

Crackdown on the Disability Support Pension

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The Gillard Government's controversial changes to the Social Security Act – which includes changes to the Impairment Tables used to determine eligibility for the Disability Support Pension - have passed through Parliament.

With the legislation passing through the Senate with coalition backing, people who apply for the Disability Support Pension (DSP) from the 1st January 2012 will be assessed under the new Impairment Tables.

The Impairment Tables are used in Disability Support Pension assessments to measure how a person's impairment affects their ability to work, and were last reviewed in 1993.

The government unveiled its plan to get people off the Disability Support Pension and into the workforce in July, revealing that the number of people receiving the DSP had reached 800,000, growing by 100,000 over the last 2 years alone. The changes to the Impairment Tables are estimated to save the government \$35 million a year.

The Gillard Government said the legislation will ensure the Impairment tables “are able to be updated regularly and enable the introduction of new Tables that are consistent with modern medical and rehabilitation practice.” The Gillard government said the new tables “focus on what people are able to do, rather than what they can't do”, however this has not stopped criticism of the changes.

The Greens say the government and coalition have united in supporting changes to the Social Security Act that are likely to lead to deeply unjust outcomes for vulnerable people. Greens Senator Rachel Siewert said her party supports efforts to assist people into the workforce, however the changes will push large numbers of people with disabilities onto the Newstart allowance, a payment which is \$131 a week below the DSP.

It has been estimated that as many as four out of every ten people who qualified for the Disability Support Pension earlier this year would not qualify under the new regime which is set to come into effect in 2012.

As well as less financial assistance, people will be forced to meet stricter activity requirements in a deeply inhospitable labour market

Government Link: <http://www.aph.gov.au/library/pubs/RP/BudgetReview2011-12/Disability.htm>