

Ombudsman recommends child support laws are changed to help parents

An investigation by the Commonwealth Ombudsman, released today, found Services Australia is not doing enough to identify and respond to financial abuse through the Child Support program. This financial abuse is commonly referred to as 'the weaponisation of Child Support'.

The report found Services Australia's actions were either unfair or unreasonable in addressing widespread manipulation and weaponisation of Child Support.

'Former partners weaponise Child Support by deliberately not making payments or not lodging tax returns, lying to reduce their income, lying about care arrangements and being abusive or violent to stop the impacted parent from seeking help.'

'Parents affected by financial abuse through Child Support keep telling us they feel abandoned and let down by Services Australia when they seek help for financial abuse in their Child Support cases,' said Mr Iain Anderson, Commonwealth Ombudsman.

The investigation found that Services Australia lacked policies, strategies and training to be able to proactively identify, monitor and respond to cases of financial abuse through Child Support.

The Ombudsman made 8 recommendations, including that Services Australia more effectively enforce payment of Child Support and comprehensively review their processes, and the Government introduce a Bill to amend the law to address limitations that impede Services Australia enforcement action, fetter information sharing within Services Australia, and require survivors of abuse to disclose sensitive information to their former partner.

'The legislation needs reform to address systemic problems and help Services Australia ensure children are not deprived of the financial support they need' Mr Anderson said.

Overall, the Ombudsman's recommendations seek to improve Services Australia's capabilities to provide better help to families being affected by Child Support weaponisation.

In Australia, around 1.1 million children are supported by the Child Support program. The investigation revealed that as of 31 December 2024, there was \$1.9 billion in Child Support Collect debt and 153,694 paying parents had a Child Support debt.

The Ombudsman's investigation reviewed more than 270 complaints received by the Office, as well as academic research and information provided by Services Australia.

Services Australia has accepted all recommendations. The Department of Social Services accepted 7 recommendations and noted 1 recommendation.

Read the full report on the Commonwealth Ombudsman website [here](#).

For more information visit ombudsman.gov.au or for media enquiries email media@ombudsman.gov.au

Background

When parents divorce or separate, one or both can apply for Child Support to help with the costs of raising children under 18 years of age. The receiving parent can ask Services Australia to collect Child Support for them (Child Support Collect) or have this paid directly to them by the paying parent (Private Collect). Reported figures do not account for Private Collect, where the amount of Child Support owed and not paid is unknown. Both men and women can be the primary carer after a separation or divorce, both can be entitled to receive Child Support, and both can be victims of financial abuse.

Child Support is administered by the Department of Social Services and Services Australia but is dependent on taxation information, which is administered by the Australian Taxation Office (ATO). The Commonwealth Ombudsman's jurisdiction includes Services Australia but excludes the ATO, while the Inspector-General of Taxation's jurisdiction only covers the ATO and Treasury.

During the investigation, the Ombudsman shared information with the Inspector-General of Taxation who was undertaking a separate investigation into financial abuse in the taxation system. By investigating financial abuse in their respective jurisdictions, both the Ombudsman and the Inspector-General of Taxation can provide analysis of how improvements can be made to reduce financial abuse, regardless of which agency has a role.

Some of the ways perpetrators can weaponise Child Support

