



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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MEDIA RELEASE

27 January 2017

Centrelink debt recovery scheme a health risk - AHCRA

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA) is deeply concerned about the health impacts associated with the Federal Government's approach to recovering alleged Centrelink debts, said Chair Jennifer Doggett.

"We are keen to see all welfare payments directed appropriately but sufficient evidence has now emerged that some of the most vulnerable people in our community are now facing increased anxiety and fear along with a reduction in their already limited incomes," Ms Doggett said.

"People who are sick with multiple chronic diseases, mental illness, mobility problems and disabilities are being asked to prove they are not receiving inappropriate payments. They are being asked to find documents dating back six years and are reporting great difficulty contacting anyone at Centrelink to discuss the situation.

"In particular we are concerned about the number of people who are reporting an increase in mental health problems related to the Government's actions.

One person on the Disability Support Pension wrote:

"...paralysed with depression have been considering suicide since I received this notice. How am I supposed to pay this when already multiple times throughout the year I go to bed hungry because I'm unable to pay for food medication and housing expenses on the allowance I get."

Another person on the aged care pension shared this experience:

"I was unaware I had an alleged debt until I got letters late last year. I am actually on the Aged Pension and suffer from anxiety, hypertension and Diabetes 2. This has spiralled me into depression."

Source for quotes: www.notmydebt.com.au

"Despite the Government's attempts to amend the scheme, it is still putting pressure and stress on people who are already in a difficult situation. This risks escalating existing mental health problems, resulting in poorer health outcomes and increased health care costs.

"AHCRA strongly endorsed the call by the Australian Council of Social Services for an immediate end to this unfair and poorly managed policy and supports ACOSSs proposal for a round table meeting of relevant stakeholders to address the issue," Ms Doggett said.

For further information or comment: Jennifer Doggett 0403 325 980

For more information about AHCRA: www.healthreform.org.au

AHCRA is a coalition of health groups, including consumer, provider and service delivery organisations, working together to improve the health system for Australia's future.