

Half a million extra on welfare

NDIS blowing the budget

James Campbell

The number of Australians receiving welfare has leapt by 425,000 people since 2018, with a significant proportion on the NDIS.

Around 2.1 million Australians over the age of 15 are receiving welfare through the Disability Support Pension, Jobseeker, Youth Allowance or the NDIS.

The vast majority – 86 per cent – of the growth in the total number of people of 15 receiving welfare since 2018 is from the increase in the number of people on the NDIS – three-quarters of whom do not work.

The increase in the number of people on welfare since 2018 is in contrast to the five years between 2013 and 2018, during which it declined by around 115,000, or 23,000 a year on average. If that decline had continued until the end of last year there would be around 600,000 fewer people on welfare today.

These figures do not include people receiving Youth Allowance as students or the age pension.

But, since 2013, the number of people over 65 who are receiving other forms of welfare has grown 34,000 to 225,000, an increase of 500 per cent.

Overall people aged over 65 account for 61 per cent of the increase in the number of people receiving welfare over the past decade.

Between the year 2018 and the end of last year, the number

of working-aged Jobseeker and Youth Allowance (other) recipients rose by around 50,000 people to 861,455.

In the first two months of 2024, it rose again to be 876,020 at the end of February.

Last week, a note from investment bank Jarden on the latest labour market numbers found growth in youth unemployment to 9.3 per cent had been driven by stronger population growth relative to total working-age population, which had “been driven largely by a big increase in student visa holders in Australia”.

Institute of Public Affairs deputy executive director Daniel Wild said the growth in the number of people receiving welfare since the pandemic was a concern.

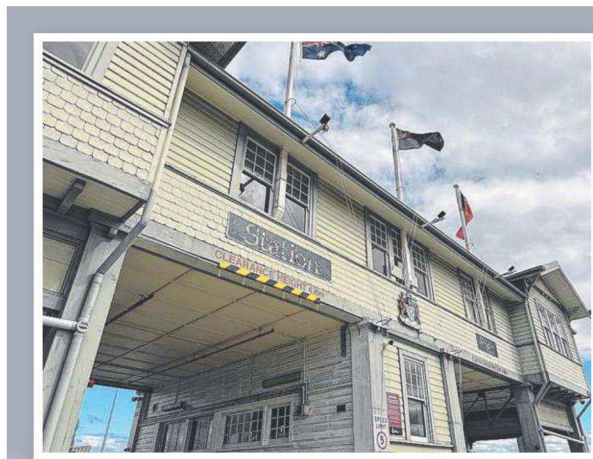
“The rapid growth of welfare dependency, often concentrated in certain geographic sections of the community, post-Covid is an urgent wake-up call to our political leaders that the Australian culture of working for a living is at risk,” he said.

“Many Australians receive welfare for valid reasons, however there is a rapidly growing cohort who could work, but do not. This is placing an enormous burden on our nation’s stretched finances and ballooning debt levels.”

Mr Wild said the growth in the number of young Australians on welfare was particularly disturbing.

“It’s clear that governments’ response to Covid has normalised welfare culture, by severing the link between income and work, and that this failed legacy continues, including among younger Australians,” he said.

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Views of Melbourne's Station Pier, which tourism bodies, maritime groups and even cruise ship companies say needs an urgent facelift; (inset below) the Overseas Passenger Terminal in Sydney Harbour. Pictures: David Crosling, Getty Images



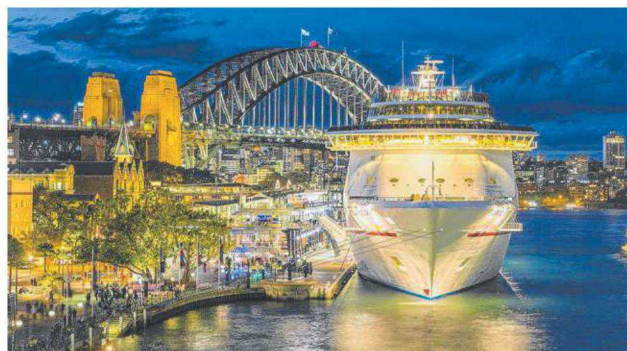
and the Ports Minister says it's a tourism issue. It's an issue for both of them but they've got to talk to each other and make it happen.”

In 2022-23, the cruise industry contributed \$5.6bn to the Australian economy. NSW was the major beneficiary of that, pocketing \$2.7bn, while Queensland attracted \$1.7bn.

Victoria, however, managed to reel in just \$379m.

Victorian Tourism Industry Council chief executive Felicia Mariani said this was largely because the state did not have a vision to engage with the sector. “We have to recognise that the expectations of the cruise sector have changed in the past 10 years and the arrivals experience at our Station Pier is not meeting those contemporary expectations,” she said.

“Observations by the industry body are that the ports in Victoria appear to lean towards more industry and not the leisure usage of the cruise sector.”



Ms Mariani said the state government desperately needed to develop a 10-year vision to manage ports and the cruise industry.

That strategy, she said, would need to take into account three key areas – the arrivals experience at Station Pier, but also a plan to get local produce on-board, as well as creating stronger relationships with tourist attractions to provide shore excursions.

Teresa Lloyd, chief strategy officer of Carnival Australia, the nation's largest cruise ship operator, said while Station

Pier was in a “fantastic location”, the visitor experience needed to be improved.

“The current guest experience for the tens of thousands of cruise visitors arriving in Melbourne is not reflective of the vibrant, exciting city that awaits them,” she said. “We look forward to working with the Victorian government on delivering a fit-for-purpose Station Pier without impacting the viability of Melbourne as a port of call.”

According to Mr Dixon, small upgrades to the site

should be immediately prioritised.

“Even a coat of paint would do the trick,” he said. “Once you take your eye off the horizon, you see that shabby (‘ome to Melbour’) sign. That’s low-hanging fruit (to fix) but, like any institution, the front door creates a lasting impression,” he said.

Opposition ports and freights spokeswoman Roma Britnell said the government had allowed the site to “fall apart from neglect”.

“Not only is Station Pier a significant piece of Victoria’s maritime and immigrant history, it’s the gateway to Melbourne by sea, which currently looks like Victoria couldn’t care less about it,” she said.

“Station Pier is in a derelict state from lack of government investment, interest or vision.”

A government spokesman said Ports Victoria was in the process of developing a Victorian Cruise Shipping Strategy.

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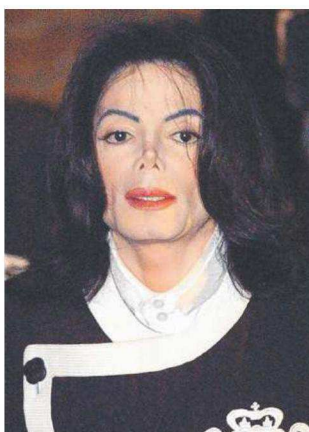
Jacko police records fight

Michael Jackson's production company is fighting to throw out legal proceedings that could allow two men, including an Australian, to access sealed police records.

Court documents filed this week in Los Angeles reveal the late singer's company, MJJ Productions, wants the subpoenas to be quashed as it believes the pair is looking to access photos of Jackson's naked body, taken by police.

Australian choreographer Wade Robson, 41, and American actor James Safechuck, 46, both claim they were repeatedly sexually assaulted as children.

The pair have filed multiple subpoenas since 2018, attempting to gain access to records regarding historic pedophilia charges. They say Jackson's production company was liable for the alleged abuse.



Michael Jackson

Probe into Tassie race deaths

Amber Wilson

An inquest will be held into the deaths of four rally drivers who were killed in Targa Tasmania crashes during 2021 and 2022.

On Monday, an administrative hearing will be held in Hobart by Tasmania's Coronial Division ahead of the inquest, which is expected to take place in the middle of the year.

On April 23, 2021, veteran racer Shane Navin, 68, died

when his 1979 Mazda RX-7 plunged 10m. The death of the NSW driver was the third fatality in Targa Tasmania's then 29-year history.

But tragedy struck again the next day, with Hobart man Leigh Mundy, 68, and Queensland co-driver Dennis Neagle, 59, dying when their Porsche GT3 RS hit a tree at Cygnet.

Australia's peak motoring body, Motorsport Australia, quickly announced it would

review the deaths and establish an investigatory tribunal.

Before the 2022 event, Targa said it had implemented all 17 recommendations from the review.

But Brisbane driver Anthony Seymour, 59, died just two days into the 2022 event.

Targa director Mark Perry said the 31st event would not take place until after the findings of the coronial inquest were released.