



CHIEF MINISTER

Parliament House
State Square
Darwin NT 0800
chief.minister@nt.gov.au

GPO Box 3146
Darwin NT 0801
Telephone: 08 8936 5500
Facsimile: 08 8936 5576

Senator Wendy Askew
Committee Chair
Standing Committee on Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Parliament of Australia
PO Box 6100
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Chair

Thank you for your letter of 5 August 2019, inviting a submission to the inquiry into the Human Services Amendment (Photographic Identification and Fraud Prevention) Bill 2019 (the Bill).

The Northern Territory Government works in partnership with stakeholders to deliver better health for all Territorians. The Northern Territory context is unique, with residents dispersed across remote and very remote areas, making up approximately 40 per cent of our population. Territorians living remotely are predominantly Aboriginal people who reside in one of 600 communities or remote outstations.

Our unique context presents challenges in meeting the complex healthcare needs of Territorians, no matter where they may live. Remote and very remote areas often have limited health services available, and as a result, access to Medicare services in the Northern Territory is the lowest in Australia. Nationally, the number of Medicare services per capita is 16.9, compared with 12.0 in the Northern Territory in the 2018-19 financial year.

As proposed, the Bill will require a photograph to be added to Medicare cards to address fraudulent access to the Medicare Benefit Scheme, and other identity security issues. I understand that in August 2017, the Commonwealth Government commissioned an *Independent Review of Health Provider's Access to Medicare Card Numbers*. In its report, the Review Panel noted that adding a photograph or other security feature was not likely to have a lasting effect on reducing Medicare fraud.

Given the likely limited value of this measure in increasing the security of Medicare cards, coupled with the additional administrative burden this proposal would place on Medicare users, particularly in remote and regional areas, the Northern Territory Government encourages the Committee to consider the Bill's proposal carefully. This includes potential equity issues arising from the introduction of unnecessary administrative barriers to accessing the Medicare Benefit Scheme, further limiting access to health care, with disproportionate impacts for disadvantaged Aboriginal patients.

Yours sincerely,

MICHAEL GUNNER

- 2 SEP 2019

