



**Submission to the Senate Community Affairs
Committee Inquiry on the Social Services Legislation
Amendment (Cashless Debit Card) Bill 2017**

September 2017

AN AUSTRALIA THAT VALUES AND SUPPORTS ALL CARERS

ABOUT CARERS AUSTRALIA

Carers Australia is the national peak body representing the diversity of Australians who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a:

- disability
- chronic condition
- mental illness or disorder
- drug or alcohol problem
- terminal illness
- or who are frail aged

Carers Australia believes all carers, regardless of their cultural and linguistic differences, age, disability, religion, socio-economic status, gender identification and geographical location should have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other Australians.

They should be able to enjoy optimum health, social and economic wellbeing and participate in family, social and community life, employment and education.

For information contact:

Ms Ara Cresswell

Chief Executive Officer

Carers Australia

Unit 1, 16 Napier Close

DEAKIN ACT 2600

Telephone: 02 6122 9900

Facsimile: 02 6122 9999

Email: acresswell@carersaustralia.com.au

Website: www.carersaustralia.com.au

INTRODUCTION

Carers Australia thanks the Senate Community Affairs Committee for the opportunity to provide a submission to its Inquiry on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Cashless Debit Card) Bill 2017.

Without better evidence of the value of the cashless debit card in meeting its objectives, Carers Australia does not support the extension of the Cashless Debit Card to new areas, more participants, and beyond the current end date.

EVALUATIVE EVIDENCE

It is not clear from previous evaluations that the Cashless Debit Card has had a positive behavioural impact on participants, other than voluntary participants.

In his second reading speech, Minister Tudge cited evidence from the evaluation of the Ceduna and Kimberley trial areas indicating less abuse of alcohol and increased engagement with services. This included that around 30 per cent of surveyed participants reported less consumption of alcohol or illegal drugs and a similar proportion reported being better able to look after their children.¹

While the evaluations support the value of the Cashless Debit Card for voluntary participants, there is no clear evidence that the card reduces the incidence of gambling or drug and alcohol abuse. For example, other measures and programs to reduce alcohol and drug use were introduced into the communities at the same time, for example the Take Away Management System in East Kimberley,² and new outreach and support services in and around Ceduna as part of the introduction of the Cashless Debit Card,³ so that it is not clear that the improvements can be (entirely) attributed to the introduction of the Cashless Debit Card.

Further, other survey evidence from the evaluation of the Cashless Debit Card is more equivocal, with more surveyed card holders reporting that it had made their lives worse (49 per cent), rather than better (22 per cent), and more family members of card holders reported that it had made their lives worse than better (37 per cent and 27 per cent respectively).⁴ Almost equal numbers of survey participants reported that it made their children's lives better or worse (around 20 per cent).⁵

¹ <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansard%2F74422013-2cb9-47e8-aa17-97c7844e66fa%2F0066%22>

² Codeswitch (2016) Takeaway Alcohol Management System (TAMS): A review into the effectiveness of the trial system, January–September 2016, Codeswitch, Mt Lawley

³ <https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/tudge/2015/additional-services-ceduna-part-welfare-card-trial>

⁴ <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children/programs-services/welfare-quarantining/cashless-debit-card-trial-evaluation-reports>, p 72

⁵ Ibid, p 7, 81

EFFECT ON CARERS

Even prior to its announcement, and amid speculation that it would soon be introduced to their area, carers in the Bundaberg area contacted Carers Queensland to express their fears about the introduction of the Cashless Debit Card to their payments.

As the Cashless Debit Card is touted as a mechanism to reduce gambling, alcohol and illicit drug use and other misuse of Government supports, carers reasonably consider it to be a punitive measure. Without evidence that carers engage in the in these activities, and given the level of responsibility they have demonstrated and their contributions to their families and communities, they feel that that there is no justification for subjecting them to the measure.

The Bill, if passed, will enable the Cashless Debit Card to be applied to any payment, except Age Pension, through a legislative instrument. While the most recent Government announcement about implementation in Bundaberg suggests that the measure will only be applied to Parenting Payment and unemployment benefits for recipients under 35 years old, it can be extended to other payments without further legislative change. Carers Australia is concerned both that many family and friend carers with substantial caring responsibilities receive other working age payments, including Newstart Allowance and Youth Allowance, and about any prospective effect on Carer Payment recipients.

RECOMMENDATION

For the reasons outlined in this submission, Carers Australia opposes the extension of the Cashless Debit Card to new locations, except to income support recipients who volunteer.

Carers Australia recommends that the Cashless Debit Card not be extended to new locations without further evaluation of its effectiveness in current locations.