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Closer look needed at proposed welfare changes

Anglicare Australia Executive Director Kasy Chambers has called for the important media and community debate on the proposed welfare reform to be based on the proposal itself, rather than rhetorical argument.

“We have seen national newspaper run the line that the Government’s proposed income management scheme will only apply to *‘small groups of people with particular problems, dysfunctional families whose children do not go to school, for example’*; and government staff claim that the Racial Discrimination Act cannot be reinstated any other way” Ms Chambers said today.

“This is wrong in both cases.”

“The proposed legislation – in fact – takes a broad brush, stand alone approach to income management – making all people on particular benefits, if they live in ‘disadvantaged areas’, subject to the regime. A young woman under 25, with a 6 month old baby, who received supporting parents benefit in three of the past six months, would automatically be categorised as *‘disengaged youth’* and subject to income management.

“I’m not sure how the media or leading politicians see dysfunction, but it’s certainly not our view that every young woman with a baby is by definition dysfunctional.”

“This welfare reform legislation is a nationally significant proposal. It should not be opposed or championed lightly, nor should the political interests or views of participants in the debate cloud a close examination of the actual changes to the law and their likely impacts.”

“The popular line that this legislation will only affect people whose lives are already dysfunctional is not only untrue. It also misses the point. We need to be confident that the initiative will assist those people it is intended to assist. The way to make a difference where people need help is by providing individual support, not merely putting a control on their spending.”

“Similarly, while this legislation happily reinstates the Racial Discrimination Act, it is disingenuous to say the least to suggest that it could only be done this way. The Human Rights Commission made that clear when it published its [Draft Guidelines](#) for Income Management in November last year. Unfortunately, that is the argument being used to encourage Indigenous people to support the Bill.”

“Anglicare Australia would support reform – where it is based on evidence – to help people function better, improving their wellbeing and that of their families and communities. There may well be a role for income management of some sort alongside individual plans and wrap around support if that were the aim. However, that is not the approach taken by the broad brush, stand alone scheme in the Bill before Parliament.”

“It would be much more constructive if this important debate was informed by a close look at the actual legislation rather than rhetorical views about its aims and its reach” Ms Chambers said.

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