

22 August 2022

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

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**Re: Supplementary Submission for the Inquiry into the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Repeal of Cashless Debit Card and Other Measures) Bill 2022**

I thank the Committee for the opportunity to make a supplementary submission on the two matters raised during the Senate CDC Repeal Bill Hearing on 16 August 2022:

1. the services that some Indigenous peoples in CDC locations have mentioned that they want to see, and
2. principles of co-design with Indigenous communities for government

**Services**

My research for the project *Regulation and Governance for Indigenous Welfare: Poverty Surveillance and its Alternatives*<sup>1</sup> is ongoing and further insights are likely to be learned throughout the project's duration. However, to date First Nations peoples in the locations where I have undertaken field work have expressed a preference for culturally appropriate services in CDC locations that include:

1. Wrap around services introduced as part of the CDC to remain – for example, the community bus in Ceduna.
2. Residential rehabilitation facilities on country near kin and community so that individuals who do have substance abuse issues can address these while receiving necessary support from their families and communities. Support for addressing these substance abuse issues on country was described as important, as one Elder explained 'it's healing for them out in the bush'. Note that people in communities stressed that not everyone had addiction issues though – so it is important not to stereotype people based on their First Nations status or social security income source and instead address this on a case-by-case basis.
3. Support for adequate housing – which is in short supply – especially on homelands. For example, one Elder explained there should be a 'needs assessment' done in the area with housing to ensure that adequate

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) (DE180100599).

resourcing is channelled towards addressing homelessness because some people 'have got nowhere to go'. This can then contribute to other problems for Indigenous peoples in terms of how homelessness is policed in some areas.

4. Support for culturally appropriate Indigenous financial literacy services where these are needed by people. Note that people in communities stressed that not everyone had financial literacy problems though – so it is important not to stereotype people based on their First Nations status or social security income source and instead address this on a case-by-case basis.
5. Support for small business development so that people can have the opportunity to be free from the need for social security payments and can instead build strong economic futures that allow them to support their families with job opportunities.
6. Support for real jobs with real wages where people can be working for their communities – in contrast to much reliance on the community development program where social security payments are exchanged for mostly Indigenous labour paid at under award rates with no superannuation accrual – the combination of which will leave people facing deeper poverty in old age. As one Elder explained about the CDP 'people are getting sick of it' and they 'should be getting equal rights' with payment for their labour. Further funding and investment for female rangers was mentioned as desirable in Kununurra.
7. Public transport services – some people explained that issues with lack of public transport were compounded by the CDC, where they could not purchase affordable vehicles second hand through private sellers with the bulk of their income restricted to the card.
8. More affordable utilities – the high price of electricity in the East Kimberley, for example, was reported to be deeply problematic for people on low incomes.
9. Supports tailored for young Aboriginal people, for example, a new youth centre was mentioned as desirable in Ceduna, and supports for young school leavers to assist them with getting employment.
10. Funding support for a women's centre was mentioned as desirable in Ceduna, they mentioned they have an Aboriginal women's group but that it is inadequately resourced.
11. Funding support for a men's shed was mentioned as desirable in Ceduna.
12. Specific training for people to help them develop further skills that will help them attain jobs and provide for their needs. For example, training for getting a licence was mentioned in Kununurra, and training for farm work was mentioned as desirable in Ceduna, with several Aboriginal community members saying that this would be helpful because their homelands near Ceduna have farms. This was seen as important because shopping for food locally was 'too dear' and some people were interested in growing their own vegetables. Food security was a problem.

When one considers that the CDC has cost over \$170 million<sup>2</sup> under the Coalition led Federal Government the services **opportunity cost** is stark. Service provision in under-resourced Indigenous communities has long been an issue and significant change is needed in ensuring government accountability for high quality service provision for Australia's First Nations peoples.<sup>3</sup>

### **Principles of co-design with Indigenous communities**

I will attach two further resources recently published on the principles of co-design with Indigenous communities that the Committee may find useful in making recommendations for developing policy that has a better chance of success. I highlight several key points from these publications for the Committee's convenience below.

In their publication on Co-design (**Appendix H**) Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales explain that:

co-design as a process demands a greater investment in time than most public servants or Aboriginal organisations are experienced with. Not an event, like a consultation or a workshop, co-design requires a willingness by all parties to commit significant amounts of time and to remain flexible in realising that achieving the outcomes desired may stretch and shift timelines and diary dates. Numerous meetings, varying culturally appropriate approaches to gathering and sharing information, and a willingness to travel from place to place may be essential to achieving the best outcome.<sup>4</sup>

This publication emphasises that:

A successful co-design process requires the inclusion and active participation of the 'right' people – those who are recognised by their community as eligible to speak and who will be affected by the programs and policies to be co-designed.<sup>5</sup>

This issue directly above was a problem everywhere I went during field work for the CDC – that there had not been adequate engagement with and co-design with people who were to be on the program. That numerous people impacted by the CDC felt aggrieved about this was evident in their interviews.

Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales also explain that the process of co-design can raise a response of wariness with Indigenous peoples due to legacies of colonialism that continue to have contemporary manifestations:

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<sup>2</sup> Minister Amanda Rishworth, 'Abolishing the Cashless Debit Card', 3 June 2022, <https://ministers.dss.gov.au/media-releases/8251>

<sup>3</sup> Jon Altman (2013) 'Arguing the Intervention' *Journal of Indigenous Policy* 14: 1-151, pp 18, 40.

<sup>4</sup> Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales (2021) *Co-designing recommendations to government: A literature review and case studies from the OCHRE initiatives*, p 10.

<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales (2021) *Co-designing recommendations to government: A literature review and case studies from the OCHRE initiatives*, p 10.

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal foundations of knowledge and experience can be very different and even in conflict. For example, co-design is often promoted as a means to achieve transformation, but for many Aboriginal people the notion of transformation raises red flags. It has roots in colonialism and assumes change is positive and on their side only. ...

the very process of co-design can also be seen to be one that originates in the 'Western world' which historically values 'development'. It is important to remember that co-design may be seen by many Aboriginal people as simply a continuation of colonialism where Aboriginal knowledge, practices and world views are acknowledged and then ignored.<sup>6</sup>

In their publication on co-design, AIATSIS (**Appendix I**) points out that "co-design" requires that governments recognise that their timelines often do not align with those of communities they wish to work with.<sup>7</sup> Allowing appropriate time frames for co-design is of vital importance.

There are also many other valuable points about co-design raised by Indigenous people in this AIATSIS publication. They explain that 'Co-design ... involves the creation of an environment where people can speak freely and candidly, and where community is in the drivers' seat.'<sup>8</sup>

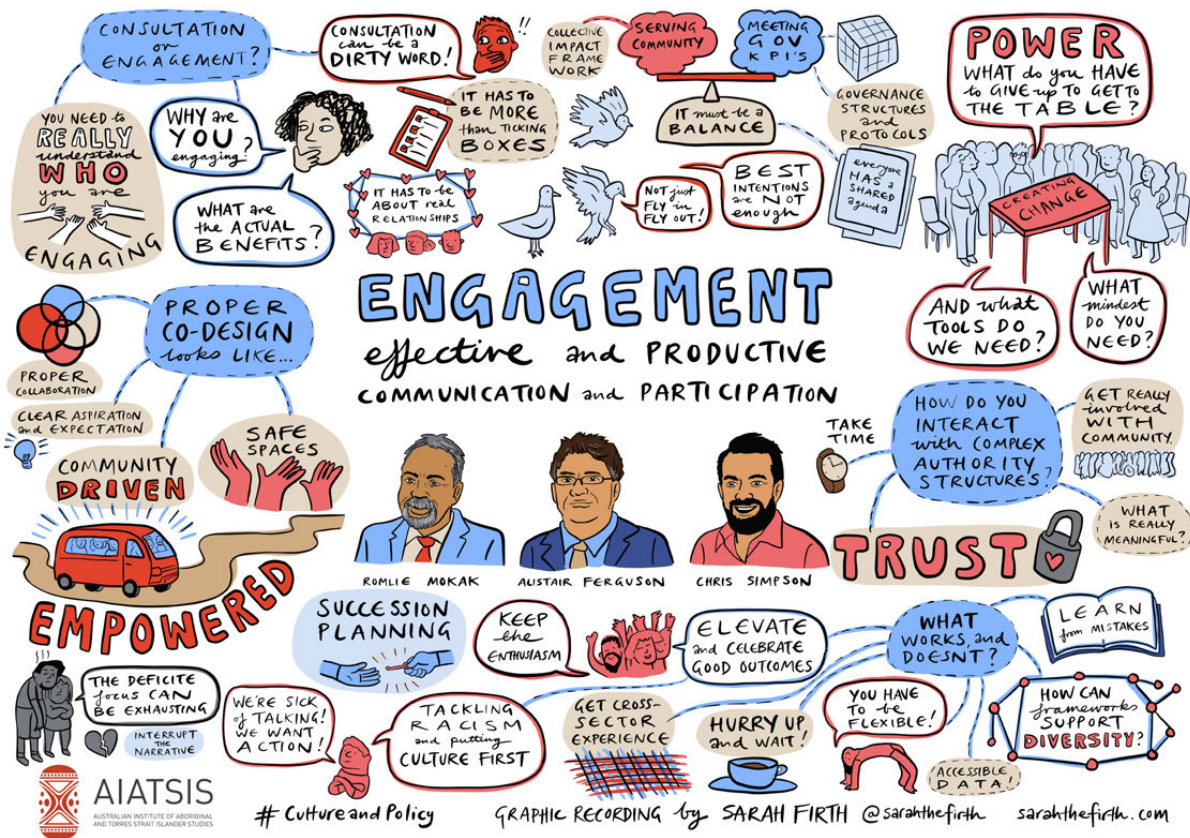
The AIATSIS report contains a helpful diagram on principles of effective engagement (p 11) reproduced below:

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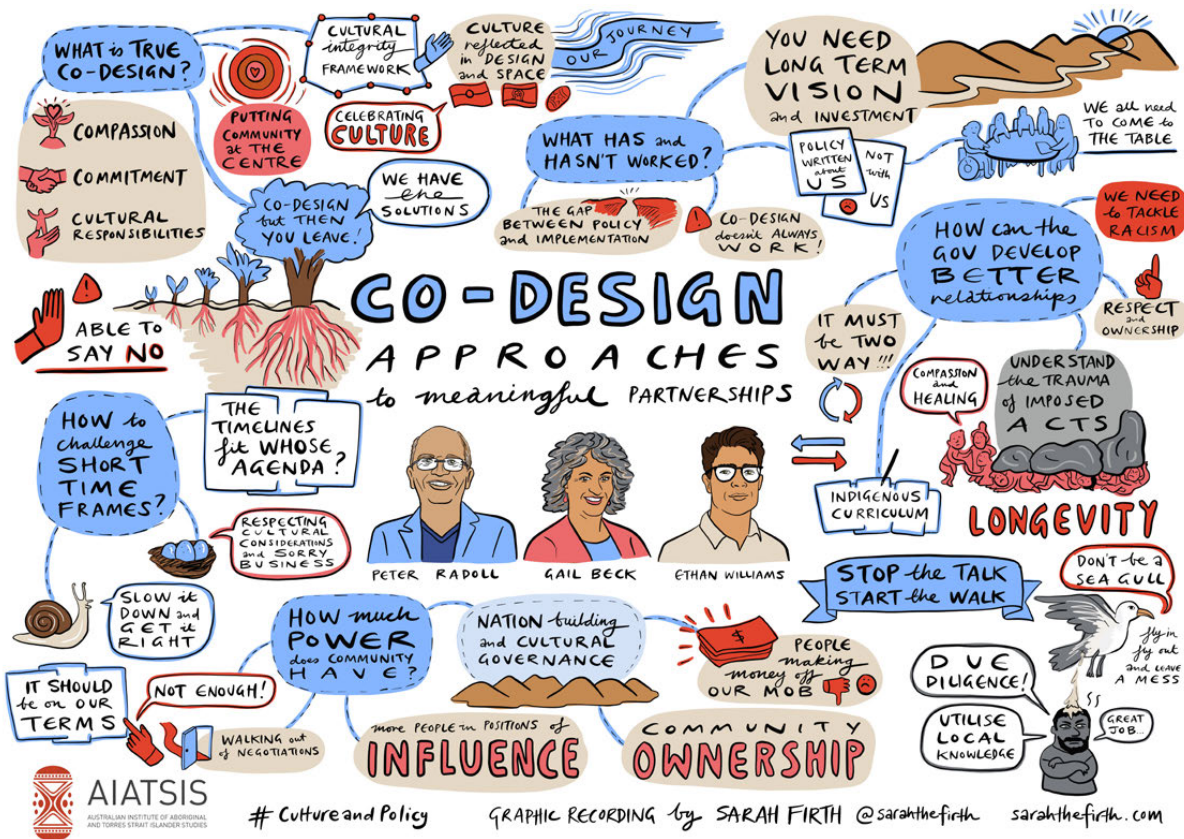
<sup>6</sup> Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales (2021) *Co-designing recommendations to government: A literature review and case studies from the OCHRE initiatives*, p 9.

<sup>7</sup> AIATSIS (2020) *Nyiyang wuunggalu! Indigenous insights into effective policy engagement and design: Event Report* (Canberra, ACT), p 5.

<sup>8</sup> AIATSIS (2020) *Nyiyang wuunggalu! Indigenous insights into effective policy engagement and design: Event Report* (Canberra, ACT), p 12.



Their report also includes a helpful diagram on effective co-design (p 13) reproduced below:



As is evident from the preceding material, being able to say no to what government are proposing policy wise and have that communication respected and attended to is important in any co-design process.

In CDC locations where I have undertaken field numerous people from the communities stated that they thought there should have been a big meeting with each community about the program being proposed rather than the government basing policy decisions on discrete meetings with a few individuals in corporations. For example, one Aboriginal woman stated, there should be 'a big meeting, a big gathering' because 'it's good to hear from the whole mob'. A desire for community participating in program design was strong in locations where I have undertaken field work.

If I can be of any further assistance, I would be happy to oblige.

Yours sincerely,

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And

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix H**

Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales (2021) *Co-designing recommendations to government: A literature review and case studies from the OCHRE initiatives* (Chief Investigator Jerry Schwab) (Mascot, NSW).

## **Appendix I**

AIATSIS (2020) *Nyiyang wuunggalu! Indigenous insights into effective policy engagement and design: Event Report* (Canberra, ACT).