

REBATE HALVED

Seniors' loss down to Abbott: Barnett

Gareth Parker and Daniel Emerson

More than 300,000 West Australian seniors will have their State Government cost of living rebate halved — a \$21 million spending cut that Colin Barnett has blamed on the Prime Minister.

WA Seniors Card holders — about 60 per cent of whom the WA Council of Social Service estimates cannot afford to lose the cash — will receive \$82 for singles and \$123 for couples when the annual payments arrive in August.

The payments are made to 302,000 West Australians aged over 60 and who work fewer than 25 hours a week. They are not means tested, meaning pensioners and self-funded retirees will be affected.

The Premier blamed the Abbott Government's \$25 million cut to pensioner concessions for the change, which Seniors Minister Tony Simpson admitted was made in part because it was administratively simple.

Mr Barnett said Seniors Card holders valued 25 per cent concessions on council rates, power and water more than the cash payments, but would not guarantee these in their current form beyond next June, when the Government hopes to finish a review of its \$430 million of concession spending.

Mr Barnett said he did not like making the decision but

said seniors in WA were entitled to more concessions and free government services than any other State.

Opposition Leader Mark McGowan said Mr Barnett had refused to stand up to Tony Abbott and now WA seniors were being made to pay.

"Struggling seniors should not have to suffer because of harsh Liberal policies and Mr Barnett's mismanagement of State finances," he said.

WA Council of Social Service chief executive Irena Cattalini said the State Government had to take responsibility for its failure to means test the system.

"It means when they have to find savings, they've got to find it through blunt responses like cuts to an across-the-board rebate," she said. "The system is not sophisticated enough for them to say 'how do we take money away from people who can afford it so we can give it to people who can't'."

Ms Cattalini estimated two-thirds of rebate recipients were pensioners on low incomes.

Duncraig pensioner Dorothy Maher, 75, criticised the "ignorant, arrogant" Barnett Government, pointing out Queensland's Government had agreed to absorb Commonwealth cuts to pensioner concessions.

She worked as an account-

ant until five years ago when a fall left her blind in one eye but most of her career had been before superannuation became compulsory in 1992.

"(The rebate) goes on my cost of living, my rates — everything," she said. "I live week to fortnight on my pension. I have voted Liberal all my life. I'm going to go to the lengths of voting informal before I vote for them again."

West Australian

Wednesday 25/6/2014

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Uncertain future: Dorothy Maher with bills she says she is struggling to pay. Picture: Bill Hatto