



21 October 2020

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Committee,

Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Continuation of Cashless Welfare) Bill 2020 ('the Bill')

The Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) thanks the Committee for their invitation to provide a submission in relation to the Bill.

QCOSS is Queensland's peak body for the social service sector. Our vision is to achieve equality, opportunity and wellbeing for every person, in every community.

QCOSS does not support the establishment of the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) as an ongoing program, including the transition of income management in the Cape York region and the Northern Territory to CDC.

Addressing complex health and social issues, such as alcohol, drug and gambling problems, through the welfare system is fundamentally flawed. Government funding for the trials, estimated at \$34 million (Senate Estimates, 2019), in addition to the \$17.5 million further allocated to assist transition to CDC in Northern Territory and Cape York areas would be much better directed to alcohol, drug and gambling supports and services.

We note that the government has recently released the *Cashless Debit Card Baseline Data Collection in the Bundaberg and Hervey Bay Region: Qualitative Findings*¹ report. This report repeats the criticisms of the CDC captured in the Orima Evaluation,² the Auditor-General's report³ and the 'baseline' findings from the Goldfields region,⁴ including:

- lack of adequate community consultation
- lack of community support and/or consent
- strong opposition to the CDC trial being a blanket approach

¹ University of Adelaide (2019) Cashless Debit Card Baseline Data Collection in the Bundaberg and Hervey Bay Region: Qualitative Findings, December 2019. https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2020/cdc-baseline-data-collection-qualitative-findings-6-august-2020-pdf.pdf

² Orima Research (2017) Department of Social Services Cashless Debit Card Trial Evaluation: Final Evaluation Report. August 2017. https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/08_2017/cashless_debit_card_trial_evaluation_-_final_evaluation_report.pdf

³ ANAO (2018) The Implementation and Performance of the Cashless Debit Card Trial, The Auditor-General Report No. 1 2018–19, Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) https://www.anao.gov.au/sites/g/files/net4981/f/Auditor-General_Report_2018-2019_1.pdf

⁴ University of Adelaide (2019) Cashless Debit Card Baseline Data Collection in the Goldfields Region: Qualitative Findings, February 2019. https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2019/cdc_baseline_qualitative_data_collection_-_goldfields_region.pdf

- lack of evidence to support the benefits of the CDC trial.

These views accord with our recent community survey results about the CDC trial in Hinkler, which indicated 65 per cent of respondents believed there would be no benefit of the CDC trial, and 75 per cent were opposed to the CDC trial in its current, compulsory form.

Rather than proceed with the Bill, we recommend that the Australian Government does the following:

- Work with all levels of government and the community, including at a local level, to develop an evidence-based strategy for addressing alcohol, drug and gambling problems in target communities.
- Make any participation in income management voluntary, and supported by a suite of relevant, adequately funded services.
- In all locations, ensure participants have a pathway to employment.

Please find the following documents **enclosed** in support of our submission:

- QCOSS Review of the Cashless Debit Card Trial and Evaluation (2017)
- QCOSS Cashless Debit Card Trial Hinkler Survey Results (2019).

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our submission to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Aimee McVeigh
Chief Executive Officer