

Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights

Public Hearing – 29 July 2024

ANSWER TO QUESTION ON NOTICE

Department of Social Services

Topic: Inquiry into Compulsory Income Management

Question reference number: IQ24-000139

Question asked by: David Shoebridge

Type of Question: Spoken. **Hansard Page/s:** 9

Date set by the Committee for the return of answer: 05 August 2024

Question:

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: As to that process we just went through about finding out what, if any, additional supports or services were available to deal with problem gambling, just assume that we're going through that entire process and instead I'm now saying alcohol and/or drug abuse. Were there any additional supports and services provided for people on CDC for alcohol and drug addiction?

Mr Burford: I'd have to confirm exactly. Again, it's quite often in a generic sense. There is funding that's being deployed. Grants are out at the moment with regard to AOD services; that's managed through the Department of Health.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: But grants out at the moment won't relate to the cashless debit card, which was abolished in 2022. I'm asking about during the currency of the cashless debit card. It would just be quicker; we had that process we went through about gambling. I was just trying to make it quicker this time by doing that for alcohol. Perhaps we could just cut to the chase.

Mr Burford: I'll have to take that on notice. That might be the most effective way to get to the response, because you're talking about during the cashless debit card?

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Yes.

Mr Burford: The supports I'm talking about is the funding committed to support the transition away from the cashless debit card.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: Sitting here now, are you aware of any additional supports or services provided to people who were placed on the cashless debit card, the CDC, any additional and targeted supports or services to deal with alcohol and/or drug addictions?

Mr Burford: Not that I'm aware of, but I will confirm on notice.

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: How did the department run a program for over a decade allegedly dealing with gambling and alcohol and drug addictions and not provide those services to the people who are the subject of the program? How did you run a program for over a decade that's allegedly dealing with that problematic behaviour and not provide those supports and services to the people who are the subject of the program? How did that happen?

Mr Burford: Are you asking with regard to the cashless debit card or the removal?

Senator SHOEBRIDGE: No. The removal didn't happen over a decade, did it? I'll ask the question again. How did your department run the cashless debit card program for over a decade allegedly to deal with concerns about problematic alcohol and drug use and problematic gambling and at no point in that decade or so provide fresh or targeted services to the people who were the subject of the cashless debit card to address problematic gambling, alcohol or drug services? How did that happen?

Mr Burford: Because you're talking about services when the program was running from 2016 onwards, I'd have to take it on notice to look at the types of services. There are a range of community consultative fora used when the CDC was introduced progressively in multiple sites. There were a range of smaller support services, I think in the order of around \$14 million per annum, that were provided to support the deployment of the cashless debit card. I'd have to take on notice exactly the precise nature. There are quite a broad church of services, not just targeted at alcohol or targeted at gambling. It could be things like a youth program that will provide activities for young people or a bus program to help transport people back to community or into main centres to get support.

Answer:

Please refer to SQ17-000149 for information on funded support services during the operation of the Cashless Debit Card. These included a range of supports, including alcohol and other drug services in former Cashless Debit Card communities.

To support the government commitment to abolish the Cashless Debit Card, a range of additional support services have been funded. A comprehensive list by location is available at <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services-welfare-reform-enhanced-income-management/support-services>.