

Cautious support for bonus changes



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PROPOSED changes to the baby bonus scheme have been given a cautious welcome by South East community agencies, along with a warning the changes do not address the underlying issues impacting some disadvantaged families.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd this week announced a planned alteration to the baby bonus scheme, which currently delivers \$4187 to parents after the birth of a child, increasing to \$5000 per child in July this year.

Under the proposed new changes, parents who are drug addicts or problem gamblers will receive the payment as vouchers for essential items such as nursery furniture, nappies, rent, electricity bills or food.

The intention is to ensure the money cannot be misused and is only spent on items which will benefit the child.

The planned change could potentially also allow women who are victims of domestic violence to ask for the bonus to be paid in vouchers, to prevent abusive partners taking or controlling the money.

always parents with drug and gambling problems.

"Possibly it should be the same system for everyone - vouchers and not cash."

While the proposed changes may alter the issue of inappropriate spending of the bonus, Mr Foggo said it still did not change the underlying issue of the perceived problem parent.

"Vouchers for essential items such as prams, nappies, baby furniture, rent, electricity bills and food will go some way to put the needs of the child first, but it does not address the root causes of drug and gambling issues, nor family violence that impacts on the welfare of children," he said.

"It is equally important to allocate funds for the treatment and education

programs for these families where parenting issues, drug, alcohol, gambling and family violence are prevalent."

St Vincent de Paul state president John D'Souza

was also concerned the voucher system did not solve the primary issues of drug or alcohol abuse or gambling.

"If they are given vouchers they will find the money for drugs somewhere else."



First time parents Tim and Tabitha Castlemaine, with four week old Eva, have retained part of their baby bonus for future baby essentials.

Picture: SARAH DUFFIELD.

Windfall eases financial burden

THOUGH it has been the cause of much debate since its introduction in 2001, the Federal Government's baby bonus scheme has proved to be a welcome windfall for many parents who say the one off payment is necessary to ease the financial burden of having a child, particularly a first child.

Having a baby can be a costly experience, with medical bills, clothing and nursery furniture just some of the many additional costs to be incorporated into the daily budget, which already includes essential debts such as mortgages, groceries and fuel bills.

Parents have also found the payment beneficial as they readjust to life on a single income, with many new mothers forced to cease work after the birth of their child.

First time parents Tabitha and Tim Castlemaine said the baby bonus they received, after the birth of daughter Eva four weeks ago, went to paying off essential items.

"We had doctor's bills, they seemed to build up, and then we

had to pay a couple of electricity bills and things like that as I've had to stop working," Mrs Castlemaine said.

The couple spent around \$2500 on baby items before Eva was born and said they were lucky to receive lots of items of clothing from friends after her birth, which helped to reduce their immediate expenses.

However, they know the expenses will not stop any time soon, which is why the remainder of their money has been put away for future medical treatment and clothing for Eva.

"She will still need new clothes in the future, she's growing out of things so quickly, so that money is still sitting there for when she needs those new things," she said.

Mr Castlemaine said many of their friends who had recently had children had also used the baby bonus for similar items.

"Most of our friends had to go out and buy items like baby car seats, capsules and cots, and they're not cheap," he said.