

Welfare, Family, and Social Security Policy

A Welfare System Based on Security, Dignity, and Universal Entitlement

Our Vision

The Alliance believes that every person has the right to a secure and dignified standard of living. Social security should provide genuine protection against poverty, illness, disability, unemployment, and the caring responsibilities that arise throughout people's lives.

Our welfare system should be based on **universal rights, adequate incomes, social solidarity, and respect for human dignity**. It should support people when they need assistance rather than subjecting them to punitive conditions, intrusive administration, or unnecessary hardship.

The Alliance will build a simpler, fairer, and more comprehensive social security system that recognises both paid and unpaid work and ensures that no child, family, student, disabled person, unemployed worker or carer is left without an adequate income.

1. Universal Family and Child Benefits

Children should have a secure start in life, and families should not be pushed into poverty because of the costs of raising children.

The Alliance will establish a comprehensive system of universal family payments:

- **Universal Early Years Benefit:** A universal payment for every child under three, recognising that the early years of a child's life are fundamental to their long-term wellbeing and development.
- **Universal Child Benefit:** A regular, non-means-tested payment for every child from age three until they turn sixteen. This will provide families with direct assistance towards the rising cost of raising children.

Universal child and family benefits will be available regardless of family income or relationship status.

2. A Simplified and Adequate Social Security System

The present welfare system is unnecessarily complicated, fragmented, and often punitive. The Alliance will replace the existing collection of overlapping benefit categories with a simpler and more coherent social security system.

We will:

- establish a **Universal Benefit** as the foundation of the welfare system, set at a level that reflects reasonable average living costs and provides a genuinely adequate standard of living;
- ensure that people receiving social security are treated with dignity and respect;
- remove unnecessary distinctions between people based on relationship status;
- individualise benefit entitlements so that a person's access to social security does not depend on the income or circumstances of their partner;
- replace the current high-compliance welfare model with a **high-trust approach** based on support rather than punishment.

Ending Punitive Welfare Practices

The Alliance will abolish benefit sanctions and other punitive measures that push people further into poverty.

We will:

- abolish benefit sanctions;
- abolish unnecessary stand-down periods, including the six-month stand-down period for unemployment assistance;
- end the use of welfare debt and debt-recovery practices that trap people in long-term poverty;
- replace recoverable assistance for urgent needs with grants where appropriate;
- write off existing beneficiary debt owed to the Ministry of Social Development;
- ban attachment orders against beneficiaries.

The purpose of social security should be to provide security and opportunity, not to punish people for needing assistance.

Protecting Incomes Against Inflation

Social security payments must not continually lose their value as the cost of living rises.

The Alliance will introduce **mandatory quarterly indexation of core social security payments**, with increases linked to either average weekly earnings or the Consumer Price Index, whichever provides the greater increase.

This will ensure that people dependent upon social security do not experience a gradual erosion of their living standards.

3. Disability, Illness, and Carer Support

People who are unable to work because of illness or disability have the same right to economic security and dignity as everyone else.

The Alliance will establish comprehensive income and social support for people living with illness or disability.

Support will:

- provide an adequate income for people unable to work;
- meet disability-related living and medical costs;
- be easily accessible and delivered in a timely manner;
- be available independently of relationship status;
- be available regardless of the cause or origin of the disability.

The social security system should recognise that disability can impose substantial additional costs and that an adequate income must take those costs into account.

Recognising Unpaid Carers

People who provide substantial unpaid care for children, disabled people, older people, or family members make an essential contribution to society and the economy.

The Alliance will establish **direct payments to family members and other primary carers** who provide significant unpaid care.

We will develop a **caregiver wage** to recognise the economic and social value of unpaid caregiving and to ensure that people are not forced into poverty because they have taken on essential caring responsibilities.

A Comprehensive Accident and Illness Support System

The Alliance supports extending the principles of comprehensive accident compensation so that people receive appropriate income support and treatment

when they experience injury, illness, or disability, regardless of whether the condition arose from an accident or sickness.

No person should be left without adequate income or necessary treatment simply because their illness or disability falls outside the circumstances covered by existing systems.

4. Students and Young People

Education and training should not require young people to live in poverty.

The Alliance will establish a **universal student income** for people undertaking tertiary education, vocational education, or training.

The student income will:

- be available universally to eligible students and trainees;
- be set at a liveable level equivalent to the unemployment benefit;
- be independent of parental income;
- provide students with the economic security necessary to participate fully in education and training.

No young person should be forced to choose between obtaining an education and being able to afford food, housing, and other necessities.

5. Principles of Alliance Social Security Policy

The Alliance's social security system will be based on five fundamental principles:

1. **Universality:** essential social security should be understood as a right of citizenship rather than a source of stigma.
2. **Adequacy:** payments must provide a genuinely decent standard of living.
3. **Dignity:** people receiving assistance should be treated with respect rather than suspicion or punishment.
4. **Recognition of Unpaid Work:** caring and domestic work are socially and economically valuable and must be properly recognised.
5. **Social Solidarity:** society has a collective responsibility to ensure that people are protected against poverty, unemployment, illness, disability, and other circumstances beyond their control.

The Alliance believes that a strong social security system is not simply a safety net. It is an essential part of a fair society in which everyone has the security and opportunity to participate fully in economic, political, social, and community life.