

MEDIA RELEASE: Rally – Say No To The Cashless Welfare Debit Card; Say No To The Family Tax Benefit Cuts

WHERE: Parliament, North Terrace, Adelaide

WHEN: Saturday November 21st, 12pm

INFO: Anti-Poverty Network SA/Stop Income Management SA spokesperson Pas Forgione – 0411 587 663 or antipovertynetwork.sa@gmail.com

Job-seekers, sole parents, carers, pensioners, students, and others will rally against the introduction of the cashless welfare debit card – to be trialled in the town of Ceduna from February – and against the Federal Government's proposed cuts to Family Tax Benefits, particularly Family Tax Benefit B, which will increase financial hardship for already-struggling low-income families.

The rally is organised by Anti-Poverty Network SA and Stop Income Management SA, both grassroots community groups run by low-income people advocating for fairer treatment of those receiving welfare payments, and other disadvantaged people.

The cashless debit card is a new, extreme version of an old policy, Income Management, that has been expanded to multiple locations across Australia since being introduced for the first time in 2007, in the Northern Territory as part of the Intervention.

There is no data showing that Income Management, when applied to welfare recipients on a non-voluntary basis, improves financial and personal well-being. The Commonwealth Parliamentary Library's 2012 paper, *Is Income Management Working*, said there was '*an absence of evidence relating to the effectiveness or otherwise*' of the program.

A Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs study from the same year, *Evaluating New Income Management In The Northern Territory: First Evaluation Report*, said:

'[Income Management] has been applied to many who do not believe they need Income Management, and for whom there is no evidence that they have a need for, or benefit from Income Management...for many people the program largely operates more as a means of control rather than a process for building behaviours or changing attitudes or norms.'

There are serious questions about the nature of the consultations in Ceduna, with large numbers of local residents, including numerous Aboriginal people in the region, feeling they were given no warning about the scheme, and were never asked about it.

It is particularly worrying that the cashless debit card will be administered in a blanket fashion, with all working-age Centrelink clients, regardless of their financial and personal history and skills, being required to participate. There appear to be no exemptions, no way for people whose mental health or housing situation is harmed by the cashless debit card, or for domestic violence victims, to exit the program.

Also worrying is that again, Aboriginal people appear to be disproportionately targeted by the scheme, with an estimated 72 percent of the roughly 800 local residents affected by cashless welfare being Aboriginal.

Meanwhile Family Tax Benefits cuts to fund childcare are as senseless as 'robbing Peter to pay Paul'. The cuts will be crippling for low-income families battling cost-of-living pressure. Sole

parents will be particularly hard-hit by these proposed changes: 'a low income single parent family with two children will lose more than \$60 per week or \$3000 per year over time once their youngest child turns 13, due to the reduction in Family Tax Benefit Part B and the withdrawal of end of year supplements', as noted by ACOSS (Australian Council of Social Service).

Single mum, carer, and Anti-Poverty Network SA member Kym Mercer said *'to remove Family Tax Benefit B from parents who have already lost so much would cause more children to go without what they need to learn best at school.'*