Robodebt — Australia's automated welfare debt system and Royal Commission

AI in the Public Sector · Good practice · Australia

Quality score: 53/100

Evidence strength: Descriptive / self-reported

Summary

Services Australia's 2016–2020 income-averaging algorithm wrongly raised AU$1.75 billion in welfare debts against ~470,000 recipients. A 2023 Royal Commission ruled the scheme unlawful, triggering a AU$1.2 billion settlement and 57 governance recommendations.

Key dimensions

Dimension	Score
Evidence of impact / measured public value	3/3
Transparency, fairness & accountability	0/3
Transferability / demonstrated replication	2/3
Scalability beyond pilot	3/3
Governance, capability & sustainability	0/3

Evaluated by C-NAPSE

Data sources

C-NAPSE web research — accessed 2026-06-21

Services Australia (formerly Department of Human Services) — accessed 2026-06-21

Royal Commission into the Robodebt Scheme — Final Report (July 2023) — accessed 2026-06-21

Wikipedia — Robodebt scheme (comprehensive reference with primary sources) — accessed 2026-06-21

Amnesty International — Automated risk-profiling systems breach human rights (2023) — accessed 2026-06-21

Oxford Blavatnik School of Government — A tragic case of public policy failure — accessed 2026-06-21

IAPP — Privacy insights from the Royal Commission investigation — accessed 2026-06-21

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