



INCOME MANAGEMENT

‘Bad for the Northern Territory, bad for Bankstown, and bad for your business’

The Commonwealth Government is intending to introduce income management into Bankstown in 2012, along with four other ‘trial sites’ across Australia. This policy quarantines half of some welfare recipients Centrelink payments onto a BasicsCard which can only be used to buy “priority items” at government-approved stores. Income Management will be compulsorily applied to people in Bankstown that Centrelink considers “vulnerable to financial crisis” and those referred by child protection.

When the Government first announced the Bill that has allowed the expansion of income management in late 2009, and extending into its review period in 2010, the vast majority of the submissions that were received by the Senate Committee that was established to review the Bill opposed the extension of income management. These submissions represented the views of most members of the welfare lobby, Aboriginal organisations, women’s organisations, legal services, religious groups, international groups, human rights agencies, medical groups, unions and others.

For example, organisations such as The National Council of Churches, The Law Institute of Victoria, Anglicare, St. Vincent de Paul, Australian Council of Social Services, Human Rights Law Resource Centre, Amnesty International (Australia), The Fred Hollows Foundation, the Australian Human Rights Commission, The Law Council of Australia, Uniting Care, Oxfam Australia, Carers Australia, Australia Youth Affairs Coalition, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation and many, many others opposed the legislation for a range of compelling reasons relating to the lack of any substantial evidence for the efficacy of compulsory income management and the lack of serious investigation into the potential detrimental consequences of this policy which the Government has still not explored or seriously considered.

In addition to this, where it has been implemented, income management has been

found to be an expensive and administration-intensive approach with no evidence to suggest that it delivers outcomes that justify its complexity and cost.

Income management was first rolled out as part of the racist Intervention in the Northern Territory in 2007. Aboriginal communities have experienced four years of hardship and shame as a result of this and related policies.

A recent report by the Equality Rights Alliance surveyed 180 women on income management in the NT. It found that 79% wanted to exit the system, 85% had not changed what they buy and 74% felt discriminated against. A report released by the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) concludes that compulsory income management in the NT has profoundly long-term negative impacts on psychological health, social health and wellbeing and cultural integrity (March 2010).

A strong new coalition “Say No to Government’s Income Management Not in Bankstown Not Anywhere” has formed in Bankstown. The campaign has initiated a call for a national moratorium on income management – demanding immediate amnesty for those already on the system and a halt to plans for expansion. Its founding statement has been endorsed by more than 50 organisations including unions, church and community groups. Income management costs more than \$4500 per person per year.

This money is badly needed for jobs and social services.

Continued overleaf



INFO SHEET

Margaret Goneis, Chairperson of Bankstown City Council Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Committee said that she is angered by the proposed changes and the effect it will have on individuals already struggling financially: "People need improved access to transport, health services, mental health care and assistance with the high cost of medications – income management will not address these needs".

Randa Kattan, the Executive Director of the Arab Council of Australia, represents a large constituency of Australians of Lebanese descent in Sydney's Bankstown, who along with those of Vietnamese descent, form part of one of the largest and most vibrant multicultural suburbs in the country. Kattan recently said "When I'm on talkback radio within the community with SBS or others, the callers consistently say the same thing: "Because it is Bankstown, because it is highly populated by the Arab community — Lebanese people — and because of the reputation Bankstown has gained over the years due to the negative media feedback. People feel targeted. It's highly derogatory, highly patronising - all of it."

The lack of serious community consultation on the matter is another parallel with the experience of Indigenous Australians living under the scheme in the Northern Territory.

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has now added its weight to concerns about compulsory income management schemes. In a media release last week PHAA Vice President Vanessa Lee stated "Compulsory income management for Aboriginal people discriminates and disempowers individuals and leaves them with insufficient resources to manage their own lives."

"PHAA believes an intervention to quarantine welfare payments and allow families to buy food should only be implemented on a voluntary basis, as determined through a comprehensive engagement process with affected individuals, and as a last resort."

According to the PHAA, any form of income management should use a rights-based approach in line with the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples which emphasises the rights of Indigenous peoples to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations. "This also has implications for the roll out of income management for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in other States and Territories, including New South Wales and other areas of Queensland."

Through this change in policy, the Government is not so much moving away from discriminating against Aboriginal people as expanding its discrimination to include a wider group of low-income and disadvantaged Australians.



The Federal Government maintains that Bankstown and the other trial sites were chosen based on a variety of factors including unemployment levels, youth unemployment, skills gaps and the length of time people have been on income support payments and yet they have not provided any substantial evidence to support the argument that Bankstown specifically needs, or would benefit from, the introduction of such a regime, or that income management generally benefits people on welfare; in fact, as already outlined, much of the evidence points in the other direction.

And how good is this for your business anyway? For example, did you realise that the Basics Card system uses eftpos machines? Do you really want a government agency intervening in your business?

The question needs to be asked – why should Bankstown and its people be further stigmatised by the introduction of this paternalistic and punitive system which singles out the disadvantaged and deliberately limits their choices "for their own good"?

A question we encourage you to ask yourself as a local business person is - do you really want your business to be associated with a system that has such enormous potential to erode the social fabric of your community?

FOR MORE INFO:

www.sayno2gim.info/
stoptheintervention.org/facts/income-management
www.arabcouncil.org.au/index.php
stoptheintervention.org/

Contact Stop the Intervention Collective (STICS) - Alex 0449 184 801

