

Child Endowment

1941 – 1976

Details

Child Endowment was a non-means tested, universal allowance introduced by the Commonwealth government in 1941. The Child Endowment Act 1941 provided that a sum of 5 shillings per week, for each child after the first under the age of 16 years, be paid directly to the mother. Under the original legislation, child endowment could not be paid to children living in institutions run by the State or Commonwealth government (charitable or religious Homes were eligible). The act was amended in 1942, and child endowment payments were made available to government-run institutions, and to Aboriginal children living on missions. Child Endowment became an important source of income for children's institutions and foster parents. The child endowment benefit was replaced in 1976 by the family allowance.

The child endowment scheme was introduced by the Menzies government in 1941. Its main spokesman was the Minister for Labor, Harold Holt, 'the only bachelor in the Federal Cabinet' as the *Australian Women's Weekly* pointed out.

Previously in Australia, there had been a maternity allowance, introduced in 1912 – it was a single, lump sum payment to all mothers of newborn children. It was not means tested when it was introduced. The state of New South Wales also had a family endowment scheme, introduced in 1927 – this was replaced in 1941 by the Commonwealth child endowment payment.

When the national child endowment legislation was first passed in 1941, children in institutions run by State or Commonwealth governments were not eligible to receive child endowment payments. However children in orphanages run by religious or charitable organisations were paid child endowment benefits. In the Australian House of Representatives, during the second reading of Child Endowment bill, Mr Pollard (Labor member for Ballarat) voiced concerns about the exclusion of children in government-run orphanages:

... that is an anomaly. Many parents in well-to-do circumstances are eligible for this benefit ... the bill definitely treats the inmates of orphanages differently from the children of parents who can afford adequately to maintain them ... a distinct injustice is being done to a particularly unfortunate section (2 April 1941).

Maurice Blackburn predicted, 'I think that there will be a good deal of friction over this matter between State Governments and the Commonwealth Government'.

Indeed, representations were made to the Commonwealth Government after the passage of the Child Endowment Act 1941 about various anomalies. The Western Australian Premier made 'very strong representations' on behalf of Aboriginal children in dormitories who were ineligible for child endowment. State governments claimed that it was anomalous that state-run institutions did not receive child endowment, but if they boarded a child out to a foster mother, she could receive the Commonwealth's child endowment (as well as receive support from the state government).

Aboriginal missions also made representations to the Australian government, about which children were eligible to receive child endowment. It was unclear whether families with children who visited the mission on occasion, but still hunted and lived a 'tribal life' were to be judged as 'nomadic' and thus ineligible for child endowment under section 15 of the legislation.

In Victoria in late 1941, there was controversy when the Charities Board ceased its regular grants to religious and charitable institutions, as they were receiving 'a large amount of revenue from the Commonwealth child endowment scheme' (Victorian Hansard, 27 November 1941).

The regulations were amended in March 1942, so that payments could be made to hospitals for children who were admitted for periods of at least 12 weeks.

In June 1942, the legislation was amended so that children living in state-run institutions were eligible for child endowment payments. The amendments also made it possible for child endowment grants to be made for Aboriginal children living on missions. The child endowment payments made to institutions and missions could be applied to the 'general maintenance, training and advancement of the children living there'.

Explaining the amendments to the legislation, an article in *The Worker* stated:

Generally speaking it was thought desirable to provide some additional funds to supplement the efforts of the State and provide additional food, clothing, and comforts for those children who have not the priceless blessing of fond parents and congenial home surroundings.

Beliefs about who should receive Child Endowment underwrote its distribution. Before 1950, a mother under the age of 16 years would not receive child endowment for her first child.

In Western Australia in 1945, a system for supervised child endowment for Aboriginal mothers was introduced. Under this scheme, if a woman was found to be misusing her child endowment payment, her cash payment could be replaced with orders on local storekeepers. In these circumstances, the Department would hold child endowment payments in a trust account and issue the recipient with an order, which listed items prohibited to be purchased, including face powder, ice cream, adult clothing and luxury items (The Daily News, 2 October 1945). This system was discontinued in 1951 – in his annual report (1953, p.5) the WA Commissioner for Native Affairs gave some information about this:

All qualified aborigines who are not nomads, and who need and can satisfactorily use it, receive Child Endowment. At the time of my assumption of office this Department controlled many child endowment payments, the control usually taking the form of orders issued on a local store instead of payment in cash. Quiet but thorough investigation revealed that the need for retention of this system no longer existed, that it has been abused in some instances, and that it militated against the interests of both the Department and the recipients. Its discontinuance in 1951 did not result in repercussions of any kind, but it did vastly improve the attitude of natives towards the Department and its Field Officers.

Child endowment payments became an important source of funding for children's Homes and orphanages.

In an oral history interview in 2011, former resident of the Gill Memorial Home for Boys in Goulburn, Jim Luthy, described how the Salvation Army benefited from child endowment payments made for the boys living in the institution. He describes how the system affected the education of boys from Gill:

When we went to school we weren't placed in the top classes ... Kids from Gill would come and go ... The school didn't see terribly much sense in keeping children in the top classes – they knew they wouldn't be there after Year 10 anyway. Because after year 10, you didn't get any funding. Child endowment finished, and then they threw you out.

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Gallery



Commonwealth of Australia child endowment order

Description: This is an image of a child endowment order that was auctioned in 2012. [Lot description:] Commonwealth of Australia child endowment order for Four Pounds 24th July 1945 still in original booklet, stain in right margin else EF.



Holt with a group of children after he introduced the Child Endowment legislation and was pronounced the 'Godfather of a million children'

More info

Related Entries

Related Events

- [Inquiry into Commonwealth Contribution to Former Forced Adoption Policies and Practices, Commonwealth of Australia \(2011 - 2012\)](#)

The Commonwealth Contribution to Forced Adoption Policies and Practices inquiry considered whether the allowances paid to single parents had an impact on adoption.

Related Archival Series

- [Correspondence files, single number series with 'B' \[Child Endowment\] prefix \(1904 - 1974\)](#)
- [Student accounts and wages, Christian Brothers, Western Australia \(1898 - 1964\)](#)

Related Legislation

- [Child Endowment Act 1941, Commonwealth of Australia \(1941 - 1976\)](#)
- [Family Endowment Act 1927, New South Wales \(1927 - 1941\)](#)

Related Organisations

- [Department of Native Affairs, State of Western Australia \(1936 - 1954\)](#)

The Department of Native Affairs received the Child Endowment on behalf of Aboriginal parents in Western Australia, making payments in the form of orders in local stores rather than cash.

- [Hagley Farm School \(1936 - 1976?\)](#)

Hagley Farm School accommodated and educated the sons of Australian servicemen during the 1940s, partially funded by child endowment payments.

Related Archival Items

- [Department of Aboriginal Affairs - Regional Office - Alice Springs - Child Endowment claims - Receiving Home \(1959 - 1962\)](#)
- [Department of Aboriginal Affairs - Regional Office - Alice Springs - Monthly and Annual Reports - FWOs \(1960 - 1961\)](#)

Related Archival Collections

- [Records of Gerard Mission \(1940s - 1987\)](#)
- [Records of the Babies Home, Walkerville \(Adelaide, S.Aust\) \(1920 - 1948\)](#)

Resources

- [Australia's Social Security Legislation](#), The Worker (Brisbane), 15 June 1942
- O'Neill, Cate, [Child Endowment records in Canberra](#), Find & Connect web resource blog, 27 June 2018
- [Points from Letters: Aboriginal Mothers](#), Tribune, 6 August 1952
- [Frank Ellis Gare interviewed by W.J.E. Bannister in the Bringing them home oral history project \(1999\)](#), 11 March 1999
- [Child endowment bill: details explained: cheered by opposition](#), Geraldton Guardian and Express, 29 March 1941
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, [Answer to Questions on Notice provided by the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Received 9 December 2011.](#), Submissions received by the Committee, 2012

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