

Punitive & Punishment
The Cashless Debit Card

**Inquiry into the Social Security (Administration) Amendment
(Repeal of Cashless Debit Card and Other Measures) Bill 2022**

**The National Council
& of Single Mothers
Their Children Inc.**

August 2022

(www.ncsmc.org.au **)**
ncsmc@ncsmc.com.au



Eliminate and respond to violence, hardship and inequality for single mothers and their children.

The National Council of Single Mothers & their Children Inc (NCSMC)

An organisation dedicated to single mothers and a platform whereby both the community and the Government can communicate. NCSMC can comment on policy and legislation and ensure that the lived experience is available and presented. NCSMC provides information, referrals, and assistance to single mothers through our electronic platforms. In the past year we have responded to tens of thousands individual requests whilst our information post can reach up to 100,000+ per week. One of our greatest strengths is our expertise and commitment in working with and for the advancement of single mother families affected by economic insecurity, hardship, and/or gendered violence.

Inquiry into the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Repeal of Cashless Debit Card and Other Measures) Bill 2022

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc (NCSMC) congratulates the Government on the swift action to halt the individual and systemic harm due to the cashless debit card (CDC), often referred to as the *Indue card*. Income management is an outcome of flawed, inadequate and prejudice policy deliberations. It did not respond to disadvantage; it transferred, restricted, and placed the blame upon the shoulders of those compelled to a regime of control for their economic survival. Consultations were managed or non-existent. There was an unwillingness to accept and to listen to the voice of the policy targets, they were powerless. The increased financial distress, the increased safety concerns, the increase of mental health issues was well-known but ignored. People did not have enough money to relocate to escape the cashless debit card whilst their neighbours and or different population groups were living with a creeping awareness that they could next. The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc (NCSMC) was responding to women whose difficult lives became intolerable due to the cashless debit card (CDC). The most predominant theme was that the Australian safety net had betrayed them and turned their backs on the wellbeing of their children. Despite individual circumstances the cashless debit card (CDC) was commonly experienced as a forced and unwanted hardship leading to homelessness, hunger with an increase in violence and depression. Again, we congratulate the Government upon taking action, listening to evidence and abolishing the cruel, stigmatised, and costly social experiment.

“I can say that this has made me try to take my life twice.

I could not pay for food at my local markets.

I have gone days without food because of this card”

Our expertise is derived from our own research, collaboration with others and steeped in the rich but often tragic experience of women who have sought our service. It is from this unique but clear vantage point that we present our submission and recommendations

Recommendations

1. Abolish the cashless debit card (CDC). It is our hope that this could be completed by the end of September 2022.

Promote financial counselling services, Centrepay, Moneysmart and other non-discriminatory information and support services. A transition hotline in Services Australia and within community-controlled organisations, for the minority of CDC uses who may seek out an alternative or transitional options.

2. Eliminate all forms of Income Management including the Basic Debit Card.
3. Reinvest the savings into the Social Security System. The most prudent and strategic investment would be restoring the Parenting Payment Single (PPS) for families whose youngest child is 16 years. Reversing successive government decisions which reduced the child threshold to 8 years. Recent [research](#) found that the majority of the single mothers who lost access to the PPS were survivors of family violence and coercive control. The report states that 90,000 wanted to leave but couldn't, [whilst](#) 8,000 women a year are forced to return to abusive partners.

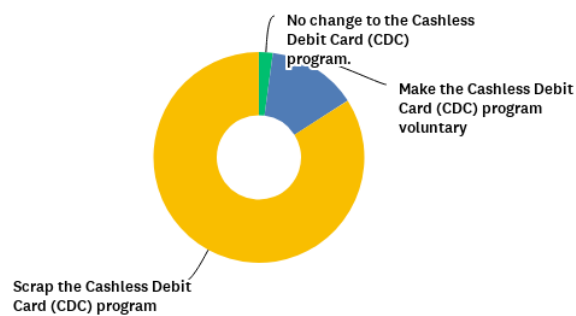
Economic security, certainty and safety are deterrents against homelessness and hunger. It provides women with a chance to protect them and their children whilst enabling future planning. Imagine the positive outcomes if the expenditure and profits associated with the cashless debit card (CDC) was directed to the individuals who needed it the most.

NCSMC welcomes the establishment of a *Wellbeing Budget* and a *Voice to Parliament* with the optimism that such harmful, costly, and racist policies may be condemned to history.

Cashless Debit Card Survey

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc facilitated a survey regarding the lived experience of the cashless debit card (CDC). The survey went live in June 2021 for 2 weeks, it collected 96 responses. The majority of respondents were sole parents (65%) with 8% stated that they were First Nations people. The survey was anonymous, questions could be skipped, whilst additional statements were voluntary. NCSMC has directly lifted representative statements from respondents which can be found from page 5 to 17.

Q8 What outcome would be best for you?

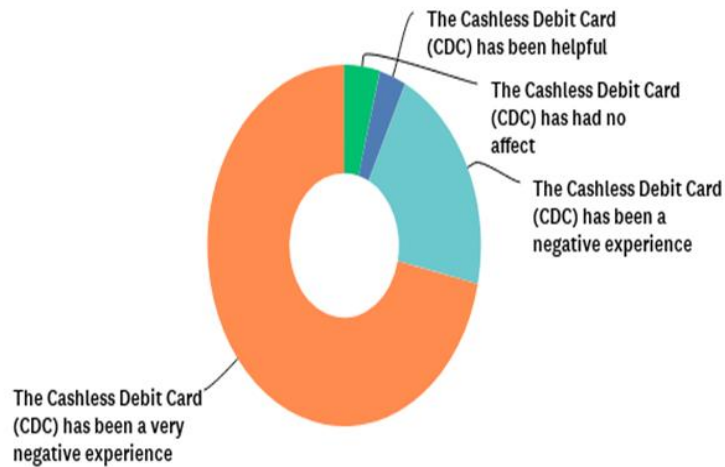


What outcome would be best for you?

No change to the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) program	2.13%
Make the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) program voluntary	13.83%
Scrap the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) program	84.04%

Lived Experience

Q4 What is your experience of the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) program



What is your experience of the Cashless Debit Card (CDC) program	
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has had no affect	4.21%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been helpful	3.16%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been very helpful	0.00%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been a negative experience	21.05%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been a very negative experience	71.58%
Other (please specify)	

I survive on cash, everything I own is from garage sales or op shops. Most of my food comes from the farmers market or roadside stalls. I cannot afford to buy new things from shops, nor can I afford a

lot of store-bought items. I'm not alone it's the only way single mothers can afford to live and feed their children on what is the lowest paid yet most important job.

I can't take my daughter to second hands shops, garage sales, Facebook marketplace because I have to have proof just to buy second hand items!! My daughter likes going on the rides at the shops that are \$2 I never have changed to even let her ride them. My mental health isn't the best and I have gained more anxiety when I use my card.

Not able to rent not able to go out to meet people not good for young person.

For me being on the Indue Card makes it harder for me to budget and pay my bills. It is more difficult overall but the only positive is I can send money internally to my family in remote communities knowing they'll be making purchases of food.

I had so many people look down on me when I use the card.

I ran a bottle shop at a hotel. We had a dedicated terminal which accepted Indue. We implemented a process where all transactions on Indue had receipts printed to ensure staff were using the terminal as specified. It was used for food, accommodation, soft drinks, and food. When there were issues in the town, Indue would cancel all merchant's ability to use the card then give it back to those who complained. It does not operate the way is told.

I have experienced stress and more financial stress having limits on what I can spend where. Going out for dinner is hard as I have to balance two cards, I can only buy a drink on one and have to buy food on other.

Instead of having all my money in one place I must pay different bills in different accounts and remember what goes where on which week.

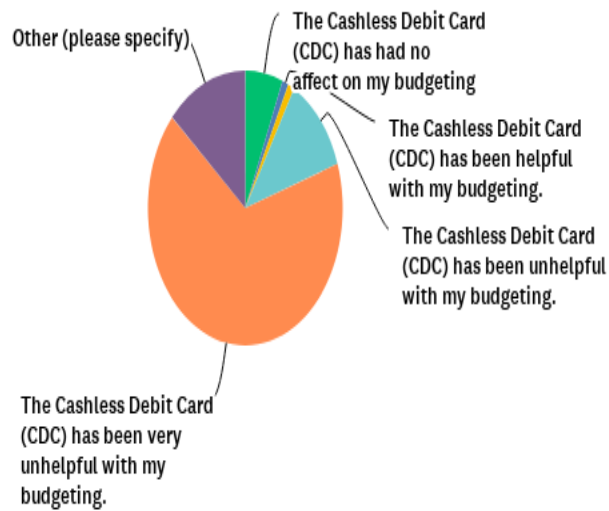
Not fit for purpose. Paying INDUE a lot to do a bad job. Mucks up continuously. Is an administrative burden that people who already have a high administrative burden with multiple regular appointment, chasing multiple regular reports and dealing with NDIS.

Not able to pay bills or loans without having to ring all the time.

I have had a shopping cart full of food for me and my child. I had to walk out with nothing as the card didn't work even though it had \$2000.

Budgeting

Q5 The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) and your budgeting.



Q5. The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) and you're budgeting.	
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has had no effect on my budgeting	6.25%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been helpful with my budgeting.	1.04%
The cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been very helpful with my budgeting	1.04%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been unhelpful with my budgeting.	11.46%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been very unhelpful with my budgeting.	66.67%
Other (please specify)	13.54%

It has limited what I would spend on my children playing after school sports and dance.

I'm more than capable of budgeting.

I was doing my own budgeting without the card.

The card does not help with budgeting as it does not work as the way it was advertised.

I work so don't really see the need for me to be on this card when I earn my own money!

I budget fine. I never needed any help and still don't.

The cashless debit card makes me spend more as I cannot buy cash items and save. If there is any mistake by someone else in my financial situation it goes against me and regardless of whether I was not to blame.

Can't budget, not able to touch money in card.

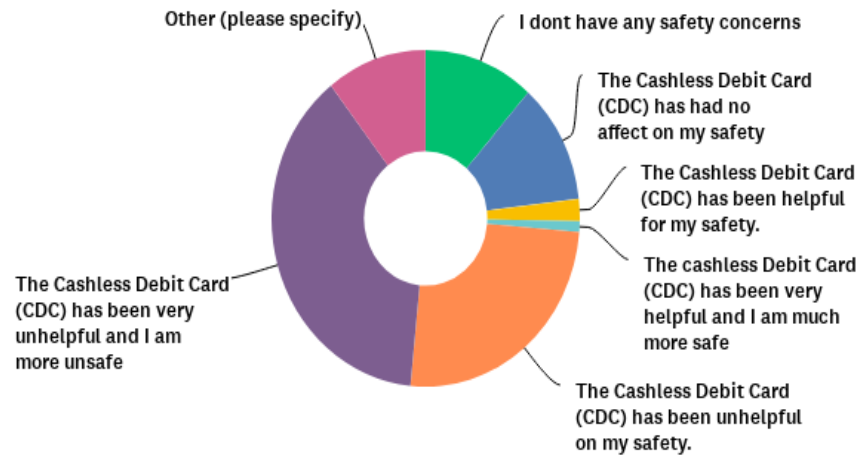
You can't budget on that sh*t card.

Instead of having all my money in one place I must pay different bills in different accounts and remember what goes where on which week.

Lost bank interest income, lost income from micro-investments linked to everyday bank account. Stress from rent not coming out on time resulting in rental breaches tarnishing my previously excellent record. Unable to shop for second hand goods at markets or on Facebook.

Safety Issues

Q6 The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) and your safety.



The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) and your safety	
I don't have any safety concerns	11.58%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has had no effect on my safety	11.58%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been helpful for my safety.	2.11%
The cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been very helpful, and I am much safer	1.05%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been unhelpful on my safety.	25.26%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been very unhelpful, and I am more unsafe	37.89%
Other (please specify)	10.53%

Not safe at all. I don't have a house over my child or my head now.

I've had to rely on my mum, and I worry that if I have to Rent a home again, I will be left homeless as real Estate's in our area do not like renting to those on indie. There is already a house shortage in rental market, and this is creating more competition and homelessness.

Coming from an abusive past relationship I would have less access to flee as I would not have options that don't require cash. I could not hide from my partner to set myself up to flee. No life

My staff were abused and threatened by people who were trying to legitimately purchase items or obtain accommodation or food which are approved items.

I am coming from a background of domestic violence where my finances were controlled within an inch of my life and my children's life, I know very well how to budget and don't need this card to reminded me of my most horrific situations that I was put through. It very demeaning and corrosive card.

I feel unsafe because the card is creating a horrible life.

In the 3 years I've been subjected to this lunacy, the CDC has 1) attempted to prevent me from accessing a private speech therapist in my community. 2) prevented me from using my tax return to buy my son a bedroom suite. 3) put a bunch of people with no mental health, disability, or domestic violence skills in charge of my financial situation in an arbitrary manner. When my ex-husband treated me this way, the family court called it financial control.

I worry that if I have to leave quickly and rent a home again, I will be left homeless as Real Estates in our area do not like renting to those on indie.

I could not hide the statement from my partner. He would know where I ran to.

This card has caused more domestic and family violence than I have ever seen. Things are becoming harder to obtain with the CDC. Even basic necessities such as shopping, clothes, and medical care.

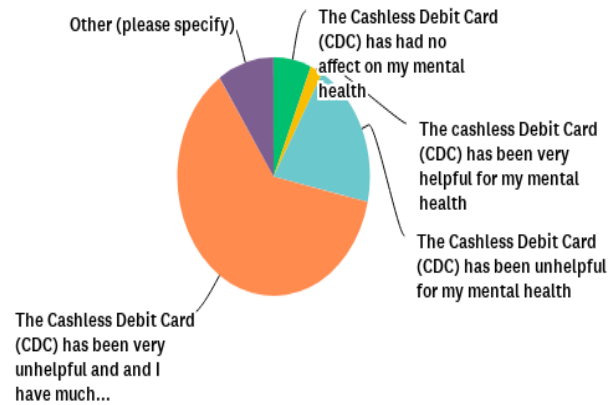
My ex used to track my spending and beat me for it

Since this card came out my ex-partner who has an alcohol problem got even more violent when they took away the majority off his money which made it worse for me.

He used the online account to track my every single purchase and anything that wasn't approved by him would earn me a beating.

Mental Health

Q7 The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) and your mental health.



The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) and your mental health.	
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has had no effect on my mental health	6.32%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been helpful with my mental health	0.00%
The cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been very helpful for my mental health	2.11%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been unhelpful for my mental health	20.00%
The Cashless Debit Card (CDC) has been very unhelpful and and I have much poorer mental health	62.11%
Other (please specify)	9.47%

Makes my depression and anxiety worse

I get depressed at the thought of it controlling my life.

People recognise the card and look at you when you are using it. It is like you have done something wrong. It's humiliating.

Depression not able to communicate with other people as I can't go out because of the card.

My anxiety, depression and PTSD got worse. Felt helpless.

Myself and my wife both got off it as it took a massive hit on our mental health and has pushed up the suicide numbers

Depression and anxiety and stress

Before the cashless debt card, I have never been in debt or had to loan money from family. My mental health has deteriorated while on this card and I have been put under more mental strain. I also horrified that my child has learnt that at age 5 yrs she cannot ask mum to go anywhere because she now asks, "can the money card work here?" She should not have to ask that, and it has made me feel like I am ruining her childhood because she has to think like an adult about the price of thing and if we can even go to a place cause of this card.

As a newly single mother this card only added to my stress and accelerated my mental health issues. Previously never having relied upon welfare payments. The experience was degrading, frustrating, humiliating, and stressful. A single parent for a period of time trying to overcome a domestic violence situation where my finances were controlled within an inch of mine and my children's life. This card brings back terrible horrific memories. This Cashless Welfare card is demeaning, corrosive and controlling mechanism and is a huge failure on this governments understanding of human beings on social welfare.

Housing Issues

A sole parent with a solid work history who has been made homeless/ been shunted from my community and forced to move 2000km interstate, while I was pregnant. Studying full-time. Indue would not let me pay cash rent. So, I was homeless for many months and still paying the price of that. It continues to control my life and I struggle to pay rent in my area, despite having literally thousands trapped in the card. My child is first nations and suffering as a result of our loss of financial autonomy.

I just want to pay rent. She is 12 months old, and I still breastfeed. This is cruel.

I can say that this has made me try to take my life twice. I couldn't pay for food at my local markets. I've gone days without food cause of this card

Only ever been homeless after the Indue card was brought in. You can't pay bills because if you have 50 in one account and 75 in another and your bill is 60 it's harder to pay Can't go to the market for food or buy second-hand furniture or clothes online. Remote areas rely on online shopping and because Indue don't cover unauthorised transactions there is no safe way to buy. PayPal isn't allowed.

I have troubled every time I need to pay my rent, it's ridiculous. I have to call indue and Services Australia just to redo it all over again. It's putting me at risk of losing my house.

Paying rent hard had as they only accept bank transfers. I'm on a month-to-month lease so each month I had to get approved.

It has stopped me, paying rent on time to private landlord. I could not purchase second-hand items which I needed when my fridge and washing machine died. I felt very alone and socially an out-cast. I didn't have enough cash to buy cheap market goods.

Made paying my rent hard as they only except bank transfers. I'm on a month-to-month lease so each month I have to get approved.

Absolutely horrible card. I have children with needs, and this makes it very difficult for us to do things. My real estate didn't accept the card which made my payments late until I could set up centapay which left me with faults. Couldn't repay loans. My mental health has gone down the drain. I feel like I'm a prisoner on this card. I am a single mum that doesn't have time to even think about alcohol.

I've lost my house due to being on this card and finding a rental is virtually impossible due to being on this card. I filled out all of the paperwork so Indue could direct debit my house payments and not one single house repayment was paid. Most real estate's that have affordable housing in my town don't use EFTPOS so being on this card has been more of a setback than a help. Due to being a

full-time single dad and not having anywhere for us to live it's affected my mental health heavily. I've contemplated suicide a few times just so my kids can use my superannuation to house themselves.

This card should be illegal.

This card has had nothing but negative impact on my life! As an example, I was mistakenly double charged by Woolworths for a big food shop. I did online as it is hard to go shopping some days with a sick child. Following 5 days of nonstop phone calls between them and indue I've been told if Woolworths don't send an email in two weeks, indue won't release the funds back to me until after Christmas. So, I can't even pay my rent this week and will be 1 week behind until after Christmas when they release the funds. I'll have to call them to change and fix my monthly rent allowance just to pay my rent and catch up on missed weeks. My normal bank would never hold my money from me for 2 weeks and do nothing to help knowing it's my rent money.

I can't pay my rent with the indue card and if I call to ask for help, I get the response of it's nothing we can do your real estate needs to get centre pay. I can't control my real estate's actions but all I can do is try and pay my rent somehow, so my daughter has a home.

This cashless debit has put me behind in my rent and other bills. It's crap

I find my rent doesn't come out sometimes and if it does, I cannot access my \$200 allowance. Of course, I have the money in my account. I also have had difficulty paying for items. The worst part of the card is that it doesn't keep up with my deductions. I have organised accommodation but when I went to the place the money was not in the account even though it was when I organised everything.

I can't pay my rent with the indue card and if I call to ask for help, I get the response "it's nothing we can do your real estate needs to get centre pay". I can't control my real estate's actions but all I can do is try and pay my rent somehow, so my daughter has a home.

Geographical Comments

Can't use it to buy fuel at half the remote service stations and most mechanics done accept it. Landlords don't like the card because, they always receive money late and they pay international transaction fees on the money they receive for rent. The allowed rent amount never lines up with the month payments, so it's always off. You can't pay for childcare.

I have grave concerns for persons on CDC some rural places do not have opal cards or ambulances so if someone were very sick and needed to go hospital, they have to walk 100 kilometres or more or suffer at home. The bus only takes cash.

I live in area on the card but does not mean I should be on this card. No understanding of my own circumstances.

No ability to save money. Card declined for no reason at places it shouldn't (Coles and Woolworths for example). Rent has been late due to Indue protocols. Being on this card makes me feel like I am a criminal or have done something wrong. I don't drink or gamble. I have always paid my bills and rent on time. Why am I on this card? I moved to Bundaberg while pregnant and was put on this card straight away. I lived in Bundaberg for less than a year and moved back to live with my family in Tasmania and have been on this card ever since. There is absolutely no need for me to be on a program like this.

I am not on CDC but if the program were extended to lake Macquarie NSW, I could not imagine anything worse.

Consultation

I am on the cashless debit card. I feel like I'm being punished. I have had no choice but to be on it because I'm on it I'm consider unable to manage my finances. There is no reason for this. I am considered guilty without cause. It is very difficult to get off and I have to prove that I am financially stable to get off it.

I cannot shop easily on the marketplace where people sell second hand things, and I could save a lot more money that way. I was given no reason that I'm on this cashless debit card other than everyone in my area is on it.

No public consultation with people who would be put on the card at any stage prior to receiving card in post. No one interviewed me to ascertain if I needed the card.

Basically, CDC should never have been imposed from the word GO in our trial region. There was no consultation whatsoever and people had no say. People didn't have any choice, they were forced. It is not normal, no one in government considered the wellbeing of recipients. If only they knew. If only they talked to the real people to hear what they had to say. CDC needs to be banned immediately.

This card it's toxic, it's destroyed and has deteriorated the quality of life of people in the trail region of East Kimberley Kununurra WA

I think the area I live in does not mean I should be on this card.

Eliminate and respond to violence, hardship and inequality for single mothers and their children.

I should be only on this card if I have done something wrong. I want to be removed from the indie card. I do not consent to being forced onto this card.

Wellbeing and other Considerations

As a Carer this makes life harder not easier. There is a high administrative burden. Payments we get for our child and supplements are 100 per cent retained. Some of these allowances are specifically to counter the additional cost of raising a child with disability and do not have any limits placed on what they can be used for. I specifically use these to fund things the NDIS don't fund and shouldn't have to ask a faceless admin person who has no knowledge of either disability or the Social Security Act for permission to use those funds.

Can no longer stretch the dollar to make my disability pension go far enough. So, I've had to cut back on essentials and the little I could save for school fun days and sports is eaten up. Basically, because I have to buy from big chains instead of cash markets. My dollar is worth less than it used to.

Final Comments

If a man did this to his wife it would be called financial abuse, but my government thinks it is OK to do this to us!

I am not an imbecile. Let me make adult financial choices

The whole CDC experience has been overwhelmingly harmful on so many levels for me.

I am pleased that my parents aged 91 and 89 are not in a catchment area as they would be forced into income management after a lifetime of being to manage their own finances.

Please get rid of it.

Only able to be used in limited stores with no ability to shop in cheaper alternatives. Also, stigma as the card is known to public to be a welfare card. Very degrading when already struggling. There are other bill paying services linked with Centrelink that do not have this public visual label

Example - I am waiting for a new NAB bank card so tried to use my indue card on eBay to buy a special gift for my sister (t shirt) but couldn't and was advised because it's an open site and I could get alcohol that my indue card would not work. Words I want to say but would probably be banned describe how I feel. I'm a 51-year-old ADULT MAN who has to ask a complete stranger over the phone if I can buy a t shirt!!!! I have zero children, don't smoke, only rarely enjoy a drink, and am told that I can't buy a t shirt. Discrimination and common sense come to mind

I can't even go out to a pub for a nice steak without being declined and left standing their embarrassed because I can't pay for it

I can't even buy a shopping cart full of food and nappies for me and my child without being declined and having to walk out with nothing