

10 August 2022

Committee Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email only: community.affairs.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Economic Justice Australia (EJA) Submission to the Inquiry into the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Repeal of Cashless Debit Card and Other Measures) Bill 2022

1. Economic Justice Australia (EJA) is the peak organisation for community legal centres providing specialist advice regarding social security issues and rights. Our members across Australia have provided free and independent information, advice, education and representation in the area of social security for over 30 years.
2. EJA draws on its members' casework experience to identify systemic policy issues and provide expert advice to government on reforms needed to make the social security system more effective and accessible. Our law and policy reform work:
 - Strengthens the effectiveness and integrity of our social security system;
 - Educates the community; and
 - Improves people's lives by reducing poverty and inequality.
3. EJA welcomes the opportunity to make submissions regarding the Committee's inquiry into the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Repeal of Cashless Debit Card and Other Measures) Bill 2022* (the Bill). EJA proposes that all forms of compulsory income management under social security legislation should be brought to an end – both under the Cashless Debit Card program *and* under the BasicsCard Income Management program. Please refer to our submissions to:
 - this Committee's Inquiry into the *Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Continuation of Cashless Welfare) Bill 2020*¹; and
 - the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs *inquiry into the application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia (2022)*².

¹ Available at <https://www.ejaustralia.org.au/inquiry-into-the-social-security-administration-amendment-continuation-of-cashless-welfare-bill/>

² Available at <https://www.ejaustralia.org.au/inquiry-into-the-application-of-the-united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples-in-australia/>. Also see previous EJA submissions and reports:

4. EJA is a member of the Accountable Income Management Network (AIMN), a nation-wide group of community members, representatives of national, State and local non-government organisations and community bodies, academics, social researchers and public policy experts. EJA endorses and adopts all points and recommendations made by the Australian Income Management Network (AIMN) in its submission to this Inquiry, to which EJA contributed.
5. EJA also endorses and adopts all points and recommendations made in ACOSS's submission to this inquiry.

Need for social security policy reform to address longstanding issues

6. Further to the specific Terms of Reference of this Inquiry but of crucial importance to the winding back of compulsory social security income management programs, is the pressing need for social security policy reform to address barriers to accessing social security income support for people in regional, remote and very remote communities, and for measures to address unmet need for community supports in these communities. These issues are discussed in EJA's submission to the 2022 inquiry into the application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia³. AIMN's *Policy Paper: Alternatives to Compulsory Income Management*⁴, sets out six policy priorities for implementation along with the abolition of compulsory income management.

Need for social security legal help

7. As stressed in the ACOSS and AIMN submissions to this Inquiry, there is a longstanding unmet need for specialist social security legal services in regional, rural, remote and very remote Australia – with the need most pronounced in regions subject to compulsory income management. There are currently no specific funds provided for social security legal help under the National Legal Assistance Partnership,⁵ and no specific funds for social security legal help for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, despite the disproportionately high number of First Nations people subject to compulsory income management – a cohort also disproportionately affected by adverse Centrelink decisions, including raising and recovery of social security and family assistance debts.
8. Social security legal help should be readily available to people in remote, very remote, rural and regional areas and it must be trauma informed, culturally safe and co-designed with communities. Immediate arrangements should be put in place for access to social security legal help for people in areas where the Bill will impact to help protect rights and wellbeing through the transition and continuing. It is crucial that people coming off compulsory income management have access to

³ Ibid

⁴ Available at <https://accountableincomemanagementnetwork.wordpress.com/2022/07/26/policy-paper-alternatives-to-compulsory-income-management/>

⁵ See National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-2025, here: <https://www.ag.gov.au/legal-system/legal-assistance-services/national-legal-assistance-partnership-2020-25>.

social security legal help, as part of a broader suite of measures to address barriers to accessing income support in these communities.

Recommendations:

- *EJA supports and adopts all recommendations made by AIMN and ACOSS in their submissions to this Inquiry.*
- *Immediate arrangements should be put in place to ensure access to social security legal help for people in areas where the Bill will impact to help protect rights and wellbeing through the transition and continuing.*

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