

Dear Prime Minister,

No matter who we are or where we live, we all know that relationships and connections with other people are what help us through the hard times. That strong communities are formed when we can rely on each other.

When we lose a job, become sick, or our relationship breaks down, being able to ask the people who care about us for support, in the ways that meet each of our needs, is key to getting through those hard times.

Right now, the Government is isolating people and punishing them for supporting each other during hard times, instead of encouraging people to build strong connections and support networks.

People in politics have written the Social Security Act so a person at Work and Income can decide to stop or reduce a person's income support, if they believe they have entered into a relationship "in the nature of marriage".

What this means in practice, is that people who start dating someone for up to six weeks, or have someone to stay up to three nights a week, or even people who have long-term flatmates, are having all their financial support cut.

Some people at Work and Income have been insisting that friends, acquaintances, and new romantic partners should become financially responsible for that person, and often their children. There is no clear criteria used by people at Work and Income to decide whether to cut someone's financial support.

This results in random and unjust practice which lacks common sense. For instance, to determine if someone is reliant on another person financially, people have been asked by Work and Income caseworkers, "If they won the lotto do you think they would give you some of it?"

This policy is eroding, not building, connections between people in our communities. It stops people developing new supportive relationships, that over the long term help people live a normal life. It makes people fearful of connecting with others in case their income is cut by people in Work and Income, and harms their mental wellbeing.

Also, when people in government insist that a person becomes financially reliant on a new partner, it forces them, especially women, children and disabled people, into relationships that may be risky or abusive, without the financial independence to get out. It traps people in unhappy, dangerous and stressful living situations.

The government should instead be seeking to support strong connections between people and build strong, resilient communities. The solution is for people in government to change how relationships are treated by Work and Income New Zealand so people get what they need to live a dignified life that does not trap them in poverty and make them fearful to build relationships.

For instance, disabled people need to continue to get financial support to manage their health needs, regardless of their romantic status. And women raising children on their own need to have the financial independence to make decisions for the good of their children, whether they are in a relationship or not.

This government promised to overcome child poverty and overhaul the welfare system which is breaking - not making - connections between people. The Government should be encouraging people to build strong connections because that's what builds great lives, great communities and flourishing countries.

We are asking your Government to individualise benefit entitlements to ensure that everyone can retain their financial independence, no matter their relationship status.



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ACTION
GROUP



Disabled Persons Assembly NZ



Auckland
Women's
Centre



THE AUNTIES



Te Kupenga Whakaoti Mahi Patunga
National Network of Family Violence Services



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