

24 November 2023

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs

By online submission

Dear Committee Secretary,

Re: Social Security (Enhanced Income Management Regime - Volunteers, State Referrals, Commonwealth Referrals and Exemptions) Determination 2023

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs' [review](#) of the three legislative instruments made by the Minister for the purposes of Part 3AA or Part 3 B of Social Security (Administration) Act 1999

The RANZCP is a membership organisation with over 8,000 members, which prepares doctors to be medical specialists in the field of psychiatry, supports and enhances clinical practice, advocates for people affected by mental illness and advises governments on mental health care.

The RANZCP notes the Enhanced Income Management (EIM) program logic to restrict the purchase of items such as alcohol and gambling products, so participants prioritise expenditure on essential expenses such as rent, food and utilities, is inherently flawed.[1, 2] The RANZCP recommends the Community Affairs References Committee (The Committee) support the abolishment of the EIM and the previous Income Management Scheme.

Moving forward, the RANZCP welcomes the Senate's commitment to consult with communities who has about social security measures as an alternative to IM. We reaffirm the need to consult with psychiatrists, addiction medicine specialists and Aboriginal health professionals drawing on their experience treating people with complex needs relating to addiction, mental health, wellbeing, housing and employment difficulties.

There are disproportionate levels of poverty among those with a mental health condition. As psychiatrists who are treating people with mental illness, we have a unique expertise on the mental health impacts of social security provision.[2-4] Social security needs to be understood as part of the healthcare system to ensure that people receive responsive support that aids a person's recovery and wellbeing. If the social security system is unable to adequately support those with mental health conditions to engage in treatment, then greater costs are incurred by the responding public mental health system.

The RANZCP recommends long-term systemic reform to:

- Introduce less adversarial processes to social security claims to avoid discrimination and stigma against people with mental health conditions and substance use disorders.
- Endorse trauma informed practice approaches and healing informed approaches when managing claims of people with a reported mental health condition and/or substance use disorder, with particular consideration given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Provide clear, publicly available information to improve access to social security supports for people with a mental health condition and/or substance use disorder.
- Scale up investment in evidence-based and culturally appropriate public rehabilitation and addiction services to ensure that people with addiction issues can access the help they need, when they need it.
- Fund research to fill gaps in knowledge regarding the lived experience of people with a combination of addiction, mental health and gambling issues.

The RANZCP reiterates our offer of support to the Government and the Committee to achieve such reform. If you wish to discuss this further, please contact Nicola Wright, Executive Manager, Policy, Practice and Research Department via nicola.wright@ranzcp.org or on (03) 9236 9103.

Yours sincerely



Dr Elizabeth Moore
President
Ref: 4193

References

1. Cobb-Clark DA et al. The Effect of Quarantining Welfare on School Attendance in Indigenous Communities. *Journal of Human Resources*. 2021 Apr. Available at: <https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/26335>.
2. Maher S. Welfare Quarantining in Australia 2007-2020: A Review Of Grey Literature. Border Crossing Observatory. 2020 May.
3. OECD. Sick on the Job?: Myths and Realities about Mental Health and Work, Mental Health and Work. OECD Publishing. 2012.
4. Isaacs AN et al. Lower Income Levels in Australia Are Strongly Associated With Elevated Psychological Distress: Implications for Healthcare and Other Policy Areas. *Front Psychiatry*. 2018 Oct 26;9:536.