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Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
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Dear Committee Chair,

8th June 2017

RE: The appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of the Community Development Program (CDP)

I am writing in my capacity as the Territory Member for Namatjira, to contribute the views and experiences of both myself and my constituents to the Senate Inquiry into the Community Development Program.

The CDP is a broken system, a national disgrace. It entrenches the poverty and disadvantage already felt by regional communities. As the Member for Namatjira I have heard first-hand the stories of constituents who struggle with the program, and witnessed countless interactions with the system that have reinforced with me that the Community Development Program is in dire need of an extensive overhaul.

The Community Development program is a highly punitive system, which does much to further disadvantage those who rely on it in remote communities. With highly uncompromising rules, a payment structure conducted through Centrelink and a bureaucratic system that is highly disconnected from the context that its implemented in, many aspects of the framework seem to be in direct conflict with the realities of living on community.



CDP's penalty framework means that those who rely on the system for payment often find their income at risk when they miss appointments or fail to fulfil their obligations. These requirements are far more difficult to meet for those who live on community, due to the realities of living out bush.

CDP participants on community actively try to work around their other family and cultural obligations to meet the requirements needed to receive payments. However, within this system, for many, this is simply not possible. It is common for me, as I visit the communities and outstations that make up my electorate, to witness people on the phone to Centrelink for hours at a time, only to be met with the added difficulty of a language barrier when they finally make contact.

The whole process can be daunting and confusing, and these difficulties combined with CDP's penalty system, result in breaches that cause a drastic loss of income across the board. This has had an immense impact on the economic and social outcomes of communities across the Namatjira region. Some of my constituents survive on community with no income at all, living off the income of pensioners and others on regular payments not subject to the stringent conditions CDP participants are subject to. Under some circumstances, this inequality and dependency has resulted in elder abuse, as pensioners are exploited for their income.

As for providing employment opportunities, the system currently in place does nothing to build capacity, and employment opportunities on community are already limited. The entirety of the CDP framework is based on a model that works by making welfare payments difficult enough to obtain that acquiring employment is deemed to be far more preferable in comparison. This is useless in an area where employment opportunities are scarce.

If the Community Development Program is permitted to proceed as it has done, there will be a very real risk of forcing people to move to town, away from their country and their homelands, seriously affecting health and wellbeing. To ensure positive outcomes, we need a community-controlled system formulated by Aboriginal decision-making.

Currently, the control of the Community Development Program occurs at a level that is highly disconnected from the environment that it operates within. When considering the requirements of a new framework, it is pivotal that Aboriginal decision-making be key in the development of policy and in the provision of services. Effectively working with communities who experience disadvantage requires high levels of community engagement if it is to be done correctly, and programs which are implemented with the support and contribution of the communities they affect is fundamental to successful service provision.

The Community Development Program has become a national disgrace, exacerbating poverty in remote communities and punishing Aboriginal people for living on country. The entire system needs to be changed, and I fear that if it is not, then outcomes will not improve and the disparity in living conditions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people will only worsen.

Chansey Paech
Member for Namatjira