



FAIR GO FOR PENSIONERS (FGFP) COALITION VICTORIA INCORPORATED

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IPAN People's Inquiry exploring the costs and consequences of Australia's involvement in US-led wars and the US-Australia alliance, to Australian people. What are the alternatives?

Australia is a wealthy, politically stable democratic country, boasting an economy that according to Treasurer, Josh Frydenberg "has bounced back better than ever". Under these circumstances we can afford a balanced fiscal/ foreign policy which secures our borders, protects our sovereignty and at the same time leaves no citizen homeless or living in poverty.

Rather than pouring billions of dollars into preparations for the next US military mission, the federal government should be protecting Australians at home by providing free high quality public healthcare, aged care, disability services, affordable housing, childcare, and liveable family benefits and pensions.

Over the next ten years the Australian government will spend \$570 billion (\$57 billion annually) of public funds on "defence", mainly in supporting US global wars and weapons corporations. If the "defence budget" was pared back to eliminate the costly military equipment and weaponry designed to wage wars of aggression well beyond Australian shores, Australia could still have a formidable defence force, but also be in better position to look after the health and wellbeing of the people and provide a secure and decent standard of living for all.

Fair Go for Pensioners (Victoria) has campaigned in the community and lobbied governments for a list of claims that would go a long way to relieving the hardship and poverty facing people on benefits and pensions, especially aged pensioners, the unemployed and single parents and their children and people with disabilities (See attached) These claims address the miserly rates paid for the aged pension, single parent pension, and Newstart Allowance, as well as improved indexation of pensions to average weekly earnings. Improvements in the concessional fees for utility costs, council fees and public transport would benefit many.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care has highlighted the neglect and abuse suffered by older Australians in the privatised-for-profit system supposedly "regulated" by the federal government. Yet many of the worthwhile recommendations of the Royal Commission on staff numbers, training and pay rates have been rejected by the government or put on the back-burner. The system could not cope with the ravages of the Covid-19 when it arrived in residential care homes. There is wide support in the community for a significant increase in resources allocated to aged care, both residential and home care, and associated medical services.

Really big issues for pensioners are sky-rocketing housing and rental costs, relief from homelessness and safe places for victims of abuse. Affordable and secure decent housing, properly funded aged care and disability services and unemployment benefits are human rights of all Australians.

The money being spent on fitting in with the latest US war plans could go a long way to alleviating the poverty, anxiety and suffering of Australia's pensioners. Billions of tax-payer dollars are

budgeted towards Australian “defence”, but in reality, much of this goes to enhance the projection of US military power and policy objectives throughout the Indo-Pacific region. Most of the military equipment, including aircraft, weapons systems, surveillance and communication equipment – all very expensive – is purchased from the United States and is “interoperable” with their equipment. This pattern also extends to Australian naval and air force personnel “embedded” in a number of US ships and bases in the region. In addition, Australia bears substantial costs for the hosting of US Marines in Darwin plus the provision of airport access and equipment storage facilities. The Pine Gap spy base near Alice Springs is another costly venture, “jointly operated” but serving mainly US intelligence targeting the economic and political interests of neighbouring countries.

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