

Submission to Parliamentary Committee re Cashless Debit Card

Dear Committee Members,

I am a former Mayor of Ceduna having served for 3 years as Deputy Mayor then 12 as Mayor. I did not nominate at the last Council Election due to my advancing age.

Whilst being actively involved during my time on Council I saw a huge number of initiatives trying to address social issues within our community – all were well meant, and all achieved very little until the advent of the Cashless Debit Card. This was not a magic bullet but resulted in massive improvements.

I was heavily involved in the implementation of the trial together with the Council CEO and 6 Indigenous Leaders. In this process our group acted effectively to overcome any problems with the implementation and did a lot of work to ensure that all card holders had support to deal with any disadvantages they encountered from the card.

I am still very proud of my involvement with the Leaders Group and found the Indigenous Leaders to be very strong in supporting this process despite the efforts of opponents of the card to pressure them to withdraw their support. I would point out that most of the opposition came from non – Indigenous persons who had never lived anywhere near Ceduna.

The three main problems that the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) was intended to address in Ceduna were:

- 1) A high level of social disruption due to intoxicated people which caused major issues for our community and caused bad impressions to some of our residents and visitors.
- 2) A tragic issue as highlighted in the Coroners Enquiry into 6 deaths of Indigenous people who were intoxicated and sleeping rough.
- 3) Issues of family violence and abuse of children and elderly people due to intoxicated people.

There were other issues but the above were the most urgent. Since the trial of the CDC we have had no deaths, levels of family violence have been reduced, (Not necessarily reflected in statistics due to a greater level of reporting because of actions taken to encourage reports) and the lives of many women and children have been hugely improved.

Prior to the CDC our community had gangs of children as young as 6 years roaming the streets and committing crimes – I was told by some of the youths involved that this was mainly due to their homes not being safe because of intoxicated visitors or family members. This is not happening now.

Children are going to school after having breakfast and mothers are receiving money to purchase household necessities whereas in some cases the funds were being spent on alcohol. In some other cases poker machines in Ceduna were taking family funds because of addictions to gambling and the card significantly reduced this problem.

Our local community, as distinct from non – resident activists who know nothing about our town, are disappointed and horrified in some cases that this most worthwhile initiative is being shut down. The level of support within all members of our community was reflected by the fact that I was known as a strong supporter of the card and was re-elected with 70 to 80% of the vote.

The lack of consultation about the cessation of the card is particularly disappointing. Ceduna was visited by Ministers for Indigenous Australians the Hon. Linda Burney MP and the Minister for Social Services the Hon. Amanda Rishworth MP. Disappointingly I tried to see Minister Burney and was told that only opponents of the card would be welcome. Similarly, Minister Rishworth was twice encouraged to telephone me and declined to do so. Given that I know more about the CDC in Ceduna than most people this is most unsatisfactory.

Furthermore, the two days notice given to make a submission to this Committee is insulting to the concept of consultation and smacks of a token gesture.

My final comment is that the Government will regret the foolish abandonment of the only system that has caused considerable improvement to what really is a broken situation. Our community will suffer consequently while inner city dwellers will not have a clue. I wish they would get out to the regions and see what is happening in the real world.