
MEDIA RELEASE

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Evaluate Income Management against Alternatives

Family Relationship Services Australia (FRSA) is concerned that the compulsory income management provisions contained in legislation passed by the Senate last night will come at the cost of investment in alternative programs of support for families with children.

“Income management is a very expensive form of assistance for low income families and it may not be the best way to deliver the outcomes intended. Evidence from the implementation of compulsory income management in Northern Territory communities as well as the voluntary income management trials in WA suggest that the cost-benefit is not clear, particularly in comparison to alternative programs of support” said Samantha Page, Executive Director.

“There are many Family Support Programs that have been extensively evaluated and proven to deliver positive results for families in a cost effective way. Income management should be fully assessed against these alternatives through independent research and evaluation, before being implemented in new regions. There should also be consultation before decisions are made about the use of income management in new areas, consultation that considers the context of community needs and the capacity of existing support programs”.

“We understand that the Government is looking for ways to improve the financial security of low income households with children and we support that intention. However, those on the front line of service delivery consistently identify the need for increased investment in programs that target the underlying causes of financial problems rather than the symptoms. Flexible support programs that can assist families to address issues across the spectrum of health and mental health issues, housing stability, debt consolidation, budgeting, parenting issues, school attendance, relationship functioning and so on are likely to have more long term benefit. “Despite a wealth of evidence to support increased funding for programs such as these they are chronically under-resourced across the country.

“For over a decade every report into improving responses to children at risk has called for greater investment in early intervention services for families to reduce family breakdown and reverse the growth in the number of children being placed into out of home care. Any investment in income management is potentially a lost opportunity to invest in alternative programs with proven efficacy”.

FRSA urges the Government to commission an independent evaluation of Income Management against the alternatives and consult with the Family Support Sector on future investment in assistance for families affected by disadvantage.

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FRSA is the national peak body for family and relationship services across Australia, our members deliver services in over 650 locations and see over 3000,000 clients each year. For more information visit www.frsa.org.au