INCOME MANAGEMENT EVALUATIONS

# Background

Income management is part of the Australian Government’s commitment to reforming the welfare system. It ensures income support payments are spent in the best interests of children and families and helps ease immediate financial stress, allowing individuals to seek education and work opportunities.

# Evaluation of income management in the Northern Territory

The Australian Government, in partnership with the Northern Territory Department of Children and Families, is undertaking a comprehensive evaluation of income management in the Northern Territory.

The evaluation is being conducted over four years by an independent consortium of experts from the Australian National University, the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, in consultation with key stakeholders.

The evaluation includes two phases:

## Phase 1 – 2009-11 involved:

* Development of an evaluation framework for new income management over four financial years (2010-2014), including the development of questions for all of the income management measures.
* Development of an evaluation approach that looks at the complexity of the circumstances of people who participated in income management in the Northern Territory.

## Phase 2 – 2011-14 involves:

* Development of detailed evaluation questions.
* Evaluation fieldwork activities.
* A process evaluation examining the implementation of income management and reporting on the barriers and successful factors of implementation, and the immediate effects on people.
* An outcome evaluation of the impact at the individual, family/household and community level. This will draw on administrative data, survey data, longitudinal interviews and case studies to determine the extent of individual, family/household and community level changes over 2010-14 financial years.
* Ensuring evaluation activities are consistent with ethical guidelines.
* The delivery of several evaluation reports covering process and early mid-term outcome and impacts. The final report is due in June 2014.

# Evaluation of income management trials in Western Australia

## Evaluation of the Child Protection Scheme of Income Management and Voluntary Income Management Measures in Western Australia (2010)

In 2010, ORIMA Research conducted an independent evaluation of income management in Western Australia, testing for impacts and early outcomes. This included:

* interviews with people who were on income management or had been on income management
* online surveys of Department of Human Services – Centrelink staff, Western Australian Department for Child Protection staff, money management and Financial Management Program Services and peak bodies
* focus group discussions with community leaders in the Kimberley area, and
* analysis of administrative data.

This evaluation found that income management was having a positive effect on the lives of many individuals, children and families in Western Australia, with a majority of those surveyed in the evaluation believing it had a positive impact overall. The full report is available on the [Department of Social Services website](http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/evaluation-of-the-child-protection-scheme-of-income-management-and-voluntary-income-management-measures-in-western-australia): http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/families-and-children/publications-articles/evaluation-of-the-child-protection-scheme-of-income-management-and-voluntary-income-management-measures-in-western-australia.

## Child Protection Income Management Evaluation (2011-2012)

A further evaluation of income management in Western Australia is being conducted in 2011-2012, that will build on the 2010 ORIMA Study. This evaluation focuses on the child protection measure. It will draw on new sources of data, including a comprehensive review of child protection case files, and in-depth interviews with child protection clients and their child protection case manager.

Because the take up of this measure is greater in Western Australia than it is in the Northern Territory, it will provide a strong evidence base for assessing the implementation and outcomes of the child protection measure of income management. The Department is undertaking the evaluation in a tri-lateral agreement with the Western Australian Department for Child Protection and Australian Institute of Family Studies acting in an advisory role. The evaluation is also under the guidance of an independent non-government advisory committee. A final report is expected in December 2012.

# Evaluation of place-based income management in five locations

The Australian Government has commissioned a comprehensive, multi method independent evaluation of place-based income management and through an open tender process, Deloitte Access Economics was chosen to undertake the evaluation.

The evaluation of place-based income management communities involves comparison with communities with similar characteristics where the policy has not been implemented. The evaluation will cover several forms of data collection and analysis to ensure a comprehensive and robust evaluation including:

* a literature and data review longitudinal client survey
* in-depth interviews with clients and family members
* interviews, focus groups and on-line surveys with stakeholders
* analysis of administrative data.

The evaluation will seek to answer some high level questions about place-based income management:

* How has income management impacted individuals, families (particularly children), and communities?
* Have there been changes in spending patterns, including on food, tobacco and alcohol consumption?
* Has income management helped people to manage their finances?
* Have there been any unintended consequences?
* Was it administered and implemented effectively?
* Were there differing outcomes for each stream of income management - Child Protection, Housing and Voluntary?

The evaluation will be conducted in consultation and engagement with key stakeholders, including the Australian Social Inclusion Board’s National Place-based Advisory Committee and Local Advisory Groups, both of which will include representatives of non-government organisations.

# Where can I find out more?

To find out more on the evaluation of income management in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and the five place-based income management locations please email evaluation@fahcsia.gov.au.

## Disclaimer

The information contained in this publication is intended only as a guide. The information is accurate as at July 2012. If you use this publication after that date, please check with DSS that it is correct.