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Title:

Press release - Revision of State Public Relief Rates

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REVISION OF STATE PUBLIC RELIEF RATES.

The State Public Relief system has caused the Government concern for some time. It was felt that, whilst the Commonwealth Social Services covered the major categories and the State scheme covered a number of gaps, there were nevertheless some needy persons who were inadequately protected. Apart, too, from deficiencies in coverage there were also anomalies in the rates. It was the practice, for instance, to pay a sick or unemployed man with a wife and no children living at home with his parents-in-law at the rate prescribed for a single man plus the rate for a single woman, which were \$4 and \$3 per week respectively. In some categories State rates were lower than the Commonwealth rates but in others the State had to provide supplementary help to people receiving inadequate Commonwealth benefits.

Following a detailed investigation over the last 18 months the State Government is now in a position to revise the State scales of public relief in order to make them more equitable. It will still be necessary, of course, for the State to supplement inadequate Commonwealth benefits for we have no power to bring them up to State rates.

In addition to rate variations, State coverage of gaps in the range of Commonwealth Social Services has been extended to cover not only wives deserted for less than 6 months, families of prisoners during the first 6 months of imprisonment, and women and children of de facto relationships lasting less than 3 years, but also to provide for pregnant girls and pregnant deserted wives in institutions. These latter women until now were precluded from State relief and normally received only a Special Commonwealth benefit for 6 weeks prior to the anticipated confinement and 6 weeks thereafter. We have authorized State payments for a period of up to 12 weeks before the expected confinement.

Recipients will ordinarily be expected to pay 60% of this to the institution. Sample rates per week are:-

Deserted wife with two other children (also in the institution)	\$11.25
Single girl 21 years old	\$8.25
Single girls 18 to 21 years old	\$4.75
Single girls under 18 years old	\$3.50
Deserted wife 17 years old	\$8.25

Perhaps the most important increase, because of its wide impact, is that given to widows with children awaiting acceptance as Commonwealth pensioners. The relief rate has been increased by \$3.50 in cases where rent allowances were payable and up to \$7.50 where rent allowances were not being received. A widow with 4 dependent children for instance, will now receive \$23 per week plus up to \$2 per week rent allowance in lieu of \$15.50 plus up to \$6 rent allowance. Child endowment of course, does not now affect relief rates in any way. Pregnant wives who are widowed and widows over 50 without children may now all receive \$11.75 per week instead of between \$4 and \$8.25 depending on housing costs.

Similarly the State rate for two parent families awaiting Commonwealth pensions has been increased \$2.75 in cases where rent allowances were payable and up to \$6.75 where they were not.

The State will continue to pay recipients of Commonwealth pensions \$2 per week in cases where the Commonwealth withholds its rent allowance because housing costs are other than rent.

The Commonwealth benefit rates for unemployed and sick persons are substantially lower than their pensions rates; periods of unemployment and sickness are not expected to be permanent. The State Government has adopted the view, however, that relief may be necessary for long periods in some of these cases and, in consequence, has provided a discretionary power for the Director of Social Welfare to pay unemployed or sick persons at

the higher rates appropriate for long term relief if he thinks this necessary during a prolonged period of unemployment or sickness.

The principal increase in the category applicable to sick and temporarily unemployed persons is \$2 per week in the rate payable to families not previously receiving a rent allowance. Single adults not living at home will now receive \$8.25 per week instead of from \$3 to \$8.25 depending on housing costs. If, however, they are residing with their parents they will still be limited to \$4 per week and so too will men with no fixed place of abode.

To sum up I point out that, except in some cases of single persons just mentioned, State Public Relief will now equal Commonwealth Social Service rates in all cases, and, in those cases where Commonwealth rates are low and housing costs are incurred, the State will in many cases pay an additional supplementary reimbursement.

As a final safeguard for necessitous cases the Government has authorised the Director of Social Welfare in cases of extreme hardship to make special extra payments for certain purposes at his discretion.

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