

Senate Community Affairs References Committee
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

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3 September 2026

To the Committee Secretary,

Re: Community Affairs References Committee review of the Social Security (Administration) Legislation Amendment (Income Management and Enhanced Income Management) Instrument 2026

People do not need the government to dictate how they spend money – they need adequate income support to ensure they have enough money to live without being in poverty.

The Antipoverty Centre continues to object to all forms of compulsory income control¹ on the following grounds:

- it exacerbates poverty and restricts access to low cost goods;
- at no point has any government demonstrated that welfare recipients support the use of compulsory income control, at the community level or otherwise;
- it is paternalistic and treats welfare recipients as incapable of determining for ourselves how we spend our income;
- it creates stigma and shame;
- it has been demonstrated to cause significant harm to health, particularly in newborn babies;
- the racial targeting and extremely discriminatory outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of all income control programs implemented by the Australian Government; and
- it violates the economic, social and cultural rights of the people subjected to it.

¹ Policymakers seek to soften the perception of cashless welfare by using terminology that invokes benign budgeting or financial counselling. We reject this practice. In this submission the term “income control” refers to compulsory participation in programs such as the BasicsCard and SmartCard, described by the Australian Government as income management.



Labor's shadow social services minister Linda Burney made the following commitment to welfare recipients during the 2022 election campaign:

Our fundamental principle on the BasicsCard and the Cashless Debit Card, it should be on a voluntary basis. It's not up to Labor or anyone else to tell them what to do. At the moment it's compulsion and that's not Labor's position.²

It is unforgiveable and completely shameful that more than four years into a Labor government that made this commitment – in the wake of several parliamentary inquiries and two major pieces of legislation related to income control programs – we are still here needing to state our opposition to this violent policy, with 31,000 people remaining in compulsory cashless welfare programs.³

This instrument represents a sneaky approach to further entrenching harm the Albanese government promised to end without the public noticing. We oppose both its effect and the way the government has gone about this process.

There is no credible reason for the government to remove sunset clauses that were to allow time for these programs to be wound down. Instead, it appears that the Department of Social Services has used the years since legislation was passed in 2023 and its resources to aggressively transition people who were on the BasicsCard to the SmartCard.

This trend provides no reassurance to people currently on cashless welfare against their will, or those of us who have been told that cashless welfare will never be used where we live. Worse, in its current form, these programs further embed racism in the welfare system and in society more broadly due to the ongoing stigmatisation and abuse of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are subjected to income control.

Please refer to our previous submissions for further information about alternative solutions for people who want help managing their money, the harms of income control and the history of community resistance to these oppressive policy measures:

- [Social Security \(Administration\) Amendment \(Repeal of Cashless Debit Card and Other Measures\) Bill 2022](#)
- [Social Security \(Administration\) Amendment \(Income Management Reform\) Bill 2023 \[Provisions\]](#)

The Antipoverty Centre is a longstanding member of the Accountable Income Management Network. We endorse AIMN's submission to this inquiry, as well as the submission made by Dr Francis Markham.

² As reported in Guardian Australia, April 2022: [theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/19/cashless-welfare-labor-vows-to-end-compulsory-use-of-basics-card](https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2022/apr/19/cashless-welfare-labor-vows-to-end-compulsory-use-of-basics-card)

³ DSS data as at 3 July 2026: data.gov.au/data/dataset/australian-government-income-management-program



The government must stop hiding behind endless “consultation” and end its use of flimsy excuses for preventing the release of information about income control programs, such as departmental reports, expenditure and budget impacts. Deliver what was promised: meaningful investment in support, services and community-led development, and the full abolition of compulsory income control. If the Albanese government’s position has changed it must make its reversal of this promise clear to all welfare recipients so we know where we stand.

For enquiries related to this submission please contact team@antipovertycentre.org.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in dark blue ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connell', written in a cursive style.

Kristin O'Connell
Co-coordinator
Antipoverty Centre