

Media report from this week outlining the value of blocked alcohol sales because of the Cashless Debit card in Bundaberg-Hervey Bay.



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Welfare card saves \$413k

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Page 1 of 1

Welfare card saves \$413k

Blocked sales show system works

MATTHEW KILLORAN

THE cashless welfare card has blocked almost half a million dollars being spent on alcohol, gambling and other contraband in Bundaberg and Hervey Bay in its first two-year trial, it can be revealed as another 2400 people are about to go on the scheme.

It follows the government pausing adding new welfare recipients on to the card in March last year as the social services system struggled with the pandemic.

Under the Cashless Debit Card trial, under 35s on Job-Seeker and Youth Allowance have 80 per cent quarantined on the card to be used at stores for products and servi-

ces other than alcohol, gambling or withdrawing cash, with about \$200 each 28 days available to be withdrawn.

The Courier-Mail has obtained data showing the card had blocked \$413,000 that users had tried to spend on prohibited sales from January 2019 when the trial began to January 2021 in the Hinkler trial site which includes Bundaberg and Hervey Bay.

This includes \$12,000 in betting or casino gaming, \$134,000 in bars, taverns and night clubs, \$62,000 at bottle shops, as well as \$205,000 from cash vendors and wire transfers.

Social Services Minister Anne Ruston said Australians wanted to know taxpayer

funds were being spent on the essentials and the CDC trial and shown a significant reduction in spending on alcohol and gambling.

"The government has no issue with people having a beer or putting a punt on from time to time which is why welfare recipients get to keep 20 per cent of their payment in their regular bank account," she said.

Meanwhile, from the start of April the freeze on new recipients will be lifted, with another 2456 people to be added in Bundaberg and Hervey Bay. Services Australia will start sending the impacted people letters from April, then they will be given a month before the transition.