



# FEDERAL BUDGET ANALYSIS

APRIL 2019

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# THE ECONOMY AND MARKETS

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg delivered his first Federal Budget last night, claiming *“Australia is back in the black and Australia back on track!”*

The budget is forecasting a return to surplus of \$7.1 billion by 2019-20 after more than a decade of deficits. The Treasurer’s claim that we are back in black is slightly premature given that we are still technically in deficit for 2018-19 - but don’t let the facts get in the way of a good slogan. It’s all about the future!

Nevertheless, the revelation of a forecast cash surplus was welcome news and represents a \$3 billion improvement on forecasts made by the Government back in December. The sudden improvement to the bottom line was courtesy of a strong uplift in tax receipts from mining companies on the back of surging commodity prices. A \$1.6 billion underspend on the National Disability Insurance Scheme from slower than expected take up of the service, also boosted the coffers.

Against the backdrop of an improved Budget position and with an election imminent, the Government announced a range of measures to try to win the hearts and minds of the voting public. The big ones included a focus on paying down net debt to zero over the medium term, lowering the tax burden on low- and middle-income Australians, and increasing the size of the instant asset write offs for small businesses. The Government also announced a record \$100 billion in infrastructure funding and more money to prop-up a range of public services.

One of the bigger promises, was the introduction of further structural tax reform by lowering the 32.5% tax for those on taxable incomes from \$45,000 to \$200,000 to a flat rate of 30%. Unfortunately, this tax cut is conditional on electing the Coalition to two terms in office as this proposed tax reform will not be implemented until 2024-25.

It was a budget designed to demonstrate the Government’s economic management credentials - that they can reward Australians; pay for essential services; balance the books; and all without increasing taxes! All eyes are now on the Opposition’s budget response later this week. It will be very interesting to see which tax measures the Labor Party will support and whether they will soften their stance on some of their more contentious policies concerning negative gearing and franking credit refunds.

From an economic perspective, the budget has been shaped on the expectation that the Australian economy, which is entering its 28<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of economic growth, can continue its impressive run - particularly in the face of a global economy that is starting to falter. Whilst the Government acknowledges that there are downside risks to their forecasts, they are banking on continued improvement in unemployment (currently 4.9%), wage growth and improved economic output to carry them to victory.

Stranger things have happened of course, but global economies and markets are starting to whistle a different tune. There are several risks and uncertainties around the Government’s outlook, including global trade tensions and deteriorating conditions in the domestic housing market, compounded by worries around the significant levels of household debt. To the extent that unanticipated changes in economic conditions occur, their impact will flow through to government expense and revenue forecasts and could potentially take Australia back into the red and well-off track. Let’s hope they get lucky again.

## Key points

- ◆ The Government has announced that it expects the Budget to return to surplus by 2019-20. The underlying cash balance is forecast to be a surplus of \$7.1 billion with surpluses projected to build to more than 1% of GDP in the medium term;
- ◆ The Budget provides tax relief to low- and middle-income Australians, with immediate relief of up to \$1,080 for singles, or up to \$2,160 for dual income families;
- ◆ Instant asset write-offs have been increased for small and medium sized businesses;
- ◆ 94% of Australian taxpayers will pay a marginal tax rate no higher than 30% in 2024-25;
- ◆ \$100 billion has been set aside for infrastructure spending over the next decade; and
- ◆ Increased spending on essential services including Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, education and training.

## Key Treasury forecasts

Note: Figures in brackets are the estimates provided in last year's Budget.

	Actual 2017-18	Estimates 2018-19	Estimates 2019-20	Projections 2020-21	Projections 2021-22	Projections 2022-23
Underlying cash balance (\$bn)	-10.1	-4.2 (-14.5)	+7.1 (+2.2)	+11.0 (+11.0)	+17.8	+9.2
% of GDP	-0.5	-0.2 (-0.8)	+0.4 (+0.1)	0.5	0.8	0.4
Net operating balance (\$bn)	-4.0	+8.5 (-2.4)	+12.9 (+8.6)	+18.2 (+19.6)	28.8	20.6
% of GDP	-0.2	+0.4 (-0.1)	+0.6 (+0.4)	+0.9	+1.3	0.9

## Major economic parameters relied on by the Budget (year average growth rates)

Note: Figures in brackets are the estimates provided in last year's Budget.

	Outcomes 2017-18	Forecasts 2018-19	Forecasts 2019-20	Forecasts 2020-21	Projections 2021-22	Projections 2022-23
Real GDP	2.8	2.25 (3.0)	2.75 (3.0)	2.75 (3.0)	3.0	3.0
Employment	2.7	2.0 (1.5)	1.75 (1.5)	1.75 (1.25)	1.5	1.5
Unemployment rate	5.4	5.0 (5.25)	5.0 (5.25)	5.0 (5.25)	5.0	5.0
CPI	2.1	1.5 (2.25)	2.25 (2.5)	2.5 (2.5)	2.5	2.5
Wage price index	2.1	2.5 (2.75)	2.75 (3.25)	3.25 (3.5)	3.5	3.5
Nominal GDP	4.7	5.0 (3.75)	3.25 (4.75)	3.75 (4.5)	4.5	4.5

Total revenue for 2019-20 is expected to be \$513.8 billion, an increase of 3.6% on estimated revenue in 2018-19. Total expenses for 2019-20 are expected to be \$500.9 billion, an increase of 2.8% on estimated expenses in 2018-19.

## Where revenue comes from (2019-20)

	\$BILLIONS
Individuals income tax	234.1
Company and resource rent taxes	101.9
Sales taxes	71.4
Non-tax revenue	37.2
Customs duty	21.1
Fuels excise	20.5
Other taxes	10.2
Superannuation taxes	9.8
Fringe benefits tax	4.0
Other excises	3.7

## Where taxpayers' money is spent (2019-20)

	\$BILLIONS
Social security and welfare	180.1
Other purposes	98.3
Health	81.8
All other functions	48.5
Education	36.4
Defence	32.2
General public service	23.6

### Asset class impacts

We are not anticipating any major implications for Australian assets in the near term. A lot depends on whether the budget measures survive the twin perils of the election and the senate. Another important factor is whether the Reserve Bank of Australia considers the fiscal response to be sufficiently stimulatory to remove the need for lower interest rates. Like us, they will be keen to get some certainty of direction following the election result.

## SUPERANNUATION

### No Work Test for voluntary contributions extended to age 66

**Date of Effect:** 1 July 2020

**Who's affected:** Retirees aged 65-67

No work test (40 hours of gainful employment in a period of 30 consecutive days) will be required to be met when an individual is under 67, for them to be eligible to make voluntary superannuation contributions. This is an increase from the current age restriction of being under 65 for additional voluntary contributions. Voluntary contributions include personal concessional and non-concessional contributions, salary sacrifice and spouse contributions.

**Profile's view:** This will align the work test requirement with the qualifying age for the age pension, which is scheduled to reach 67 by July 2023. We believe this proposal to increase the flexibility and timeframes for people to build their retirement saving in superannuation is a very positive outcome.

### Extension of the non-concessional bring-forward rule to age 66

**Date of Effect:** 1 July 2020

**Who's affected:** Retirees aged 65-67

People aged under 67 at any time during a financial year (eg 65 and 66-year-olds) will now be able to trigger the non-concessional bring-forward rule. This will allow them to make up to three years' worth of non-concessional super contributions in one year. With the current \$100,000 annual non-concessional cap, this would allow a contribution of up to \$300,000 in one year.

**Profile's view:** This change will provide increased flexibility in structuring individuals' investment portfolios around and beyond their retirement date. This may well lead to improved tax outcomes for individuals, as more wealth can be held in the tax effective environment of superannuation. The significance of this change and its likely impact is highly reliant on the proposed changes to the work test requirement (noted above) also being implemented.

### Extension of spouse contributions to age 74

**Date of Effect:** 1 July 2020

**Who's affected:** Couples including someone with income under \$40,000

Currently, to be eligible to make a spouse contribution, the receiving spouse must be under age 70 at the time of the contribution and must meet the work test if they are aged 65 to 69. Under the proposed changes, spouse contributions can be made where the receiving spouse is under age 75. In addition, where the receiving spouse is age 65 or 66 they no longer need to meet a work test. A receiving spouse will need to meet the work test from age 67.

**Profile's view:** This change extends the time period available to build a low-income earning spouse's super balance while also taking advantage of the existing spouse tax rebate of up to \$540 pa.

## Exempt current pension income (ECPI) calculation

**Date of Effect:** 1 July 2020

**Who's affected:** SMSFs

Trustees of super funds, with interests in both the accumulation and retirement phases in a year, will be able to choose their preferred method of calculating ECPI. Currently, if 100% of a fund is in retirement phase at any stage during the financial year it is deemed to utilise the segregated method for that period but may also need to use the unsegregated method for part of the year if a contribution is made.

The requirement for superannuation funds to obtain an actuarial certificate when calculating ECPI using the proportionate method where all members of the fund are fully in the retirement phase for all of the income year but where a member has a total super balance greater than \$1.6 million will be removed.

**Profile's view:** The removal of the requirement for an ECPI actuarial certificate should result in cost savings of several hundred dollars per year for those SMSFs impacted by this change. The provision of choice regarding the method of ECPI should allow for affected funds (and their tax agents) to have a simpler method of calculation when completing their annual return. Given the specific set of circumstance where the current rules apply, this change is unlikely to impact a large number of people. The proposed change corrects an unintended consequence of the existing legislation.

## Protecting Your Super Package – opt-in for insurances

**Date of effect:** 1 October 2019

**Who's affected:** Low balance superfund members and new members under 25

Mentioned in last year's budget, the Government will delay the start date for ensuring that insurances held within superannuation are only offered on an "opt-in" basis for accounts with balances of less than \$6,000 and new accounts belonging to members under the age of 25 years. The proposed start date is now 1 October 2019 (previously the start date was set to be 1 July 2019).

**Profile's view:** These changes will protect the retirement savings of young people and those with low superannuation balances, to ensure that their superannuation savings are not eaten away by multiple insurance policies held across different superannuation accounts.

## Tax relief for merging super funds

**Date of effect:** currently in place

**Who's affected:** Superfund members in merging funds

The current tax relief for merging superannuation funds, that is due to expire on 1 July 2020, will be made permanent. This tax relief has been available for superannuation funds to transfer revenue and capital losses to a new merged fund and to defer taxation consequences on gains and losses from revenue and capital assets.

**Profile's view:** This announcement will ensure superannuation fund member balances are not adversely affected by tax considerations when superannuation funds merge. It will remove tax as an impediment to mergers and facilitate industry consolidation, consistent with the recommendation of the Productivity Commission's final report.

## Offering Choice in the Australian Defence Force Superannuation Scheme

**Date of effect:** ongoing

**Who's affected:** Australian Defence Force members

The Government will extend Australian Defence Force Superannuation Scheme (ADF Super) membership eligibility, to allow ADF Super members to choose to remain contributory members, when they leave the ADF.

**Profile's view:** Profile supports this change as it grants greater choice for members of these schemes and removes the requirement to move their superannuation when they complete their service in the Australian Defence Forces.

# TAXATION

## Personal income tax brackets change

**Date of effect: 1 July 2022**

**Who's affected: Income earners from \$37,001 and over**

This proposal (similar to the previous budget) is designed to address the issue of bracket creep, particularly for middle-income earners.

From 1 July 2022, the upper threshold for the 19% tax bracket will be extended from \$37,000 to \$45,000, and subsequently, the threshold for the 32.5% tax bracket will increase to between \$45,001 and \$120,000 (currently \$37,001 to \$90,000).

From 1 July 2024, the proposed changes will eliminate both the 32.5% and the 37% tax brackets, with the introduction of a new 30% tax bracket for personal income between \$45,001 and \$200,000. This will more closely align the middle-income bracket of the personal income tax system with corporate tax rates.

The proposed rates are outlined in the table below:

Tax rate (%)	Existing threshold (\$)	Proposed threshold for 1 July 2022	Proposed threshold from 1 July 2024
0	0 – 18,200	0 – 18,200	0 – 18,200
19	18,201 – 37,000	18,201 – 45,000	18,201 – 45,000
30	-	-	45,001 – 200,000
32.5	37,001 – 90,000	45,001 – 120,000	-
37	90,001 – 180,000	120,001 – 180,000	-
45	180,001 +	180,001 +	200,001 +

Note: The proposed changes will increase the Medicare levy low-income thresholds for singles, families, seniors and pensions from 2018/19FY. There are no changes to the existing 2% Medicare levy rate, which will continue to apply in addition to the taxation rates shown above.

The above threshold increases will be further reinforced by an increase to the Low-Income Tax Offset (LITO) from \$445 to \$700 from 1 July 2022.

**Profile's view:** For the changes effective 1 July 2022, a worker with an income of \$86,242 (ie the Full-Time Adult Average Weekly Ordinary Time Earnings AWOTE as at November 2018), would expect to see a tax saving of approximately \$1,080 per annum. Assuming the changes are implemented in 2024, this tax saving could increase to approximately \$2,121 per annum. This equates to a rise in disposable income of 2.5%; if combined with wage growth of 2% or more we should see Australians get ahead of inflation.

The plan to eliminate two tax rates has been criticised by some as being too simplistic, eventually seeing 94% of Australian workers paying no more than 30% tax by 2024. The Treasurer defended this on Budget night, citing a worker of \$200,000 paying ten times as much tax as someone earning \$45,000. Having carried out a 'Fact Check', we can confirm this is indeed the case; the tax bill for the former being an estimated \$51,591 reducing to a considerably lower \$5,091 for the low-income worker.

## Changes to Low & Middle Income Tax Offset

**Date of effect: Lodgement of 2018/19 Tax Return**

**Who's affected: Income earners up to \$126,000**

The Government budget is giving a further reduction in tax for Australians earning up to \$126,000. This is provided through the Low and Middle Income Tax Offset (LMITO), which is applied once an individual's tax return is lodged for the 2018/19 Financial Year. Effectively, the new LMITO arrangement increases the base amount from \$200 to \$255pa., and the maximum amount from \$530 to \$1,080pa.

The LMITO is non-refundable, so if your total tax bill is \$0, this offset is not refunded to you. The LMITO is available to individuals after lodging their tax returns this financial year and is expected to continue until 30 June 2022.

Taxable Income (\$)	LITO for 2018/19FY
0 – 37,000	Up to \$255
37,001 – 48,000	\$255 plus 7.5 cents per dollar over \$37,001
48,001 – 90,000	\$1,080
90,001 – 126,000	\$1,080 less 3 cents per dollar over \$90,001
Over 126,001	Nil

**Profile's view:** This 'people pleasing' provides a more meaningful benefit to working Australians compared to the previous LMITO arrangement. By providing individuals with a refund (of up to \$1,080 for individuals, or \$2,160 for a family with dual incomes) - something is better than nothing in the short-term. In isolation, this may not be enough where stagnant wages are slow to increase, and the rising cost of living has continued to test the personal budgets of many Australians.

## Medicare Levy Low-Income thresholds

**Date of effect:** 1 July 2018

**Who's affected:** Low-income earners

The Government will apply indexation to the Medicare Levy Low-Income thresholds for individuals and families. You do not have to pay the Medicare Levy if your taxable income is below the threshold.

Income Category	2017-18	2018-19
Individual	\$21,980	\$22,398
Family	\$37,089	\$37,794
Individual (eligible for SAPTO*)	\$34,758	\$35,418
Family (eligible for SAPTO*)	\$48,385	\$49,304
Additional threshold for each dependent child/student	\$3,406	\$3,471

\*Seniors and Pensioners tax offset

**Profile's view:** With an increased commitment to strengthening Medicare from other budget measures, we are less concerned with the impact on a threshold increase for Medicare funding. Standing alongside favourable personal income tax relief, the indexation will contribute to a higher disposable income for those earning below the threshold.

## Luxury car tax

**Date of effect:** 1 July 2019

**Who's affected:** Eligible primary producers & tourism operators

For vehicles purchased from 1 July 2019, farmers and tourism operators can apply for a luxury car tax (LCT) refund of up to \$10,000. This is an increase from the existing LCT rebate, where the maximum refund is \$3,000. The eligibility criteria remain unchanged for the types of vehicles available for the refund, along with the requirements of primary producers and tourism operators.

**Profile's view:** This measure can help farmers and tourism operators upgrade their assets, improve cash flow and grow their operations. The proposal of a higher refund on the LCT can help boost these industries that are important to the Australian economy. This is reflective of the current sentiment in the Australian community to support local businesses in a meaningful and measured way.

## Business Tax

### Lowering of corporate tax rate

**Date of effect:** 2021-2022

**Who's affected:** Business up to \$50 million turnover

Small and medium-sized companies (with turnover below \$50m) currently paying a 27.5% rate will have a 25% rate by 2021-22, which is five years earlier than previously planned. This compares to the standard company tax rate of 30 per cent.

**Profile's view:** As slow wage growth continues to be an issue for many Australians, this incentive is hoped to drive employment opportunities and wage growth for employees in the small to medium-sized business.

There is always a risk that employers do not pass on this increased cash flow to employees, however, we are hopeful there will be a positive economic outcome from this strategy by increased wage growth or increased output from business.

## Increase and expansion of instant asset write-off

**Date of effect:** 2 April 2019 – 30 June 2020    **Who's affected:** **Business up to \$50 million turnover**

### Increase and expansion of instant asset write-off

As of Budget Night (2 April 2019), the Government is increasing the instant asset write-off threshold from \$25,000 to \$30,000, and extended its availability to medium businesses (with up to \$50m turnover) for assets acquired after budget night. The threshold applies on a per asset basis, so eligible businesses can instantly write off multiple assets. This builds on the Government's earlier announcement that the instant asset write-off threshold would be increased from \$20,000 to \$25,000 and extended to 30 June 2020. More than 350,000 businesses have already taken advantage of the instant asset write-off. With the expansion of the program to medium-sized businesses, we expect there will be further use of this strategy in the coming year, with an additional 22,000 businesses becoming eligible.

**Profile's view:** These changes will benefit small and medium-sized businesses and improve their cash flow as they will be able to immediately deduct purchases of eligible assets. Given the government's increased focus on infrastructure, we may also see an increase in car/ute sales as tradespeople may take advantage of this strategy to upgrade their vehicles.

As we noted last year, this can be a beneficial way of businesses improving the quality of their assets in a tax effective manner, provided the asset will be an added value to their business.

## Philanthropy

**Date of effect:** 1 July 2020

**Who's affected:** **Men's Sheds and Women's Sheds**

The Government will establish a deductible gift recipient (DGR) general category to enable Men's Sheds and Women's Sheds to access DGR status from 1 July 2020. The measure is estimated to reduce revenue by \$8.0 million over the forward estimates period. Taxpayers may claim an income tax deduction for gifts of money or property of \$2 or more to DGRs. Ensuring that Men's Sheds and Women's Sheds can become DGRs will further encourage philanthropy and support for the not-for-profit sector.

**Profile's view:** We know many Profile clients already donate their time to these worthy causes and are pleased to see they will soon be able to also claim a tax deduction should they wish to donate funds as well. This may also see an increase to Men's Shed and Women's Shed initiatives, which have a positive impact on many communities, particularly in rural areas.

## SOCIAL SECURITY

### Energy Assistance Payment

**Qualifying date:** 2 April 2019

**Who's affected:** **Eligible Australian residents receiving qualifying social security payments**

The Government will provide a one-off, income tax exempt payment of \$75 for singles and \$125 for couples (\$62.50 for each member), who were on a qualifying social security payment as at 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2019. The payment will go towards helping eligible recipients with their energy bills and cost of living expenses and is expected to be paid automatically before the end of the current financial year (30 June 2019).

The Treasurer's announcement on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 2019 and subsequent confirmation in the Budget, is expected to benefit more than 3.9 million Australians.

Qualifying payments are the:

- ◆ Age Pension
- ◆ Carer Payment
- ◆ Disability Support Pension
- ◆ Newstart Allowance (announced less than 24hours after the Budget)
- ◆ Parenting Payment Single

- ◆ Veteran's Service Pension and Veterans' Income Support Supplement
- ◆ Veterans' disability payments, War Widow(er)s Pension and
- ◆ Permanent impairment payments under the *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004* (including dependent partners) and *the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988*.

**Profile's view:** A welcome measure that should help ease the cost of living burden for qualifying recipients (albeit temporarily). The timing and nature of the proposed measure appears to be a kick-start of the Government's Federal Election campaign. The one-off energy assistance payment is subject to the passage of legislation; however, Labor has indicated that they would likely support such measures.

## Improving residential and at-home aged care

**Date of effect:** Immediate

**Who's affected:** Senior Australians in residential aged care, those considering a move into residential aged care or those waiting for a home care package.

### Residential aged care subsidy increase

The Government is increasing funding by providing \$320 million to residential aged care providers in the form of a subsidy boost. This is immediate assistance for the care of residents over the next 18 months as the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety completes its investigation. This financial support is in addition to the establishment of the Quality Care Fund subsidy, which began on 20 September 2018.

### The release of additional home care packages and additional residential aged care places

The Government will provide \$282.4 million in funding over the next five years for the release of an additional 10,000 home care packages across all levels. There have already been 15,000 additional home care packages released since December 2018.

The Government is also providing an additional 13,500 residential care places, combined with a \$60 million investment in infrastructure.

### Improved administration for aged care services

The Government is investing \$4.6m over the next two years to trial a new residential care needs assessment tool. The new tool aims to ensure a more stable, efficient and effective funding tool to provide greater financial stability to both the residential aged care sector and the Government.

Furthermore, the Government announced it will simplify the means testing forms that need to be completed when entering residential aged care. Approximately 110,000 residents will no longer have to complete means testing forms if they do not own a home and receive income support such as the Age Pension.

**Profile's view:** A much needed financial assistance estimated at \$724.8 million has been allocated towards providing higher quality aged care services over the next five years to support Senior Australians. The Residential Aged Care providers have argued the current government subsidy is not sufficient to cover the costs of residents' care. After preliminary findings in the Royal Commission seem to support the providers, it's good to see the Government has included in the Budget an increase in the subsidy to help with ongoing costs of care.

Aged Care residents and elderly Australians at home continue to need support in their later years and the Government has shown a commitment to delivering financial assistance and care programs. Specifically, for elderly Australians not requiring residential care, the Government is improving access to home care packages allowing older clients to remain at home for longer, with a better quality of life and the ability to retain more independence.

Application and reporting for Aged Care has become an administrative nightmare, which has been recognised by the Government. We hope that the new assessment tool and improved application process provides administrative ease for our clients entering residential aged care.

## Single Touch Payroll (STP) to automatically report employment income

**Date of effect:** 1 July 2020

**Who's affected:** Income support recipients who are employed

The Government expects to save \$2.1 billion over the next five years by automating the reporting of employment income for social security entitlement purposes via a Single Touch Payroll (STP) system. STP reporting is already available through payroll, accounting and business management software.

As of 1 July 2020, the fortnightly employment income received by income support recipients will be reported to the Department of Human Services by their employers who incorporate STP. This means that such recipients will no longer need to calculate and report their earnings directly to the Government as their income data will be automatically communicated. This arrangement will not constitute any change in eligibility criteria or maximum payment rates and the Government believes the initiative will bring significant cost efficiencies driven by increased accuracy in the reporting of income.

**Profile's view:** This initiative should reduce the chances that social security support recipients are over/underpaid support payments. Being under or overpaid is not normally enjoyable, it will often mean that work needs to be done to resolve the issue. In particular, the case of being overpaid a support payment and being required to pay it back can cause significant stress if the money has already been spent with no expectation of it being owed. Furthermore, the introduction of STP will make income support recipients' lives easier as they will not need to worry about the correct calculation and reporting of earnings from work. One less task to complete sounds like more available time to enjoy life, but this positive relies on your employer utilising STP software.

## Extending the Family Tax Benefit

**Date of effect:** 2018-19

**Who's affected:** **ABSTUDY recipients aged 16 and over who study away from home**

From 2018 -19 and over the next 5 years the Government will extend the Family Tax Benefit eligibility to families of ABSTUDY (secondary) student recipients who are aged 16 years and over and are required to live away from home to attend school.

**Profile's view:** This is a welcome extension of the current eligibility requirements to improve access to secondary education for affected Australians. We believe the Government's focus on "Closing the Gap" between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians completing High School will help with their long term plans to address Indigenous disadvantage.



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