

'Lived experience' will direct Aly's policy choices



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**Highlight:** New minister **Anne Aly** knows what it's like to be in the dole queue with no money and two kids in tow. She is adamant she won't 'squander' the platform she now has to make positive change.

### **Body**

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The Productivity Commission will be handed the terms of reference for a review of universal childcare within the first 100 days of the Labor government.

Early childhood education and childcare is central to the Albanese government's long-term vision for economic growth and stability for generations to come, says **Anne Aly**, the newly appointed minister for early childhood education.

"Universal childcare is an investment in our children, our youth and our future," Dr Aly told The Australian Financial Review.

"It's also about delivering immediate economic benefits through increased productivity and increased workforce participation for caregivers, who are predominately women. And it's also about gender equality.

"I don't want to squander this platform, this opportunity, to make meaningful change."

Starting from July next year, the government will increase the maximum subsidy rate to 90 per cent for families earning up to \$80,000 and a sliding scale in subsidy rates for every family earning less than \$530,000. It also plans to extend the increased subsidy to outside-school-hours care.

Dr Aly, who has represented the West Australian seat of Cowan since 2016, was the first Muslim woman elected to federal parliament.

She will bring her complicated, and often traumatic, background to her role, which includes a second portfolio as minister for youth.

'Pathway to a better life'

Her family migrated from Egypt when she was two, and settled in western Sydney. Her professionally qualified parents worked in factories and as a bus driver while she attended the Anglican girls school Meriden in Strathfield.

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She took herself back to Egypt for undergraduate studies in English and acting before returning to **Australia**, where she and her first husband lived in Perth.

The marriage was violent. She left with her two sons and no money, discovering the brutal reality of a dole queue and little hope. But she managed to scrape enough together to put herself through a master's degree and PhD before becoming a lecturer and international expert on counterterrorism.

"For me, access to childcare meant I was able to lift myself out of poverty and chart a pathway to a better life for myself, and particularly for my children," Dr Aly said.

"That meant I was able to secure the financial freedom that enabled me to have choices in life. If you understand those things from a lived experience it gives you insight into what we do - not just about policy, legislation and economics, but how it actually has a real impact on people's lives.

"You never really lose that part of yourself who used to cry every night because you didn't know where you were going to find the money to put food on the table the next day."

Representing young people, she will design a youth engagement strategy that works across the whole of government to address the pressing issues facing the younger demographic, including access to intergenerational wealth transfer, access to housing, cost of living and educational expenses.

"**Australia** is one of the most expensive places in the world to study, not just in terms of how much it [costs for a university degree](#) or TAFE, but the cost of living while you are studying," Dr Aly said.

"There was no minister for youth in the previous government. To say that Labor inherited a policy void is an understatement. That certainly presents challenges, but also enormous opportunities."

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