

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100 Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Date: 18 October 2019

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management to Cashless Debit Card Transition) Bill 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission in response to the Senate Inquiry into the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management to Cashless Debit Card Transition) Bill 2019.

About Australian Women Against Violence Alliance

Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA) is one of the six National Women's Alliances funded by the Australian Government to bring together women's organisations and individuals across Australia to share information, identify issues and contribute to solutions. AWAVA's focus is on responding to and preventing violence against women and their children. AWAVA's role is to ensure that women's voices and particularly marginalised women's voices are heard by Government, and to amplify the work of its member organisations and Friends and Supporters. AWAVA's members include organisations from every State and Territory in Australia, representing domestic and family violence services, sexual assault services, services for women in the sex industry and women's legal services, as well as organisations representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, young women, women educators and other groups. AWAVA's contract manager is the Women's Services Network (WESNET).

Recommendations:

We recommend that the Australian Government:

- Abandon the cashless debit cards legislation;
- Establish a voluntary opt-in framework for welfare management; and
- Apply intersectional gender lens to the social security policy.

The right of women to live free from violence

AWAVA strongly opposes the expansion of the Cashless Debit Cards (CDC) trials as a compulsory welfare management tool. We have called to abandon these trials since their inception, through the following submissions and reports:

- [AWAVA's analysis of the 2018-2019 Federal Budget](#)
- [AWAVA's analysis of the 2019-2020 Federal Budget](#)
- [AWAVA's submission in response to the Senate Inquiry into the Social Security \(Administration\) Amendment \(Income Management and Cashless Welfare\) Bill 2019](#)
- [AWAVA's Submission on the Comprehensive National Review of Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#)
- [2018 Shadow Report for the 70th session of the United Nations Conventions on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)

It is enshrined in both domestic and international human rights law that all women have a fundamental right to live free from violence. In situations of domestic and family violence, compulsory placement on CDC infringes upon women's right to live free from violence. We ask the Committee to note the following considerations:

- Receiving social security support predominantly through cashless debit cards may impact the ability of victims/survivors to leave violent relationships given the lack of disposable cash. If a woman has children, the available 20% may be even further reduced considering all necessary school and other child-related expenses that cannot be paid via direct debit.
- The lack of options for financial independence may force women back into violent relationships.
- The list of exemptions at it stands does not foresee any exemptions for women experiencing family violence.
- All other types of payment including a crisis payment that victims/survivors may be eligible to access in situations of domestic and family violence, and disability payments, are subject to the cashless debit card.
- Cashless debit cards also have strong gendered and racial implications, especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women many of whom are placed on this card. This will be even more so if the CDC trial is expanded to include the Northern Territory.
- There is no evidence to suggest any positive outcomes from the compulsory punitive welfare policies. The Auditor General concluded that in the absence of any effective evaluation and monitoring mechanism, it is difficult to conclude whether any positive impacts or reduction of social harm has occurred.¹
- Similarly, the 2013 evaluation² found little evidence to date that income management is resulting in widespread behaviour change. Instead, the evaluation stated that 'the early indications are that income management operates more as a control or protective mechanism than as an intervention which increases capabilities'.

We are also concerned with the current proposal to expand the CDC trials to the Northern Territory and transfer people who are subject to income management to CDC. Currently, for people subject to income management in the NT 50% of the payment is available for a cash withdrawal unless income management falls under a child protection measure or supporting people at risk measure.³ Transfer to CDC will decrease the amount of cash allowed to be withdrawn to 20% of the overall payment.

Intersectional Gender Lens in Social Security

Any changes to social security policy need to be done applying gender and intersectionality lenses that take into account how multiple and intersecting factors may place women at greater risk of exploitation, violence and abuse and thus take appropriate action to empower them through access to social security as an enabler to regain financial independence.⁴

In its concluding observations on Australia's 2018 reporting, the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women expressed concerns about the lack of gender analysis in social security policy and the impact it has on women.⁵ These concerns represent a setback in the implementation of

¹ Auditor-General Report No.1 2018–19 The Implementation and Performance of the Cashless Debit Card Trial

² Australian Government, 'Income Management Evaluations', Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs website, 18 July 2013.

³<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/programmes-services/family-finance/income-management>

⁴ (2017, A/RES/71/170, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 71/170, Intensification of efforts to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: domestic violence, OP.11)

⁵ Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (2018) Concluding observations on the eighth periodic report of Australia, CEDAQ/C/AUD/CO/8

the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women as well as the Sustainable Development Goals.

The CDC trials as they stand now fail to apply an intersectional gender lens and thus, as discussed in the section above, place women at further risk of violence and limit their options to leave violent relationships.

Achieving economic security in particular for women cannot be done solely through restrictive and punitive welfare measures. Actions must be taken to ensure an increase in employment opportunities, and reforms must be in place to reduce the costs of child care and increase access to affordable housing. More support services including specialist women's services need to be sufficiently resourced to assist women. It is important that financial counselling and education, mental health services, alcohol and drugs programs and domestic and family violence services are available. It is vital that necessary changes are co-designed with communities and with the strong participation of women and are not imposed on them.

In conclusion, AWAVA is calling on the Australian government to abandon the cashless debit card income management legislation. There is no evidence to suggest any positive outcomes from the compulsory punitive welfare policies. The Auditor General concluded that in the absence of effective evaluation and monitoring mechanism, it is difficult to conclude whether any positive impacts or reduction of social harm has occurred.⁶ We call on the government to ensure that every member of the community is treated equally and with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

Once again we thank you for the opportunity to provide input to this inquiry. If you would like to discuss the contents of the submission further, please contact Dr Merrindahl Andrew, AWAVA Program Manager, using the details below.

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⁶ Auditor-General Report No.1 2018–19 The Implementation and Performance of the Cashless Debit Card Trial