build lasting, scalable models of employment.

Broadening the scope of job creation

While the care economy is central, it should not be the only focus. There are many other sectors where entry-level opportunities can be created through government leadership. Environmental restoration, sustainable housing, local manufacturing, and community infrastructure all hold untapped potential for entry-level work.

The Working on Country program is a model of what publicly funded job creation can achieve. It employs over 2,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as rangers managing Indigenous Protected Areas, combining meaningful work with environmental and cultural outcomes.[23] Similar programs could be expanded to address regional unemployment, restore degraded land, or deliver community services in areas with limited private-sector employment.

There is also scope to create entry-level roles through investment in public housing maintenance, local council projects, and social enterprise. Jobs like these strengthen communities, generate economic activity, and provide pathways for people who are currently locked out of mainstream employment. Far from being a cost to the economy, every person employed in a publicly funded role contributes through taxes, spending, and social participation.

Reframing public employment as an investment, rather than a cost, would allow government to take a more active and strategic approach to job creation. Instead of relying solely on incentives and subsidies, Australia could adopt direct employment programs that offer real work, fair wages, and pathways to independence.

Overhaul employment services

After decades of constant reform, rebranding, and outsourcing, the employment services system now functions mainly to monitor and punish those who are unemployed. For many people with barriers to work, it has become a system to be endured rather than a tool that helps them succeed.

This failure is not new. Anglicare Australia's research has shown for years that people in the deepest disadvantage spend an average of five years in employment services. This is far beyond the definition of long-term unemployment. The evidence is clear that the longer people remain in the system, the less likely they are to find a job. Despite billions of dollars in contracts, the privatised model has not reduced long-term unemployment. Instead, it has entrenched it.

A system built on the wrong assumptions

At the heart of the problem is a set of flawed assumptions. Current employment services are built on the belief that people remain out of work because they are not trying hard enough, lack motivation, or need more training. This logic underpins the regime of mandatory activities, job search targets, and compliance measures that people must complete to receive income support.

These measures do not address the structural reasons people are unemployed. The data from this year's Jobs Availability Snapshot shows that there are 25 people with barriers to work for every entry-level job available. No amount of motivation or training can overcome that imbalance. A system that treats unemployment as an individual failing will always punish people for circumstances they cannot control.

Instead of helping people find work, providers spend much of their time enforcing paperwork, scheduling appointments, and issuing penalties. People are routinely breached for missing meetings that clash with job interviews, training sessions, or medical appointments. Payment suspensions can leave people with no income for days or weeks, even when they have done nothing wrong. These practices cause hardship but achieve nothing. They neither create jobs nor prepare people for them.

A new approach: Support, not surveillance

Australia needs a fundamentally different model based on voluntary participation, trust, and tailored support. A reformed system would treat unemployment as a shared challenge rather than an individual failure. It would offer practical help, not punishment.

The core elements of this new approach should include:

» Voluntary engagement: People should be able to choose how to engage with employment services, rather than being compelled through the threat of sanctions. Evidence shows that voluntary participation leads to better outcomes and stronger motivation.

» Personalised case management: Support should be delivered by skilled, stable caseworkers who understand local labour markets and can build lasting relationships with jobseekers.

» Wraparound support: Many people with barriers to work face challenges that go beyond job searching, such as housing instability, poor health, or caring responsibilities. A new system should coordinate with housing, health, and community services to address these barriers holistically.

» Outcome-based funding: Providers should be funded for helping people into sustainable, long-term employment, not for ticking boxes. Payments should be linked to meaningful outcomes, such as maintaining employment for six months or more.

» Public and community delivery: Rather than relying on large for-profit companies, funding should prioritise community organisations, local providers, and social enterprises with proven experience supporting people facing disadvantage as well as strong links to local employers. A voluntary public option, echoing the Commonwealth Employment Service, would add value to this landscape.

Overhauling employment services is not just a bureaucratic reform, but an imperative for the wellbeing of people in the system. A reimagined system would replace fear and compliance with partnership and opportunity.

It would also make better economic sense. Every dollar spent on punitive compliance and pointless training could be redirected into job creation, education, and support services that produce lasting benefits. In the long run, that would reduce welfare dependency far more effectively than penalties ever could. The current system measures success by how many people attend appointments. A fair system would measure success by how many people build stable lives, find secure work, and contribute to their communities.

Australia's employment services should be rebuilt from the ground up as a public service, not a profit centre; as a partner to jobseekers, not an obstacle. The evidence is overwhelming that punitive approaches do not work. The time has come to replace them with something that does.

Raise the rate of income support payments

Australia's income support system does not protect people from poverty. It was built on the idea that unemployment would be temporary, and that people who lost their jobs would soon find new ones. Yet as this Snapshot has shown, many people remain on JobSeeker for years, not because they refuse to work, but because the jobs they can compete for have vanished. While they wait, the payment meant to help them survive is trapping them in deep and lasting poverty.

A payment that no longer meets basic needs

Anglicare Australia's Cost of Living Index shows that people living on income support payments are structurally unable to afford the basics of life. A single person on JobSeeker in shared accommodation falls behind by $69 every week after paying for food, transport, and rent.[24] Those who live alone fall behind by $331 per week, and couples with two children fall short by $386.[25] Even a single parent on the Parenting Payment, receiving more than JobSeeker, falls $262 short each week.[26]

These figures account only for weekly expenses. They do not include bills, health costs, clothing, or emergencies. This means that even people who cut back to the bare minimum are unable to make ends meet. The result is predictable, with people skipping meals, delaying medical appointments, and getting trapped in debt spirals. Anglicare Australia's members report rising demand for emergency relief as more people turn to them for food, rent assistance, and utilities support. This is not because of crises, but because their regular income cannot cover the basic cost of living.

For decades, the real value of income support payments has fallen. Since 1994, JobSeeker has barely increased in real terms, even as housing and living costs have soared. The basic rate of JobSeeker remains below $55 a day or $20,075 per year. This is far beneath any recognised poverty benchmark. By contrast, pensions are indexed to wages and benchmarked against community living standards. This means the gap between working-age payments and pensions widens every year, leaving people on JobSeeker further and further behind.

The cost of inadequate payments

Low income support payments do not save money in the long run. They simply shift costs elsewhere. Anglicare Australia's members are seeing the consequences every day. More people are presenting to emergency relief and food services, while homelessness and housing stress continue to rise. Charities, health services, and state governments all bear the downstream costs of poverty created by inadequate Commonwealth payments.

Poverty also has a direct economic cost. People who cannot afford transport cannot attend job interviews. Those who skip meals or go without medication struggle to stay healthy enough to work. Forcing people to live in constant crisis undermines their ability to find or keep a job. Raising income support is therefore not just a social policy, but an employment policy. It gives people the security to plan, to study, to apply for jobs, and to participate in their communities.

Raising payments above the poverty line

The simplest and most urgent step is to raise the rate of JobSeeker and related payments to at least the Henderson Poverty Line, which captures the cost of essentials and allows for a modest standard of living. This would restore fairness and dignity to people who are currently being left behind.

As Anglicare Australia's Cost of Living Index recommends, payment rates should no longer be determined by political bargaining or short-term budget priorities. A new independent commission should be established to set and adjust payments based on the actual cost of living. It should include experts, economists, and people with lived experience, ensuring that decisions are guided by evidence and fairness, not ideology.

Raising the rate of JobSeeker would not be a radical step. It would simply restore the basic promise of Australia's social security system: That no one should be left without enough to live on. Research has repeatedly shown that increasing payments would have wide-ranging benefits, improving health, strengthening child wellbeing at a crucial time in their development, and all but ending poverty.

These changes would also reduce reliance on emergency relief. As Anglicare Australia's Cost of Living Index notes, relief services are now being used to fill the gaps left by an inadequate income support system, rather than to respond to genuine emergencies. Raising payments would ease that pressure, allowing services to refocus on helping people through temporary crises rather than chronic poverty.

Raising the rate of income support is about more than keeping people out of poverty. It is about inclusion. People cannot participate in training, work, or community life if they are hungry, sick, or homeless. Adequate income support lays the groundwork for every other reform, enabling people to benefit from employment programs, to study, to care, and to contribute.

Conclusion

The findings of this year's Jobs Availability Snapshot tell a clear and urgent story. Across Australia, there are simply not enough suitable jobs for the people who need them most. More people are out of work for longer, and when work is available it is often insecure, underpaid, or out of reach. These are not temporary problems or matters of personal effort. They are the predictable result of a labour market that no longer works for everyone, and of policies that have failed to keep pace with change.

For years, governments have focused on the supply side of the equation, urging people to be more "job-ready." But readiness means little when the jobs aren't there. True full employment requires action on both sides: policies that help people prepare for work, and policies that ensure the right kinds of work exist.

The evidence from this Snapshot points to a clear path forward. We can create quality entry-level jobs in sectors that desperately need workers. We can replace punitive employment services with systems that actually support people to succeed. And we can raise the rate of income support payments so that nobody is forced into poverty while they look for work.

These changes are not only fair, they are practical. They would strengthen local economies, reduce demand for crisis services, and unlock the potential of thousands of people who are ready and willing to contribute. Above all, they would restore dignity to people who have been excluded from the benefits of growth.

Australia faces a choice. We can continue to manage unemployment through punishment and scarcity, or we can build an economy that values every person's capacity to contribute. The data make the choice plain. Now it requires leadership to create opportunity, invest in inclusion, and ensure that no one is left behind.

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