

## Max and Jean

Max and his wife Jean\* have two high school-aged daughters. Max is a senior citizen on National Super. Jean is in her forties and receives National Super as Max's partner. Because she is a non-qualifying partner, their combined benefit is income-tested. If either worked, their earnings would be largely deducted from their benefit.

Max and Jean qualify for an accommodation benefit and Max gets a disability allowance as he is almost 75% blind. They also receive family assistance of \$280 per fortnight for the girls. Their combined annual income is about \$24,000 before tax.

They are not eligible for the new In Work Payment, introduced in April this year. The payment is worth \$60 per week for families with two children on their income, but because Max and Jean don't work a combined total of 30 hours per week they must do without it.

It would be difficult for Jean to work at present as she is recovering from breast cancer surgery and is still not completely fit. The income testing on their benefit is also a disincentive. "They say they want people off the benefit and into work, but it's difficult for people in our situation," says Max. "We'd be no further ahead if Jean worked, so she prefers to be a mum at home with the girls."

Due to family circumstances, Max and Jean don't own their own home so a large chunk of their income goes on rent. They recently moved to a place on a farm 4km out of town, for which they pay \$260 a week. This has some benefits as electricity and water are included. "It's a nice spot to live," says Max, "but we're using the car a lot more as everything the girls want to do seems to be in town."

Max says there is little money available for clothing, car expenses and the girl's activities after they have paid for food and utilities. He says, "The girls know we're poor, they feel hard done by because they don't have the same things as their friends." The family never takes a holiday now.

An extra \$60 a week would make a big difference – it would help pay for petrol, which has become a big burden, and clothing for the girls.

Max says they are doing OK, "but it just doesn't seem fair that other people are getting such a big hand out when we're struggling. When I read about people on an income of up to \$50,000 getting \$100 to \$200 extra per week because one of them works and they have kids at school, I can't help wondering if there isn't something wrong somewhere! I think our kids deserve some help too."

\*not their real names