



MEDIA RELEASE

To: News Editor
From: Uniting Church Synod of WA,
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Uniting Church WA calls for an end to the Cashless Debit Card

The Uniting Church WA, at the 43rd Annual Meeting of the Synod of WA held this weekend, has agreed to call on the Commonwealth Government not to expand Cashless Debit Card trials, and instead work with communities on transitioning to a voluntary scheme co-designed with communities that includes holistic and coordinated support services.

The Uniting Church WA also expresses concern for the well-being and treatment of people affected by the Community Development Program (CDP). It commends the alternative proposals of the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory, and encourages collaboration with similar groups around the country.

Effectiveness of the Cashless Debit Card trials is inconclusive, and there is evidence in some circumstances of increased domestic-related assaults and police-attended domestic violence associated with the trial.

The use of the income management cards has disproportionately affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with more than three quarters of cardholders identifying as such.

“Our people are sick of being managed. For the full history of colonisation, we have been told by governments what we can and can’t do. All apparently for our own good,” said Rev Robert Jetta, Chair of the Western Australian Regional Committee of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress.

“These cards are no different and this so-called Community Development Program is more of the same thing. How is it empowering to punish our people who are already struggling below the poverty line on Newstart?”

The CDP is a Commonwealth Government program that has resulted in discrimination against, and exploitation of, many First Peoples who have been locked out of the normal job market.

The CDP is targeted towards job-seekers who are living in remote regions and who are in receipt of Newstart Allowance, Parenting Payment or Youth Allowance benefits. The overwhelming majority of participants are Aboriginal people.

People on the CDP have been forced into Work for the Dole labour immediately, which is not the case with people seeking work on Newstart who are not on the CDP. They have been given fewer options than people seeking work elsewhere in Australia, such as training, voluntary work or participation in non-vocational support programs.

Rev Steve Francis, Moderator of the Uniting Church WA, said that it is unfair to punish people who are seeking work in remote areas.

“Sixty percent of the people receiving social security penalties are participants of the CDP, despite only being 5% of people seeking employment,” he said. “Fines handed to people who are already experiencing hardship is only creating more poverty. This program needs to end. There are better ways of supporting people into the workforce.”

Ends

For media enquiries and interviews,

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