From the Director’s Notepad
Communications
Central Australia
Co-morbidity Project
Mental Health Coalition
Member Profile
Community Sector Workforce Toolkit

INCOME MANAGEMENT

ONE in 10 Territorians will have their income quarantined within six months, the Prime Minister has revealed.

Prime Minister Kevin Rudd yesterday gave his second report to parliament on closing the gap since the apology to the Stolen Generation.

He said the Racial Discrimination Act is being strengthened to prevent discrimination in areas such as income management.

Income management allows Centrelink to quarantine half a person’s welfare to ensure it is spent on food or accommodation.

Under the previous government, this affected 1400 people.

It now affects 16,000 Territorians. And when it is expanded…

Look inside for more information on Income Management………
In a couple of week’s time, the Senate Community Affairs Committee will conduct a public hearing in Darwin into the Government’s proposed amendments to the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation. If the legislation is passed, July 1 2010 will see significant changes to the way the income management system operates in the NT.

Income management – or ‘welfare quarantining’ as it is widely known – was announced in June 2007 as part of a package of ‘intervention’ measures into remote Aboriginal communities in the NT. All those living on the 73 prescribed communities who were receiving social security benefits had 50% of their welfare income ‘quarantined’. This money was made available to beneficiaries on a BasicsCard – a debit card which would be accepted only at selected merchants, and could not be used for to purchase of alcohol, tobacco or ‘pornography.’

Under the proposed legislation, income quarantining will be applied right across the Northern Territory to selected target groups: ‘disengaged youth’, ‘long term welfare payment recipients’ and those deemed to by centrelink or child protection authorities to be ‘at risk’.

Income management will no longer apply to those living on remote communities who are receiving an age pension or a disability pension. But the restrictions will now apply to people of all races living in Darwin, and right across the NT, who fall into one of the target groups.

It is likely that the imposition of income management, and the issue of a BasicsCard to a 19 year old, living with her parents in the suburbs of Darwin who has been unemployed for 13 weeks will arouse considerable resentment. The forty-five year old long-term unemployed man living in Alice Springs will also become subject to the income maintenance regime. In the view of NTCOSS, before income management is imposed across the NT, it is critical that one simple question be asked: Does it work?

The Rudd Government routinely stresses the importance of what it calls ‘evidenced-based’ decision making. Simply put, this means that there is a clear and objective basis for the policies that the Government implements. Income Management has been operating in remote communities in the NT for more than two years, and NTCOSS remains unconvinced that it has been successful in improving the lives of disadvantaged Territorians.

The initial justification for the Northern Territory Emergency Response was the Little Children are Sacred report written by Pat Anderson and Rex Wild for the NT Government. It has been widely noted that the actions taken by the federal government were not necessarily in keeping with the recommendations of the report. The question that must be asked is: Are the little children any safer?

NTCOSS believes that the federal government has failed to provide clear, objective evidence to demonstrate that income management has been effective. In these circumstances we would argue that there is not sufficient justification to expand the income management system.

The federal government proposes to spend $352 million dollars over four years managing the income of 20,000 people. We feel this money could be better spent on increasing income support payments, and providing more effective services for vulnerable Territorians.

Wendy Morton
Executive Director
NTCOSS

ACOSS National Conference
2010: A Vote for Equity
Rydges Lakeside Canberra
25—26 March 2010
REGISTRATIONS OPEN
Is income management the answer?

NTCOSS Central Australian Policy Officer, Jonathan Pilbrow, and I have been busy writing a submission to the Senate Committee which is reviewing the government’s proposed legislation to modify the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

The new bill will see Income Management measures introduced across the whole of the Northern Territory. However NTCOSS is concerned that the government has not demonstrated that income management has been effective even on the prescribed communities.

Minister Macklin’s case for expansion of income management appears to rely on anecdotal material rather than on objective data. Our submission to the Senate Committee highlights some of these key reservations.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s Report on the evaluation of income management in the Northern Territory notes that “the research studies used in the income management evaluation (point-in-time descriptive surveys and qualitative research) would all sit towards the bottom of an evidence hierarchy.”

Of the 15,000 people who are currently subject to income management, only 76 people from four communities were surveyed, and the report concluded that “the overall evidence about the effectiveness of income management in isolation from other NTER measures was difficult to assess.” The reports authors added that “the evaluation was dependent on the perceptions and views of various stakeholders.”

Encouraging reports are emerging to suggest that increasing amounts of fresh fruit and vegetables are being sold on remote communities. However, these reports appear to be based on telephone surveys which measure the perceptions of store managers, rather than ‘hard data’ about the value or volume of sales of these commodities. It should also be noted that community stores were required to stock supplies of fruit and vegetables to gain their Basics Card licence. Increasing levels of consumption may simply reflect the fact that these products are more available, rather than the

imposition of income management.

Also the figures that indicate that Basics Cards have increased sales on food and clothing may not be absolutely reliable, because the system is very limited. The data provided tells us only how much Basics Card money was spent on non-prohibited goods, but not what proportion was spent on food as opposed to other allowed items such as DVDs, CDs or toys.

NTCOSS would like the government to provide more objective data that clearly demonstrates the success of income management, before Minister Macklin implements her proposal to expand the program across the whole of the NT.

The NTCOSS submission is available from the NTCOSS website at www.ntcoss.org.au

ACOSS survey spotlights problems

The recent release of the 2010 ACOSS Australian Community Sector Survey demonstrates that vulnerable Territorians are suffering because community organisations are under-resourced.

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) Survey found that in the Northern Territory, these organisations are simply unable to meet the demand for their services. Most worryingly, 77% of all those people turned away were seeking housing and homelessness services.

The survey also indicates that the community services who work to assist those with housing problems and other difficulties are at breaking point. Average staff turnover in these organisations across the NT runs at a staggering 52%.

Community organisations in the NT struggle to attract and retain quality staff. Wages in the sector languish almost 20% behind the salary packages available to those doing similar jobs in government and private enterprise. The chronic shortage of housing in the Territory also makes it difficult to attract staff from southern locations.

Territorians are entitled to a strong and stable community sector to ensure that people in our community are happy and productive. The NT cannot prosper if people are left behind in large numbers.

Graham Ring
Communications Officer
NTCOSS
Heat on youth in the Centre

Every summer, young people in Alice Springs are demonised by politicians and the media. Young folk who use public spaces to socialise – as they do all around the world – are a particular target, as the government instructs police to crack down on ‘loitering’ and truancy. The inevitable result of treating these complex social issues as ‘law and order’ problems is that young people end up in the criminal justice system. A crucial opportunity to work with these young people to address the underlying causes of the problems is lost.

The youth services sector has repeatedly called for relatively simple initiatives to be supported by the NT Government, including the provision of after-hours recreational services for young people in Alice Springs. There is nowhere in Alice Springs where vulnerable young people can meet to ‘hang out’, especially after hours and on weekends. A ‘drop-in centre’ of some kind would provide a diversion from anti-social behaviour, and would allow youth workers and other professionals to build relationships with young people and commence case management where required. Such a service would also help to bring together the disparate groups of young people in Alice Springs.

The Central Australian Youth Justice Committee (CAYJ) campaigns and advocates for an appropriate Youth Justice System in the NT, with a focus on criminal justice issues. CAYJ has representatives from a range of organisations in the Northern Territory who work with young people in the criminal justice system. The committee of CAYJ comprises representatives with significant on-ground experience working with at-risk youth in Alice Springs. CAYJ suggests that a key reason for youth crime and risky behaviour is boredom. Strategies for engaging youth - particularly those involved in the criminal justice system - have been shown to be successful in other states.

For this reason, CAYJ is astounded that the NT Government is focusing on policing, rather than providing youth services designed to engage young people in education, training, and other meaningful activities to minimise their contact with the criminal justice system. CAYJ is extremely concerned that the use of loitering notices and the practice of ‘moving on’ young people from central locations serves to push them out of the public eye, without addressing any of the underlying questions around why these young people are not at school.

Those best equipped to approach young people who are disengaged from school or congregating in public spaces are the youth workers and youth service providers, who are trusted by these young people. While police have a role to play, it is important to distinguish between good policing, and the kind of professional support and case management that can be provided by youth workers and support services. Mechanisms must be put in place to ensure that police refer at-risk young people to an appropriate service for assessment.

If the community is genuinely concerned about youth issues, and the complex questions of young people’s rights, safety and positive development, then it makes sense to engage and adequately resource Alice Springs youth-specific services. Youth services are not seeking to excuse young people who break the law. However we believe that taking a punitive approach to youth issues in Alice Springs will not result in the positive outcomes we are all working towards.

Jonathan Pilbrow
Policy Officer
Central Australia

NTOCSS Alice Springs has moved back to
4 Elder Street, Alice Springs.

Contact details remain the same -

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An opinion .......

Income Management - Expanding the Injustice

The existing system of Income Management (IM) imposed in the Northern Territory is unjust, and a violation of human rights. The proposal to expand compulsory Income Management to all ‘disadvantaged’ communities does little to address the inherent racism of the policy, and does nothing to create ‘equity’.

The new policy appears to be driven primarily by the Governments desire to expunge their dishonourable act of maintaining the suspension of the Race Discrimination Act (RDA). While the extension of IM to ‘communities of disadvantage’ may provide the bureaucratic and legal vehicle to re-instate the RDA, it does nothing to re- instate the dignity of those who are affected by the policy.

The policy of Income Management contradicts the Government’s notional commitment to social inclusion. Instead the policy exacerbates exclusion. This seriously flawed policy effectively labels all disadvantaged people as ‘incompetent, untrustworthy and unable to manage their finances.

This policy will continue to impact more heavily on Aboriginal people than on non-Aboriginal people. It will mean that those who live in poverty will be told how, when, where, and on what they can spend their money. They will also suffer the indignity of being required to produce the BasicsCard – the symbol of their alleged financial incompetence – when they make purchases.

Peter Yu’s review team found that that Aboriginal people felt ashamed to be publicly identified and treated differently under the Income Management system.

“Experiences of racial discrimination and humiliation as a result of the NTER were told with such passion and such regularity that the Board felt compelled to advise the Minister for Indigenous Affairs during the course of the Review that such widespread Aboriginal hostility to the Australian Government’s actions should be regarded as a matter for serious concern.” *October 2008 - Northern Territory Emergency Response Review Board Report*

While some Aboriginal people welcome compulsory IM, there are also many voices of dissent. Some people living in poverty with no resources will welcome any change. This does not justify the policy. The Government has failed to offer people a choice that secures basic rights and dignity and ensures that outcomes are universally beneficial.

Those who do not support compulsory Income Management - or the related intervention policies - are portrayed as failing to protect children and families, and failing to condemn child sexual abuse. As a result, thoughtful evidence-based solutions that will secure long-term benefits for people have been ignored.

Prior to compulsory IM there were no banking or savings systems available to most people in remote communities. There were no financial counsellors and there was a poor presence of Centrelink officers. There was in effect no system available to support those who wished to manage their income differently. Two small scale voluntary systems operating through Aboriginal organisations (one in Central Australia and one in the Top End) were successful. Rather than build a system of financial services to address need, and develop income management skills, and self responsibility, the Government imposed a system of state control.

The money the Government has spent implementing Income Management could have been better invested. This investment could have equated to over $1M in each Aboriginal community to provide a banking system, financial literacy, family support and cultural and community solutions to income management and school attendance.

This is not an ‘Aboriginal’ problem or a ‘poor persons’ problem it is systemic. Poor people are not by definition stupid or incompetent. Many are very skilled at managing their income. The answer lies in case by case support that is driven by the individual, and providing a range of options that support voluntary Income Management, facilitate better financial literacy and provide a more effective financial service infrastructure.

Our response must be to create solutions that offer safety, while at the same time respecting the rights and dignity of all Australians. We can, and we must, create solutions that ensure that basic human rights are protected. We cannot ‘Close the Gap’ unless we honour the fundamental rights of all citizens, black and white, rich and poor.

......... from Jane Vadiveloo
an NTCOSS Board Member
Caring in the Heart of the Country

The Alice Springs Mental Health Rest and Relaxation Centre is a long name for a service which is making short work of the antiquated notion that mental illness is a shameful thing which must be banished to the margins. The centre is bright and comfortable, and located right in the middle of the Alice Springs CBD. It features a welcoming relaxation room, complete with massage chairs, where carers can relax when they need a break from the rigours of the job.

The centre also offers a range of varied activities including yoga, art classes and morning teas. Even more importantly, it offers carers the chance to get to know each other, and share the stories of the important and often challenging work they do.

Not so long ago, this service operated from a small room tucked away in the Salvation Army building on the outskirts of the central business district. They were open for 20 hours a week and had space just large enough for a carer to squeeze in and have a cup of tea. But things have changed.

NTCOSS Project Officer Janine Sims visited the service on a number of occasions to offer assistance. “Janine inspired me to feel that we could expand” recalls service co-ordinator Tracey Hatchard. “She encouraged us to consider further possibilities - like workshops for carers, and a resource library. We were able to do the groundwork to plan what we wanted for the future.”

Janine was able to offer practical assistance to ensure that the service actually had the capacity to implement these exciting new plans. “When we first went down to meet with everybody in Alice Springs in November 2008, we mapped out all of the existing services in the town and then looked at the gaps in service delivery” says Janine. “We found that there wasn’t a physical place where carers could go. They had been stuck away in the backblocks, but people decided that it should be moved to the centre of town as a challenge to the stigma that shrouds mental health.”

These days, Mental Health Carers NT Co-ordinator Tracey Hatchard and her small team have moved into larger and more hospitable premises in Bath Street, right in the heart of town. The catalyst for this impressive new development was the planning made possible by the

Building Capacity in Mental Health, Family Support and Carer Respite project.

Mental Health carers may experience a wide range of sometimes conflicting emotions including shame, fear, guilt, anger, frustration, sadness, and of course, love. Unhappily, many carers often find their way to services like Mental Health Carers NT only when they reach a crisis point. The new service is keen to reach out to carers before this occurs, and provide them with the assistance and support which will make their task more manageable.

The Alice Springs Mental Health Rest and Relaxation Centre is a boon for mental health carers in ‘the Alice’, and a tribute to the locals who wouldn’t let go of a good idea.

* Thanks to the ‘Building Capacity in Mental Health’ project for permission to use this story.

Mental Health Carers NT
Left to right— Tracey Hatchard, Co-ordinator, Andra Somerville, Support Worker, Rose Goldner, Admin Support.
CO-MORBIDITY PROJECT

NTCOSS welcomes Barry White

On an earlier trip to the Top End, Barry White, a keen fisherman and kayaker was visiting Adelaide River and asked if the river was a good place to go kayaking. ‘Probably not’ – or words to that effect - was the advice he received from the locals about plunging into the crocodile-infested waters.

Barry has just arrived in Darwin to take up the role of project co-ordinator for the NTCOSS ‘Co-morbidity project’. The Northern Territory is plagued by one of the highest rates of alcohol consumption in the world, and drinking at dangerous levels is commonplace. Unfortunately this behaviour is all too often associated with relationship problems, health problems, and concerning levels of violence.

Roughly 35% of the people who suffer from alcohol or other drug problems also have mental health issues. The focus of the co-morbidity project is to build the capacity of the community to provide treatment which recognises that the issues of substance misuse and mental health concerns are closely related. Few drug and alcohol counselors are also trained to deal with mental illness. To be most effective, treatment needs to address both the issues.

Barry has fifteen years experience working with homeless people for Baptist Care in South Australia, and holds a degree in drug and alcohol counseling. He’s a great believer in the value of collaboration and networking. He is interested in ‘building capacity’ so that the community is in better shape to tackle these pressing problems.

Alcohol is a chemical depressant, so it’s no surprise to find that many people with alcohol problems also struggle with depression. The tendency to combat depression by self-medicating with more alcohol contributes to the development of a vicious circle. Barry stresses the importance of equipping counselors with the skills to deal with this situation. He speaks of the need for an ‘all agency response’ with everyone working together to ensure that clients receive the best quality care.

Barry was born and bred in the South Australian tuna town of Port Lincoln, but grew up in Port Adelaide in the days when it was a tough working-class area, rather than the gentrified locale of today. He supports the Port Power football team and jokingly dismisses the Power’s arch rivals – the more up-market Adelaide Crows as ‘silver spooners’.

The NTCOSS crew welcomes Barry to Darwin and wishes him well as he takes on the challenging role of the co-morbidity project. We are going to suggest that he confines his kayaking to Lake Alexander. Then again, we’ve heard that there are some good spots along the Daly River...

NTCOSS organized the National Launch of the guidelines on the management of co- occurring alcohol and other drug and mental health conditions in Darwin on Thursday 4th March 2010. The project was funded by the Department of Health and Aging, and the guidelines were produced by the National Drug and Alcohol research Centre, University of New South Wales.

The guidelines have taken several years to develop, and will be a great resource for any government and non government agency involved in the treatment of people suffering from substance use and mental health disorders.

The purpose of the guidelines is to increase AOD workers’ knowledge and awareness of mental health conditions, improve confidence and skills of AOD workers working with clients with comorbid mental health conditions, and provide guiding principles for working with clients with comorbid mental health conditions.

The launch was attended by approximately fifty people from government, mental health, and AOD treatment agencies.
The NT Mental Health Coalition is the peak body for mental health representing non-government organisations that provide services to people with mental health needs. It operates as a sub-committee of NTCOSS. The Coalition also holds a seat on the Mental Health Council of Australia (MHCA), the national peak body for mental health. The Coalition is a member of Community Mental Health Australia which is a national alliance of state and territory peak bodies.

**Incorporation**

One of the main priority areas flagged at our planning day in June 2009 was the Incorporation of the NT Mental Health Coalition, it was decided by our general membership that in order for us to take the next step in our evolution we must become an incorporated body.

Being incorporated opens a lot more doors for the coalition and will enable us to follow some of the big picture things we have all looked at but have not been able to put in place, things like training for instance.

We have a meeting set for March 16 where we will formerly adopt the name of the body and the Constitution; we will also be electing a board and public officer to handle the process of application etc.

At that meeting we will also have a look at the branding of the coalition and whether we need to change our corporate look before we go through the process of incorporation. I am hoping we can get away from the old butterfly logo and get something up and running that is more representative of the NT. If anyone has any ideas please pass them on.

**Phil Dempster**  
Program Coordinator  
NT Mental Health Coalition

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Coalition Members hard at work at the planning day in June 2009

We formed a working group to look after the task of getting us ready for incorporation and that group has worked very hard to get us to the line. I am very happy to say that we have been supported all the way by our funding body the Department of Health and Families and we are in the final stages of that process today.
Anyway, that was (Salvation water...now staff Run mental Representing Consisting and development consumer Commission, of needs way grow, and members Palmerston TEMHCO in involvement. Consumer management by organisational, general involvement. Cupids by consumption is, of needs arrival of the Army to the voice. New arrow to the place, work forms Officer to the Top Volunteer Day 2008 bimonthly newsletter and advocacy. TEMHCO has been and is involved in a number of organisational boards and networks and lists the involvement in the formation of the NT Mental Health Coalition as a highlight.

Moving into permanent ‘digs’ in Palmerston in 2009, we are now looking at ‘ramping’ up our services to the next level. In the next month we will be introducing a volunteer program, employing a Social and Recreational Coordinator, undertaking a significant advertising campaign (big thank you to the Mental Health Carer Respite Project for help with this), increasing our involvement in the recovery process of consumers while they are on the ward and formalising a number of policy and procedures. So that’s us. If you know of someone who may be interested in our services referral is a matter of picking up the phone and dialling 8932 6686 or come and visit us at 3/7 Rolyat Street, Palmerston. And if you know of someone who is looking for a different type of volunteer role, please give us a ring or email temhco2@bigpond.com.

Program times :-

- Humpty Doo Peer to Peer Support Group every Monday
- Palmerston Peer to Peer Support Group every Tuesday and Thursday
- Palmerston Art Group every Tuesday
- Palmerston Odd Job Group every Thursday

TEMHCO also supports Mental Health Carers NT by providing transport to Pete’s Place in Darwin every Friday. Join in the great activities or simply hang out, have a chat and enjoy a low cost meal with friends.

Please call for times, more details or if you need transport to attend on 8932 6686

Catherine Balfour-Ogilvy
Manager
TEMHCO
COMMUNITY SECTOR ‘WORK FORCE TOOLKIT’

The ‘Building a Stronger Community Sector’ project forges ahead

Community organisations in the Territory have always struggled to recruit and retain staff members. It’s a long way to move to the NT from interstate, and accommodation is scarce and expensive, and wages languish well behind what is on offer in government and the private sector.

The Community Sector Workforce Planning and Development Strategy is looking at ways to address these obstacles. To date the project has concentrated on developing and distributing some practical tools to assist organisations to recruit and retain staff and to undertake workforce planning.

NTCOSS has now completed Stage Two of the project, which built on the research conducted and resources developed in Stage One. Workforce Planning and Development Workshops were delivered in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine, and Tennant Creek. The Workforce Development Toolkit was well received by workshops participants, including managers and staff from a broad cross section of NT community sector organisations.

A Workforce Planning and Development Consultation and Coaching Service was also established. NTCOSS was able to assist community sector organisations in the effective use of the toolkit to recruit and retain staff.

Stage Two also included the completion of a survey on employment conditions in the sector. Results will be circulated to NTCOSS member to assist in staff recruitment and retention, and will also inform the award modernisation debate.

NTCOSS is now undertaking Stage Three of the Strategy, which will have a continued focus on community sector

Workplace’ workshops, ‘Salaries and Condition’ seminars and online workforce planning and development resource with an NT focus are highlights to watch out for in 2010.

Five steps to retain your most valuable asset, your staff:

Produce clearly written duty statements, policies and procedures.

Provide access to training, tools, resources and information.

Treat employees equally and with respect.

Recognise positive performances promote a sense of belonging.

Support employees to balance work and family life.

People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.

Maya Angelou

NHULUNBUY VISIT

A big thank you to all the wonderful people of Nhulunbuy who met with Wendy Morton, Janine Sims and Graham Ring on our recent Community Sector Workforce visit.

A full write up will be published in our next Newsletter.

Janine Sims
Project Officer
Community Sector Workforce
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY 2010 WORKSHOPS
“Building a Stronger Community Sector”

**Bullying in the Workplace:**

Workplace bullying is a form of repeated unreasonable behavior, which threatens, intimidates or humiliates a person in the workplace and creates a risk to their health and safety.

In a recent workforce survey workplace bullying was identified as one of the three top reasons why workers leave the Community Sector.

With two distinct workshops, one targeted at employees and one at employers, participants will learn what workplace bullying is, the ramifications of it on both a personal and an organisational level plus how to establish effective risk management strategies.

**Workforce Financials:**

As a manager what financial skills and knowledge do you need? What expectations should you have of your finance staff? Does your organisation need a bookkeeper or an accountant? Are you up to date with the latest Tax Office requirements? Do you know exactly what a new salary position costs?

Get all your workforce financial questions answered in these practical workshops presented by Debbie Wilson, an exceptional financial controller with many years experience working collaboratively with NT Community Sector organisations.

**Managers Workforce Skill Swaps:**

Enjoy an informal breakfast and the unique opportunity to network with some of the NT Community Sectors most experienced managers.

An overarching workforce theme will be introduced then time for frank and open discussion allowing you to get to the bottom of some of your staff management, recruitment and retentions issues.
NT Council of Social Service has moved.

We are now at 33 Bayfield Road, Malak. Our contact details remain the same:

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