

Response to Cashless Welfare Card Proposal

23 March 2015

Catholic Social Services Australia (CSSA) is concerned about the Federal Government's proposed trial into a cashless welfare card which may occur later in the year. The stated intention is to prevent welfare payments being spent on alcohol and gambling.

CSSA's vision is to ensure that Australia is a place where all people are treated with respect and have the opportunity to fully participate and contribute; a society in which people of all ages, especially our elders, children and vulnerable groups, have the assistance they need to live a dignified, healthy and meaningful life.

"We believe that income management is only a stop-gap measure to prevent harm while an individual, family or community works to overcome underlying problems such as alcohol or drug addiction, poor budgeting skills, or financial harassment. The cashless welfare card will not by itself address these issues." said Marcelle Mogg, CEO of CSSA.

"At the same time that the Government is intending to control welfare payments spending by individuals, it has made large funding cuts to the social services that assist individuals and families. These support services for example - family support, domestic violence prevention and homelessness services must be in place for the cashless welfare card to have any effect. It is disappointing that the government has also made cuts to financial counselling services, depriving the same clients they intend to help on a short term basis from developing lifelong skills."

"We also oppose a blanket approach to income management measures or any discrimination or potential to discriminate against Indigenous people. The cashless welfare card or any form of income management should only be considered in certain situations- as a bottom-up community initiative, as a voluntary measure or on a case by case basis."

"In areas of entrenched disadvantage one option is to adopt a place-based approach that brings together mental health, drug and alcohol, employment, parenting, school attendance, child protection, housing and other services."

"Strengthening individuals and families must remain the priority to enable them to take control of their own lives."

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