



Media release

For immediate release - Monday 24 April 2023

New liquidator data reveals more than 100,000 people paid over \$174 million to predatory insurer Youpla/ACBF

First Nations advocates renew call for urgent action in May Federal Budget

The liquidators of predatory funeral insurer Youpla/ACBF, SV Partners, have released shocking new data that reveals for the first time the full extent of First Nations exploitation perpetrated by the company over three decades.

The new figures reveal that over \$174 million was paid to Youpla/ACBF since 1992, comprising over 100,000 individual members and over 150,000 individual policies, including policies for small children and babies. Members paid for years under the misrepresentation that they were paying towards an Aboriginal-owned funeral fund when it was not.

The role of Centrepay in this financial exploitation is highlighted with over \$169 million paid to Youpla/ACBF in the period from 2001 when they were registered for Centrepay payments. The company used Centrepay to market itself as a government-approved essential service.

Centrepay quickly became the payment platform of choice for the company, extracting money from low-income households' Centrelink payments before they had a chance to pay for food, clothing or school expenses.

The Save Sorry Business Coalition, representing First Nations communities across Australia, has been in negotiations for almost a year now with the Federal Government, including five visits to Canberra to meet with parliamentarians and numerous meetings with Minister for Financial Services and Assistant Treasurer Stephen Jones, Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney and the Prime Minister's Office - in addition to numerous meetings with Treasury and NIAA officials.

Despite assurances that the Federal Government is working on an enduring resolution, the above ministers have yet to provide a commitment that the promised enduring resolution will form part of the May Budget. This has raised concerns from advocates and local support organisations about the impact of prolonging this social, cultural and financial crisis in First Nations communities.

The Youpla Benefit Scheme is the interim scheme developed to bridge the gap while this enduring resolution was developed. It expires in late 2023 and is not a suitable long-term option. Extending it in the May Budget will only extend uncertainty and deepen the exclusion of those not covered.

Advocates are aware there is significant cross-partisan support across the parliament for action in the May Budget. There have been positive meetings and statements of support from all significant political parties and a number of key independents in the House of Representatives and the Senate.

Quote attributable to Lynda Edwards, Wangkumara/Barkandji woman and Financial Capability Coordinator at Financial Counselling Australia & 2023 NSW Woman of the Year

"First Nations people are not asking for much, just a meaningful acknowledgement of the harm done and a proportionate response to their financial losses."

"A fair and culturally appropriate scheme would have options to cover those who need repayment, those who need a replacement funeral plan, and those who need a savings product. Financial counselling support would support each policyholder to make the right decisions for their situation."

Quote attributable to Bettina Cooper, Boandik woman and Aboriginal Financial Counsellor at Mob Strong Debt Help

"First Nations people across Australia have been speaking out for decades about the terrible harm caused to their families by Youpla/ACBF. Instead of closing the gap, this has entrenched intergenerational poverty."

"Providing an enduring resolution in the May Budget is an opportunity to demonstrate that the Federal Government is listening to First Nations voices and responding with dignity and respect."

"This is an opportunity for the Federal Government to take a positive step towards closing the gap in relation to Outcomes One and Fourteen - life expectancy, financial wellbeing, and social and emotional health and wellbeing outcomes."

Quote attributable to Mark Holden, Dunghutti man and Aboriginal Solicitor at Mob Strong Debt Help

"Centrepay became the payments platform of choice for Youpla to take First Nations people's money, even before they had a chance to buy groceries or clothes for their kids."

"Previous federal governments and regulators failed to regulate Youpla's predatory practices and their misleading financial products. This Federal Government now has the chance to set a new direction."

Editor's note: The analysis of the liquidator data was carried out by the Save Sorry Business Coalition and has been shared with the Federal Government to inform their budget response. The Federal Government has not released the data they hold on payments made to Youpla/ACBF through Centrepay during the time it was an approved recipient of Centrelink transfers via the Department of Social Services.

Other useful contacts:

- **Mob Strong Debt Helpline** - 1800 808 488 or www.facebook.com/mobstrongdebthelp
- **Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network** - 1800 369 878 or www.ican.org.au
- **Financial Counselling Australia** - www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au

About Youpla/ACBF and the Save Sorry Business Coalition

For almost 30 years, the Aboriginal Community Benefit Fund, trading as Youpla, aggressively sold poor-value funeral plans to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.

Youpla actively preyed on the culturally significant practice of Sorry Business with many people paying tens of thousands of dollars to the company to ensure their families could afford a dignified and culturally appropriate Sorry Business. Federal/state governments and regulators have been aware of the exploitative practices of Youpla for many years.

The Save Sorry Business Coalition is a First Nations-led campaign supported by 130 organisations and over 20,000 Australians seeking a fair and enduring resolution for the 100,000 First Nations people harmed by the misleading and deceptive conduct of Youpla and the massive and prolonged failure of government and regulators over two decades.

Media enquiries: Daniel Scoullar, 0402 596 297, dscoullar@choice.com.au