

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT)

An alliance of the Central and Northern Land Councils and
Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory



MEDIA RELEASE

NT Aboriginal organisations slam cashless debit card as “another Intervention”

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Aboriginal organisations in the Northern Territory have expressed deep concerns that the Federal Government plans to rush through a bill to impose a new form of compulsory income management in the NT despite months of advocacy from Aboriginal Peak Organisation NT (APONT) on the need for greater discussion and consultation on the ground.

“The bill would significantly alter the controversial income management that is already in place in the Northern Territory and put it in place indefinitely, yet communities are largely unaware of the proposed changes. Parliament must refer the bill to a Senate inquiry at the very least,” Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT (AMSANT) CEO John Paterson said.

“This feels like the Howard era Intervention all over again. The last time the government intervened in the NT, and did things to us instead of with us, it failed at great cost to families and communities,” Mr Paterson said.

“This directly opposes recent commitments by the Federal Government and COAG to work with us in partnership on Closing the Gap. Aboriginal people in the NT will be most affected by this new form of top-down control and deserve the chance to give evidence. Without due consideration this proposal makes a mockery of government rhetoric around Aboriginal controlled decision making,” he said.

The Director of the Arnhem Land Progress Association (ALPA), Keith Lapulung, said "This legislation will be dropped into our communities from outside with no consultation and no understanding. It will take away peoples' choice and control, their rights and self-determination."

"It will add to the negative effects of the Intervention in our communities, not only taking away peoples control over their lives but by making it harder for small Indigenous businesses who may not be able to accept the card to survive," Mr Lapulung said.

“We don’t want this to come to our communities and take away peoples’ dreams of running their own small business,” Micky Wunungmurra, ALPA’s deputy chair and the Traditional Credit Union’s chair added.

The Australian National Audit Office has described the Cashless Debit Card evaluation the Federal Government keeps quoting as “inadequate”. The card has also been criticised by the parliament’s expert committee on human rights and a robust evaluation of four years of compulsory income management in the NT was equally damning.

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