

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT)

Why we are calling on all MP's to oppose the Cashless Debit Card Expansion Bill

8 October 2020

We call on all members of parliament to **strongly oppose** the bill that would expand compulsory income management in the Northern Territory through the Cashless Debit Card (CDC).

APO NT spokesperson John Paterson said, "Support for the bill would directly contradict the recent National Agreement on Closing the Gap that was supported by all levels of government including the Commonwealth. It is not in keeping with the spirit of the agreement and its emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination."

Mr Paterson added, "We did not ask for the card, yet 22 000 of us will be affected if the card is imposed on NT income recipients."

There is still no proof that compulsory income management works. In February this year the University of Queensland released a report on their review of four CDC trial sites. The overwhelming finding was "that compulsory income management is having a disabling rather than enabling effect on the lives of many social security recipients."¹

The Cashless Debit Card relies on regular and reliable access to the internet and mobile phone coverage. This is not the case for many remote communities in the NT. What works in other CDC trial sites will not work for the NT. 82% of people who will be transferred to the CDC are Aboriginal and most live on remote communities.

Mr Paterson said, "Face to face Centrelink support has been stripped back out bush and will be replaced by a 1800 number or an internet site. This is grossly inadequate for a population who lack digital literacy and where English is a second language".

"The bill is a new Intervention. It will perpetuate the torment of our powerlessness. **It denies our basic freedom to control our lives.** It locks the many of us who live below the poverty line out of the cash economy and undermines our small businesses that rely on cash payments."

"The millions of dollars supporting the transition of NT communities into a CDC "trial site". would be better invested in holistic wrap around services helping our people to overcome drug and alcohol dependence and trauma. They and their families deserve support, not punishment.

¹ <https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2020/02/compulsory-income-management-disabling-study-shows>

“To the government this is just a law change, but to us it is **about our everyday lives becoming even more of a struggle. We are sick of governments doing things to us, rather than with us.**”

Mr Paterson concluded, “This bill **disregards our views and lived experience and fundamentally** undermines the collaborative spirit of the next phase of Closing the Gap. It symbolises why so many policies have failed our people and why things aren’t getting better in our communities.”

“We call on every MP to **oppose this bill.**”

For media comment:

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