

Federal Government continues to fail Aboriginal people

WACOSS is extremely disappointed by the announcement yesterday of the Cashless Welfare Card extension for a further year, and the imposition of a third trial site, following the passing of legislation in the Senate this week. The extension highlights the sustained attacks on people on income support, particularly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, who make up a large majority of people living in communities affected.

Extensive advice was provided against the introduction of the card, and formal submissions from WACOSS and other councils of social service and the wider community services sector around Australia opposed the card. The third trial site will be in the WA Goldfields region.

“The Minister for Social Services claims to want to listen to feedback on the expansion. WACOSS has communicated concerns, along with many other experienced providers. The resounding advice is that the Cashless Welfare Card lacks evidence-based research, and further stigmatises those living on income support,” said Louise Giolitto, CEO, WACOSS.

“Extending such trials is offensive and discriminatory, and further stigmatises people on income support, without assisting their situation or improving services in the community,” Louise said.

The announcement comes following a series of examples showing the lack of consideration by the Federal Government for Aboriginal-led initiatives and solutions.

In November, the Prime Minister rejected the Uluru Statement of the Heart, a request for inclusion and acknowledgement of First Nations people in the Constitution, released by the Referendum Council. The statement was supported by more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and backed by nearly 10,000 non-Indigenous supporters.

This week, a report by the Close the Gap campaign identified a widening of the life expectancy gap in the past 10 years, while highlighting the poor implementation and near abandonment of the strategy – following cuts of \$530 million to the Indigenous affairs budget by then Prime Minister Tony Abbott.

“There is a disturbing trend from this Federal Government. They are not open to listening or collaborating with First Nations people and communities. These sustained attacks show disregard for Aboriginal voices, and Aboriginal-led solutions, and quite frankly, disrespect. The Government is failing our First Nations people, time after time after time,” said Louise Giolitto.

“There needs to be significant investment in Aboriginal-led solutions if the Government is serious about making a difference to the lives of First Nations people. Punitive measures that repress people’s freedom to participate in society is not the answer.

“The Federal Government is failing our First Nations people. In the 10 years since the National Apology, the Federal Government has learned nothing,” said Louise Giolitto.

Ends.