

## More Effective Service Delivery

### Introduction

- 3.1 A general consensus has emerged over the last 20 years that many mainstream and Indigenous specific services are failing to adequately meet the needs of urban (and non urban) Indigenous people. As acknowledged by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services:

The Department recognises that there is a justifiable concern that welfare, as it has been traditionally understood, is now no longer an adequate framework for addressing social disadvantage.<sup>1</sup>

- 3.2 An Indigenous leader expressed it thus:

“mainstream” examples and systems are failing Indigenous people thus setting the challenge to comprehensively review underlying factors and modern needs rather than continuing to try and make a poor system fit the people or the people fit a poor system.<sup>2</sup>

- 3.3 The evidence suggests that Indigenous people in urban areas tend not to use mainstream services and choose instead to use Indigenous community organisations as either intermediaries with mainstream agencies or as replacement service providers, or not to use any services at all – as will be described later in the chapter. As one such organisation explained:

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1 Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS), *Submissions*, p. S446.

2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) Commissioner Northern Territory (North), *Submissions*, p. S390.

while staff [of the Indigenous organisation] make every attempt to assist clients to use the mainstream services available, clients are not comfortable using these services.<sup>3</sup>

- 3.4 The result is overstretched community organisations attempting to provide parallel services while at the same time mainstream agencies may go underutilised or not be given the opportunity to tailor solutions to problems.
- 3.5 However, as mentioned in chapter two, the last decade has seen a major rethinking of the way in which services are delivered to Indigenous people (urban and non urban). In the last half decade in particular, action taken after the rethinking has begun to bear fruit. Services are now being better designed and are more effectively meeting the needs of Indigenous people. It will take time, patience and effort to ensure that the initiatives, many still top down approaches, can lead to improved outcomes at the individual, family and community level. The evidence before the Committee suggests that there is still a way to go yet.
- 3.6 This chapter examines the nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling Indigenous people and how they may be more effectively delivered. It begins by describing some of the key features of service delivery reform to provide a theoretical perspective. The chapter then reviews some of the evidence before the Committee indicating where service delivery remains less effective and where progress is being made.

## Service Delivery Reform

### Inter-Government Agreements

- 3.7 The need to more effectively deliver services to Indigenous people (urban and non urban) was first acknowledged at a government level at a Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in 1992 and reflected in the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders* ('the Commitment'). Under the Commitment, Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments agreed, among other things, that service delivery and planning is a shared responsibility of all levels of government.
- 3.8 At its November 2000 meeting, COAG committed itself to an approach based on partnerships and shared responsibilities with Indigenous

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3 Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, *Submissions*, p. S1468.

communities, program flexibility, and coordination between government agencies with a focus on local communities and outcomes. This commitment included reviewing and re-engineering programs and services to ensure that they deliver practical measures that support families, children and young people.<sup>4</sup> The November 2000 commitments were reiterated at the June 2001 COAG meeting. That Council meeting noted that:

the development of partnerships between Indigenous peoples and governments, greater flexibility and coordination between programmes and a focus on practical outcomes for local communities are key factors in advancing reconciliation.<sup>5</sup>

## Inter-Agency Agreements

- 3.9 As a complement to the COAG process, individual governments are taking steps to improve the coordination of their own programs and taking 'whole of government' approaches to Indigenous funding allocation and service delivery. The goal is to minimise duplication and overlap between agencies.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.10 These arrangements are at their most advanced at the state level. Western Australia, for example, has established an Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee to 'coordinate effectively the activities of all persons and bodies, corporate or otherwise, providing or proposing to provide service and assistance in relation to people of Aboriginal descent'.<sup>7</sup> The Committee brings together the chief executive officers of relevant state agencies and the chairs of key Indigenous advisory bodies. Its aim is to develop clear priorities agreed with Aboriginal representatives, to coordinate the activities of government agencies and provide regular feedback on progress. Similar arrangements at the ministerial or chief executive level are in place in Victoria and Queensland.<sup>8</sup>
- 3.11 The Prime Minister has asked all Commonwealth portfolio ministers to review their mainstream and Indigenous specific programs and services to improve outcomes for Indigenous people. The reviews will be completed

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4 Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Meeting, 3 November 2000, *Communique*, Canberra, p.7

5 COAG Meeting, 8 June 2001, *Communique*, p. 4.

6 For example, see Western Australian Government, *Submissions*, pp. S1625-26.

7 Western Australian Government, *Submissions*, p. S112.

8 See Queensland Government, *Submissions*, p. S1297.

during 2001 and a comprehensive whole of government response will be provided to COAG.<sup>9</sup>

## Key Principles of Successful Agreements

### Agreements

- 3.12 The importance of the COAG Commitment and subsequent resolutions is that they have provided a framework for a series of bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and states.
- 3.13 Bilateral and multilateral agreements have slowly 'evolved' in the last several years, and have been signed, to date, in the health, housing and infrastructure areas.<sup>10</sup> The agreements that have been signed are usually between the Commonwealth, a state or territory government(s), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and other Indigenous groups (such as Indigenous housing authorities or Aboriginal community controlled health organisations). The agreements can cover a broad range of cooperative activities including: data collection; forward planning; demarcation of responsibilities; joint funding arrangement; decision making; and evaluations.
- 3.14 In a parallel process, ATSIC is entering Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with state governments which outline principles upon which partnerships for joint policy development and service delivery can be based. So far these have been signed with Western Australia and Queensland.<sup>11</sup> ATSIC is also in the process of reaching an MOU with the Australian Local Government Association on behalf of local governments.
- 3.15 In addition, there are now hundreds of local, specific arrangements for partnerships and collaborative activities that involve Indigenous organisations and provider agencies.<sup>12</sup>

### Partnerships

- 3.16 A key element of the agreements described above is that they bring together Commonwealth, state and territory governments at the national and regional levels. Equally important is that the agreements incorporate Indigenous organisations or representatives in government program planning, priority setting and service delivery.

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9 Commonwealth Government, *Our Path Together: Statement by the Honourable Philip Ruddock, MP, Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs*, May 2001, p. 16.

10 ATSIC, *Submission*, p. S620.

11 See ATSIC, *Submissions*, pp. S696-707.

12 ATSIC, *ATSIC Annual Report 1999-2000*, p. 13.

- 3.17 The Indigenous participation is based on the recognition that programs are more successful if Indigenous people have input into and play an active role in making decisions that affect them (as with other service recipients). Indigenous organisations must have or be given the capacity to be equal and fully participating partners with governments.

### Community Focus in Decision Making

- 3.18 It is also apparent that a 'one size fits all' approach to service delivery will not effectively deliver services to Indigenous people. There may be national or state based goals, but decisions on how to provide the services are best if based on local circumstances as agreed by local communities. As an Aboriginal group told the Committee:

Giving the community primacy in the planning and delivery processes is the only means to achieving sustainable outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

- 3.19 It is particularly challenging to identify the discrete needs of urban communities – in fact, more so than for discrete remote area communities. The first difficulty in urban areas is to determine who is part of or speaks for 'the community' and in fact what is the community. The best way is to encourage Indigenous people to identify their own community in the context of the various needs.

- 3.20 Commonwealth agencies are now acknowledging that they should assist communities to develop their own solutions, rather than imposing solutions.<sup>14</sup> As a community leader told the Committee for her region:

All of the Indigenous urban-based programs and services have arisen because of a need or needs identified by the Indigenous people of the region.<sup>15</sup>

- 3.21 The challenge is for agencies to acknowledge that Indigenous people know what their problems are, generally what possible solutions are, and that they need reasonable resources applied in accordance with their own priorities to implement locally developed solutions. That being said, governments cannot expect to slip into a passive or just funding role as communities cannot be expected to find all the solutions to their problems.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, community groups must acknowledge their need to be accountable to their community and to the governments that fund them for any expenditure of public money. Indigenous people and

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13 ATSIIC, Murdi Paaki Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1048.

14 FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S447.

15 Margaret Hornagold, *Submissions*, p. S1461.

16 Burns Aldis Community Development Consultants, *Submissions*, p. S359.

the wider community increasingly expect regular reports on how public money is being invested and what is being achieved.

- 3.22 In structural terms, agencies need to delegate to their regional offices or service deliverers the authority to customise services and react flexibly to local circumstances.<sup>17</sup> These issues are discussed in greater detail in chapter four.

### Coordination and a Holistic Approach

- 3.23 Successful agreements involve restructuring different programs in concert so that they can meet the needs of the individuals or the community as a whole. Ideally, agencies and governments should pool resources and funds, as distinct from just coordinate them, so that interconnecting factors such as the housing, education, health and employment needs of individuals, families and communities can be met in a planned, structured and comprehensive way.
- 3.24 Particularly in an urban context, holistic approaches may require a ‘whole of family’ response, recognising that solutions to the needs of individuals will be more successful if they take into account family networks.<sup>18</sup>

### Funding Certainty

- 3.25 The needs of Indigenous people are often intractable and complex and require long term solutions and commitments. Short term funding for agencies or programs that is only guaranteed on a year by year basis does not allow enough certainty for long term planning either by mainstream agencies or grant recipients, nor encourage people to invest effort in programs.
- 3.26 At the macro level agencies, including ATSIC, need program funding certainty, and at the community level grant funding cycles need to be long enough to allow time for projects to demonstrate successful outcomes. The Committee believes that, generally, funding on a triennial basis is appropriate.

### Recommendation 3

- 3.27 **Commonwealth agencies must ensure that, as part of the evaluation and performance reporting requirements, mainstream programs providing services used by Indigenous people, detail:**

17 See D E Smith (ed.), *Indigenous Families and the Welfare System: Two Community Case Studies*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR), Research Monograph No. 17, 2000, p. 112.

18 See chapter four.

- the extent to which Indigenous people or their representative organisations are involved in the identification of needs, priority setting, service delivery and reporting on effectiveness and barriers to access;
- the extent to which the program overlaps or duplicates services provided by any level of government or organisation, and action proposed to address this;
- the potential for pooling program funding with any similar programs of the Commonwealth or other levels of government or organisation, and action proposed to help achieve this; and
- the extent to which the programs encourage Indigenous capacity and leadership building and action proposed to implement, expand and achieve this, while addressing any obstacles.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**3.28 When designing Indigenous specific programs, government agencies take the following principles into account:**

- integration where appropriate with mainstream Commonwealth programs and services provided by other levels of government administration at the community level;
- exploration of the potential for pooling program funding (actual or notional) with any complementary programs of the Commonwealth, other levels of government or other appropriate organisations;
- involvement to the maximum extent possible of local Indigenous people or their representative organisations in the identification of needs, priority setting and service delivery;
- funding be guaranteed for sufficient time as to allow the program to achieve its objectives; and
- encouragement to the maximum extent possible of community capacity and leadership building.

**Each program must also set clear goals, performance monitoring arrangements and reporting requirements. Reporting requirements must include identification of any impediments to Indigenous access to the program and how the impediments will be addressed.**

## A Way to Go Yet

3.29 Governments are working to improve the delivery of services and programs to Indigenous people through partnership arrangements between the different levels of government, Indigenous groups and other interested parties (such as the private sector). However, evidence suggests that there are still some 'top down' reform processes and that individuals, families and community based groups are waiting to see improved outcomes. As a community representative explained:

There is a sort of facade that there is community control of projects and moneys... when in fact the community at the real grass roots level has very little control because we can only bid for funds within the parameters that the funds are made available. So we have to almost design out of our buckets of needs, what will fit into that bucket of funding... there has to be some hard looking at who is really controlling what is going on, because at the moment it is not the communities.<sup>19</sup>

3.30 And an observation from health consultants:

The consultation for [a study] was carried out within the last twelve months [since October 1999], so the issues raised are current. It is alarming that mainstream services are still alienating their Indigenous clients to the extent indicated by the interviewees and focus group participants.<sup>20</sup>

3.31 In the following section, the Committee reviews its evidence highlighting where services could be more effectively delivered but also gives examples of successful and innovative service delivery as an inspiration and encouragement to others.

3.32 The Committee has identified two broad categories of barriers to the efficient delivery of mainstream, and to a lesser extent Indigenous specific services, that remain:

- those barriers that are structural in nature and require a whole of government response; and
- those barriers that are managerial in nature and can be addressed at the level of individual agencies.

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19 Wongatha Wonganarra Aboriginal Corporation, *Transcripts*, p. 40.

20 Burns Aldis, *Submissions*, p. S360.



## Structural Barriers to Mainstream Access

### Fragmentation of Programs

- 3.33 Despite initiatives to coordinate programs and pool funding, Indigenous groups and individuals seeking services or grants are still confronted by a plethora of similar programs, different tiers of service delivery and a complex array of funding sources. This has an impact at the individual level:

The multi-sourcing of specific Indigenous programs and services... often produces significant levels of confusion for Indigenous end-users of programs and services. An overriding sense of fragmentary and dislocated delivery is experienced by families who may be accessing multiple services...<sup>21</sup>

Agency innovation

#### **Client Focus at Centrelink – National**

Centrelink is restructuring its service delivery focus to a 'life events' model.

Instead of having to find out about and apply individually for different allowances, customers will be able to present to Centrelink with a 'life experience', such as having a baby.

Centrelink will then put together the best package of services and allowances from a range of agencies to meet the customer's needs. Customers will not need to know the name of the programs they are using and should only need to tell their story once.<sup>22</sup>

- 3.34 The multiplicity of programs across agencies places stress on Indigenous organisations trying to access government funds to meet the range of needs facing Indigenous people. It is 'the rule rather than the exception' that urban based Indigenous cooperatives, in Victoria at least, administer community housing assistance, Community Development Employment Projects, cultural programs, primary health care, mental health care, substance abuse prevention, as well as a host of State funded programs. This requires the organisations to operate on 'a cocktail of program

21 ATSIIC, Victorian State Office, *Submissions*, p. S580.

22 FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S1490.

funding' that requires extensive management, administration, fiscal care and coordination.<sup>23</sup>

- 3.35 The ATSIC Murdi Paaki Regional Council sees the fragmented nature of program responsibility as leading to 'continuing difficulties' for Indigenous groups to access available funding.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, funding from government agencies is often allocated on an application basis rather than a needs basis, favouring agencies that can prepare the best grant application rather than the one most in need.<sup>25</sup> Funding agencies tend not to recognise the costs of applying and administering the range of grants nor the need for organisations to plan for the long term. The impact of this in Western Sydney is that:

workers are so overwhelmed by the unrelenting pressure of their day to day activities that establishing and cultivating the links necessary to co-ordinate services is simply beyond them.<sup>26</sup>

- 3.36 A counter view, however, is that the multiplicity of funding sources can work well – what cannot be achieved or obtained through one government agency under one guise, 'might just be achievable under a slightly different guise'.<sup>27</sup>

- 3.37 It is not just Indigenous people who have difficulty accessing programs. At an early stage in the inquiry, Anaconda Nickel Ltd told the Committee of its difficulties at that time of trying to draw on funds from several agencies to run a vocational education training course for Indigenous people:

the real issue is that it is extremely unstable, relying on five or six individual contracts to be signed between various departments and agencies before we can actually run one course.<sup>28</sup>

Also:

you are dealing with three different agencies and three different policies and three different rules of administration. The administration rules ATSIC uses to control funding are totally different from those of the state or [the Department of Employment, Work Place Relations and Small Business], and they

23 ATSIC, Victorian State Office, *Submissions*, p S580.

24 Murdi Paaki Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1047.

25 See Commonwealth Grants Commission (CGC), *Draft Report of the Indigenous Funding Inquiry*, Discussion Paper IFI 2000/2, 2000, p. 24.

26 Burns Aldis, *Submissions*, p. S360.

27 CAEPR: *Rethinking the Fundamentals of Social Policy Towards Indigenous Australians: Block Grants, Mainstreaming and the Multiplicity of Agencies and Programs*, Discussion Paper, No. 46/1993, p. 10.

28 Anaconda Nickel Ltd, *Transcripts*, p. 203.

will be different from the [Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs].<sup>29</sup>

- 3.38 However, as an example of good agency flexibility, the Department of Employment, Work Place Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) took a leadership role between the Commonwealth agencies. It ensured, by the end of the inquiry, that there was sufficient funding provided in a flexible way to suit Anaconda Nickel (and others) to ensure adequate funding for the course to be run.

### Program 'Silos'

- 3.39 A further difficulty is that agencies tend not to be aware of the programs or services that their clients – individual or corporate - may be accessing from other agencies. From a client perspective, this can lead to the receipt of disjointed or uncoordinated services because no agency is looking at the client's total needs. Consultancy firm Burns Aldis believes that a major failing within the system is:

the inability of service providers, functioning within the constraints imposed by the reductionist processes of government, to take an holistic approach to service planning and delivery, in the recognition that Aboriginal people and communities are greater than the sum of their parts...<sup>30</sup>

- 3.40 Another group has described this as the 'functional silo mentality that currently exists in many program delivery agencies'.<sup>31</sup> One impact is that single agencies cannot provide satisfactory or comprehensive solutions to complex problems - at the individual or community level - which require responses from a range of services. Indigenous organisations seeking holistic solutions find the responses by single mainstream agencies inadequate, as one explained:

we are finding the people come in and their problems are so diverse that I cannot send them down to mainstream.<sup>32</sup>

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29 Anaconda Nickel, *Transcripts*, p. 217.

30 Burns Aldis, *Submissions*, p. S359.

31 Murdi Paaki Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1048.

32 Bay of Isles Aboriginal Community Inc, *Transcripts*, p. 101.

### Coordinating Housing Services – National

Indigenous housing bilateral agreements have been signed between the Commonwealth, ATSIC and (separately) New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and with Queensland for the Torres Strait region.

The agreements improve and simplify the planning, coordination and delivery of Indigenous housing programs by:

- pooling funds (notionally or actually) to get better value for money;
- reducing duplication between programs and departments;
- coordinating key players and clarifying roles and responsibilities; and
- giving Indigenous people a decision making role at the state, territory and community level.

3.41 One of the challenges for mainstream agencies is tackling the cross agency and interconnected nature of Indigenous needs. As an example in the health area, the Committee was told that:

to fix some of the lifestyle diseases that Aboriginal people currently must carry, we need to get education, employment, housing and other areas of activity outside the health sector well organised.<sup>33</sup>

3.42 The dimensions and breadth of these types of problems place substantial challenges of coordination on agencies and across levels of government as another witness told the Committee:

I have been sitting on the health council for how many years and I have not once seen a bloke from the water authority come along to the health council and tell me how we are going to fix the water... I have not seen anybody from housing... I have not seen anybody talk about education... I have not seen anybody talk about sewerage... Is this the national health strategy... it has not affected how the state brings the housing up to scratch...<sup>34</sup>

33 Western Australian Government, *Transcripts*, p. 226.

34 National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), *Transcripts*, p. 480.

3.43 This quotation highlights the importance of ministers or agencies continuing to take a leadership role in bringing parties together. The problem of coordination in the health sector (as an example), presents at the individual as well as the structural level as the mainstream does not always meet the needs of Indigenous patients. Mainstream primary health care services (provided by general practitioners funded under the Medical Benefits Scheme) are structured to provide for a patient case load that is characteristically high volume and low complexity. In contrast, there is an increasing proportion of Indigenous people who require more complex management.<sup>35</sup> Indigenous primary health service providers are generally acknowledged to provide a more efficient service (financially and professionally) than the mainstream system:

In a [Indigenous community health service] consultation you would have, say, a child being immunised at the same time as the growth being assessed and the mother's health being checked... whereas with the fee-for-service type of arrangement, you would tend to have just one problem fixed at one time and that is \$30, thank you very much.<sup>36</sup>

3.44 Primary health care delivery is an example of an instance where it is currently more effective to deliver tailored services to Indigenous people through Indigenous organisations rather than through mainstream service providers. The challenge for mainstream health delivery is to adopt similarly effective service delivery models and efficiencies that meet the needs of Indigenous people.

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35 FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S1077.

36 Northern Territory Government, *Transcripts*, p. 362.

### Coordinated Health Care – Perth and Bunbury, WA

Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) are the Commonwealth's largest mainstream primary health care programs. Per capita, Indigenous people receive only 27% of the Medicare benefits paid to non Indigenous people. Similarly, per capita, Indigenous people only receive 22% of PBS benefits paid to non Indigenous people.<sup>37</sup>

In an attempt to better utilise and link mainstream funding sources to provide holistic health care for Indigenous patients, a Coordinated Care Trial was undertaken at two urban sites in Western Australia where individual patient care plans were prepared by Aboriginal health workers.

The trial was jointly funded by using pooled funding from capitated Medicare and PBS benefits (Commonwealth) and hospital (state) costs to fund the care, supplementary services for patients and costs of coordination.

- 3.45 Inter sectoral collaboration 'is one of the most difficult processes to achieve'.<sup>38</sup> When combined with the fragmented nature of funding sources and areas of program responsibility it can be difficult for Indigenous organisations trying to develop multi functional strategies by drawing on the resources of different agencies. Programs need to be flexible enough so that they can be tailored to meet local circumstances. The risk is that local groups tend to provide services that they can get funding for rather than providing those that meet local priorities. A further risk is that organisations bypass mainstream services and do not act to seek a review of the mainstream services.
- 3.46 The Committee believes that inter government and inter agency cooperation and coordination will be more successful if one government or agency provides leadership and drives progress. A mining company with extensive experience at negotiating with Commonwealth and state agencies, Anaconda Nickel, commented that:

The continual competition between State and Federal agencies and their respective ministers over successful outcomes and funding frustrates effective partnering... This competition takes form in neither party committing support until it is clear what the other

37 CGC, *Draft Report on the Indigenous Funding Inquiry*, pp. 77-78.

38 Murdi Paaki Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1048.

(both state and federal agency level) is contributing with the result that initiatives are slow and difficult to progress.<sup>39</sup>

3.47 The Committee, accordingly, makes the following recommendation.

### Recommendation 5

**3.48 When Commonwealth agencies are coordinating their activities in joint arrangements, one agency be nominated as the lead agency to take overall responsibility for the partnership and act as a first or single point of contact for service users.**

**Commonwealth agencies involved in existing joint arrangements should review those arrangements to ensure that one agency has overall responsibility for the partnership and that one agency is identified to service users as the first or single point of contact.**

### Short Term Approaches

3.49 A consistent complaint to the Committee is that grant funding cycles are too short and do not allow time to demonstrate successful outcomes, allow ventures to become independent or for Indigenous people to build trust in a service:

You had what appeared to be not a lot of action while all these processes happened in the beginning. Even during what was called the live phase of the trial, a number of the trials where those community processes were happening did not see action on the ground and results until much later in the process.<sup>40</sup>

3.50 Companies and employment placement groups have also noted that employers will not utilise assistance to take on Indigenous people for multiyear apprenticeships if the funding is only guaranteed for one year at a time.<sup>41</sup>

3.51 An allied complaint is that ‘there appears to be a lot of money for “pilot projects” but not enough to sustain successful projects’.<sup>42</sup> Notwithstanding this, the Committee is heartened to see that pilot projects under the auspices of the Commonwealth Department of Family and

39 Anaconda Nickel, *Submissions*, p. S1501.

40 Department of Health and Aged Care, *Transcripts*, p. 167. See also: City of Kalgoorlie-Boulder, *Submissions*, p. S231; Murdi Paaki Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1048; Queensland Government, *Submissions*, p. S1298; Youth Coalition of the ACT, *Submissions*, p. S935.

41 See Anaconda Nickel, *Submissions*, p. S1502; Indigenous Housing Association, *Submissions*, pp. 378-79.

42 ATSIC, *Submissions*, p. S651.

Community Services to strengthen Indigenous communities will run for a minimum three years duration and take into account local rather than nationally determined timeframes and capacities.<sup>43</sup>

### **Recommendation 6**

**3.52 Commonwealth agencies ensure that the following guiding principles be applied to pilot and other projects that they fund for the delivery of services to Indigenous people. The projects:**

- **be designed and run in the context of agreed long term strategies for addressing Indigenous needs;**
- **run for at least three years or for a time that accommodates local timeframes and capacities where appropriate;**
- **be developed locally with a high degree of Indigenous involvement and ownership and where possible be in partnership with mainstream service providers;**
- **have flexible funding arrangements and minimise the administrative burden on participating Indigenous organisations;**
- **be adaptable to accommodate modifications if better processes are discovered;**
- **have evaluation processes that incorporate Indigenous feedback;**
- **ensure processes for skills transfers to Indigenous participants where external personnel are used to implement the projects;**
- **be goal orientated and require reporting on outcomes and impediments to achieving goals; and**
- **make maximum use of mainstream expertise and services.**

### **Mainstream Services: Barriers to Individual Access**

**3.53** There are barriers facing individuals trying to access mainstream services that need to be addressed by individual agencies. Some of these barriers are at the primary service delivery level where, in cases, the reform initiatives have yet to filter down.

**3.54** The Committee acknowledges the difficulties agencies face in providing flexible services for Indigenous people, particularly when they have low

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43 FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S447.



visibility in the community and may form a small proportion of the agency client base.

### Knowledge of Services

- 3.55 The difficulty of access to services may arise because of a lack of knowledge by Indigenous clients of the services available and how to access them, or in some cases a reluctance to attempt to use them.
- 3.56 As a corollary, people may accept a lower standard of service as they are unaware of or unable to deal with service inequities. A tenants' advice service noted that many Indigenous customers of a mainstream public housing authority were not made aware of their appeal rights which, in any event, were often difficult to take advantage of (requiring access to documents under Freedom of Information legislation, written appeals collating all relevant information and speaking before a review panel to the written submission).<sup>44</sup>

### Distrust

- 3.57 Indigenous people may be reluctant to use mainstream services simply because of a lack of trust. The experience of an Indigenous housing association was that:
- when our people come against the Ministry of Housing there is automatically a brick wall there and it shuts off a lot of vision now to see either side's problems.<sup>45</sup>
- 3.58 Allied to the distrust may be feelings of shame, shyness, the perception of prejudice and concern that the service provider may be judgemental and see problems as causally related to a lack of individual care and responsibility. Some Indigenous representatives do not, for whatever reason, encourage people to try to overcome their apprehension and break down barriers. There also appears to be a lack of resolve in some quarters to find a way or a solution to make it easier for Indigenous people to use mainstream services. This is one of the reasons why the Committee seeks to encourage the reporting of barriers to Indigenous access so that these are brought into the open and solutions quickly found to overcome them.

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44 Tenants Advice Service Inc (TAS), *Submissions*, pp. S969-72.

45 Peedac Pty Ltd & Yahnging Aboriginal Corporation, *Transcripts*, p. 306.

## Institutionalised Discrimination

- 3.59 The Committee believes that the historical legacy of perceived institutionalised discrimination has reduced the appropriateness of mainstream programs for Indigenous people and hindered their access to services.
- 3.60 Until the last two decades or so, insufficient effort has been made by some mainstream services to take into account Indigenous experiences, priorities and cultural traditions. An example of such assimilationist policies has been the lack of culturally appropriate school curricula, particularly for more traditionally oriented Aborigines. While mainstream services, are generally becoming more responsive to the needs of their clients, both culturally and regionally, the 'one size fits all' model continues to predominate and impact negatively on Indigenous families.<sup>46</sup>
- 3.61 The Committee notes too that the provision of culturally appropriate service delivery requires more than just the elimination of perceived discrimination. Nor will culturally appropriate services just materialise because of an absence of discrimination.<sup>47</sup> The absence of perceived discrimination is certainly the first step to providing culturally appropriate services but the latter will require a focus on meeting any special needs clients may have.

## A Culturally Appropriate Setting

- 3.62 There are a number of cultural barriers that may discourage Indigenous people (urban and non urban) from using mainstream services. Indigenous people may feel a minority in a 'white enclave'; isolated from family and community support structures; feel that gender differences are not respected and that agency staff are not culturally aware. These may lead to a sense of alienation and resentment that they are dealing with a government agency staffed by people who are not Aboriginal, providing services to them on conditions determined by the government agency.<sup>48</sup>
- 3.63 In these circumstances, it is not surprising that Indigenous people may wish to use Indigenous organisations that are staffed by Indigenous people who are usually from their local community and have a better understanding of their needs. As an Indigenous person explained, in a housing context:

It just feels so much better talking to your own people, too, if there is a problem, a lot of the things you are probably too ashamed to

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46 D E Smith CAEPR, Research Monograph No. 17, 2000, p. v.

47 NACCHO, *Transcripts*, p. 473.

48 ATSIC, *Transcripts*, p. 179.

share with the [non Indigenous]...accommodation manager that comes around.<sup>49</sup>

### **Tangentyere Town Council – Alice Springs, NT**

Tangentyere Town Council is an Aboriginal community controlled agency providing services to the Alice Springs town camps. Council runs a resource centre called the ‘One Stop Shop’.

In partnership with Westpac Bank, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services and Centrelink, camp residents at the Shop can access:

- a bank agency and post office;
- the Council’s housing office (for tenancy, repairs and maintenance);
- the ‘Job Shop’ (a member of the Job Network); and
- purchase electricity cards and firewood.

The Council bus service transports people between their homes, the One Stop Shop, and a supermarket part owned by Council.<sup>50</sup>

- 3.64 The Committee has been told of the benefits of agencies and their staff building personal and long term relationships with Indigenous people.<sup>51</sup> Indigenous people have said that it is confronting to have to repeatedly explain their circumstances or case history to new staff or case managers, or to have to renegotiate previously made arrangements.<sup>52</sup> In this regard, the Committee is heartened to learn that Centrelink, at least, now identifies ‘one main contact’ officer for each customer, with that contact officer taking responsibility for all of the customer’s business. Customers can then receive more personalised service and a more holistic assessment of their needs.<sup>53</sup>
- 3.65 The Committee believes it important that the staff of mainstream agencies who are delivering services to Indigenous people should undertake cross

49 Peedac Pty Ltd & Yahnging Aboriginal Corporation, *Transcripts*, p. 307.

50 Tangentyere Council Inc, *Submissions*, pp. S278-80; *Transcripts*, p. 433.

51 Youth Coalition of the ACT, *Submissions*, p. S900.

52 See TAS, *Submissions*, p. S964; Council of the City of Wagga Wagga, *Submissions*, p. S370.

53 FaCS, *Submissions*, p. S1490.

cultural education. Staff with an understanding of Indigenous culture and history are more likely to be culturally sensitive and deal with Indigenous people in an empathetic way. This will not only have benefits for staff dealing with Indigenous customers but also for staff dealing with Indigenous co-workers.

- 3.66 In any event, under directions issued by the Public Service Commissioner, Agency Heads must ensure that employment strategies in their agency take account of the diversity of the Australian community and the agencies' business goals.<sup>54</sup>
- 3.67 The Committee believes that Commonwealth agencies using non government organisations to deliver services to clients of whom a high proportion are Indigenous, should ensure that those organisations also comply with the requirement to provide cultural training for staff.

### Recommendation 7

- 3.68 Mainstream Commonwealth agencies and non-government organisations delivering Commonwealth services which have a significant Indigenous client base (notionally over three percent of their total client base) or which provide Indigenous specific services, strive to employ appropriately trained Indigenous staff and provide non Indigenous staff with cross cultural training with qualified Indigenous trainers.**

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54 2.13, Public Service Commissioner's Directions. See [www.psmpc.gov.au/publications01/diversityguidelines](http://www.psmpc.gov.au/publications01/diversityguidelines).

### Lowana Young Women's Service – Canberra, ACT

Lowana Young Women's Service is a gender specific mainstream youth accommodation refuge in the ACT. In its 1996-97 Annual Report Lowana noted that Indigenous young women did not use its services. Lowana assumed this was because potential Indigenous clients feared racism and discrimination by mainstream services. In the following year:

- the common rooms and office were decorated with Indigenous posters;
- an Aboriginal flag was hung at the front entrance;
- Lowana secured funding to train a female Indigenous youth worker;
- cross cultural training was provided for staff.

In 1999-2000 18% of the Refuge's clients identified as Indigenous. Lowana is now trying to attract adult Indigenous women onto its management committee.<sup>55</sup>

## Indigenous Staff

- 3.69 There is an increasing recognition by mainstream agencies that Indigenous people are more likely to access services if the agencies are staffed by Indigenous people.<sup>56</sup>
- 3.70 It is desirable for mainstream agencies staff to reflect the diversity of the customer group. The Queensland Department of Families, for example, through its Walking the Talk Strategy, sees the use of Indigenous staff as an 'intrinsic part of management', underpinned by the belief that 'investment in Indigenous staff is an investment in the community'.<sup>57</sup>
- 3.71 Where it is not always possible or feasible for mainstream agencies to employ Indigenous staff, the agencies may be able to use Indigenous groups to provide its services. For example, the Western Australian Department of Family and Children's Services purchases services such as

55 Youth Coalition of the ACT, *Submissions*, pp. S931-34.

56 See Western Australian Government, *Submissions*, pp. S1117, S1121; Northern Territory Government, *Submissions*, p. S1367; FaCS, *Submissions*, pp. S459, S1486; Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service, *Submissions*, p. S1468.

57 Queensland Government, *Submissions*, p. S1291. The Department of Families was formerly the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care.

child care, domestic violence support, child placement, and family support services from local Indigenous groups in the Perth metropolitan area. The Department does this in acknowledgment that Aboriginal people are more likely to access a service if it is staffed by Aboriginal people.<sup>58</sup>

- 3.72 An alternative approach is for mainstream agencies to nominate Indigenous Liaison Officers (ILOs), who may or may not be Indigenous, to assist Indigenous clients or work in a community development capacity.
- 3.73 However, Indigenous groups cautioned the Committee that some agencies see the nomination of ILOs as absolving them of further responsibilities to provide culturally sensitive services. The Committee was told of several circumstances where ILOs were organisationally isolated, expected to relate to and meet the needs of all Indigenous clients and overcommitted for the areas and population they are expected to cover, leading to 'burn out'.<sup>59</sup>
- 3.74 It is important for agencies with ILO designated positions to have at least one male and one female ILO position. Having ILOs of both sexes will help reduce any barriers to access based on gender differences between agency staff and Indigenous customers. Having at least two ILOs will also: reduce their organisational isolation; reduce agency reliance on a single person; help ensure a support network and allow the ILOs to become a hub for agency services to the Indigenous community.
- 3.75 The work of ILOs will be maximised if they are allowed to go out into Indigenous communities to build bridges with clients in their surrounds and explain mainstream services and processes.<sup>60</sup> This may take the form of giving talks or holding question and answer sessions with community groups, visiting schools or the like.
- 3.76 All ILOs will need access to appropriate and regular training and professional support, particularly those ILOs who are not Indigenous.

### **Recommendation 8**

- 3.77 **Commonwealth mainstream agencies which have nominated Indigenous Liaison Officer (ILO) positions ensure that:**
- **there be at least one male designated ILO position and one**

58 Western Australian Government, *Submissions*, p. S1117. Territory Housing in the Northern Territory has a similar rationale for employing Indigenous organisations to deliver some of its services. See Northern Territory Government, *Submissions*, p. S1373.

59 See: Mental Health Council of Australia, *Submissions*, p. S188; City of Wagga Wagga, *Submissions*, p. S370; Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, *Submissions*, p. S275; Winnunga Nimmitjyah Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service, *Transcripts*, p. 511;

60 Binaal Billa Regional Council, *Submissions*, p. S1097.

**female designated ILO position;**

- **all ILOs, and particularly those who are non Indigenous, have access to adequate training and professional support.**

**Lack of Language Services**

- 3.78 Language difficulties present another barrier to mainstream service access for those Indigenous people who do not speak English as a first or even second language. Unless staff in agencies speak the first language of Indigenous customers, there is a risk that their needs may be poorly understood or not understood at all. In this regard, the Committee notes that interpreter services are often available for non Indigenous, non English speaking communities, but not for those speaking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. In this regard, the Committee welcomes the establishment in 2000 of the Aboriginal Interpreter Service in the Northern Territory jointly funded by the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory governments. The service can provide interpreters in 104 languages and offers services at the Royal Darwin Hospital and the courts in Darwin, Alice Springs and for bush circuits.<sup>61</sup> Similar services are also needed in other areas of the country.
- 3.79 In addition, while Aboriginal Australian and Standard Australian are usually mutually intelligible, there are significant differences in vocabulary, grammar, gesturing and socio-cultural context. The result can be misunderstanding between agencies and Indigenous people, which can be particularly critical in places such as courts and hospitals.

**Problems Common to all Disadvantaged**

- 3.80 Indigenous people sometimes suffer problems of access to agencies and services that are common to other disadvantaged Australians. As identified in the McClure Report, the lack of access to affordable, regular and safe public transport may create a significant barrier for those seeking access to services.<sup>62</sup> Further disadvantages include the need to use public phones to contact agencies and case managers; the need for a fixed postal address to receive correspondence from agencies; and poor writing and spoken English skills.
- 3.81 The Committee notes a suggestion by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research for agencies to formulate and implement a framework for the administrative recognition of 'no correspondence' Indigenous clients.

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61 Hon Daryl Williams AM QC MP, *News Release*, 9 April 2001.

62 *Participation Support for a More Equitable Society, Final Report of the Reference Group on Welfare Reform*, July 2000, (the McClure Report), p. 15

Under this proposal, Indigenous clients could self nominate or be nominated after consultation with the agency and be classed as a no correspondence client. Such status would be on the basis of customer characteristics including a low level of literacy, difficulties in responding to correspondence and filling out forms and high levels of mobility. Such clients could be targeted for more intense face to face contact by agency staff about decisions and information that might affect the clients.<sup>63</sup> The Committee sees this as an excellent initiative that could be adopted to advantage by a wide range of agencies that offer services to Indigenous people.

## Community initiative

### **The Grannies Group – Adelaide, SA**

The Grannies Group mainly consists of grandmothers who devote their spare time to helping young Aboriginals living in metropolitan Adelaide. The Group began as friends getting together to help Aboriginal women re-entering the community after prison terms, but soon expanded into a general support network for Aboriginal families. Without any public funding, the group now:

- successfully lobbies state and Commonwealth agencies for resources to help Indigenous young people, particularly those with drug and alcohol problems; and
- provides assistance to women and children suffering domestic violence.

The Group promotes the local Aboriginal heritage through school visits, story telling, dance sessions, language groups and advice on traditional parenting skills.<sup>64</sup>

## Case Managers

3.82 Several initiatives have been described or highlighted in this chapter to make it easier for individuals or families to access the array of services to which they are entitled. The initiatives described include ‘one stop shops’ and Centrelink’s ‘life events’ model. The Committee is impressed with the

63 D E Smith, CAEPR Monograph No. 17, 2000, p. 118.

64 See Grannies Group, *Submissions*, pp. S126-54; *Transcripts*, pp. 342-55.



potential of such approaches, and would like to see them extended using a case manager approach.

- 3.83 The Committee envisages Indigenous individuals and families in need of public services being able to use a locally based case manager who could bring together information and improve access to available services at the Commonwealth and state level in a holistic client focussed approach. Case managers could assist clients identify entitlements to which they may be eligible, but also discuss with clients longer term strategies that identify emerging needs for housing, education or training assistance (for example).
- 3.84 This type of service is already offered, to some extent, on an informal basis by local Indigenous community organisations which act as advocates for Indigenous people and assist them access government services. However, the Committee believes such approaches should be integrated more closely into government service delivery strategies. At the minimum, case managers at one level of government should be able to provide advice on services offered by other governments and assist individuals and families to access those services.

### **Recommendation 9**

- 3.85 **The Commonwealth further strengthen its leadership role in coordinating with the states and territories, the delivery of Commonwealth and state services using a case manager approach. Under this approach, case managers at either level of government would assist Indigenous individuals and families to access the range of services available from either level of government in a holistic, client focused approach.**

### **ATSIC and Service Delivery**

- 3.86 ATSIC is the largest Commonwealth agency in the Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs portfolio and was created to devolve as much decision making in Indigenous affairs to Indigenous people as possible, particularly at the region and community level.<sup>65</sup> Through ATSIC's representative arm, Indigenous elected representatives are brought into the processes of government through regional councils and the Board of Commissioners. The representatives are able to make decisions about projects, programs and policies that affect their communities at the regional and national level.<sup>66</sup>

65 ATSIC, *ATSIC Annual Report 1999-2000*, p.4.

66 ATSIC, *ATSIC Annual Report 1999-2000*, p.4.

- 3.87 ATSIIC also has an administrative arm to support the activities of the Commissioners and regional councils and administer ATSIIC's programs.<sup>67</sup> ATSIIC's appropriation in the 2001-02 budget was \$1,064 million.
- 3.88 ATSIIC's program delivery function is to supplement mainstream government services rather than replace them. ATSIIC's major programs are the Community Development Employment Projects program (see chapter seven); the Community Housing Infrastructure Program (see chapter eight); a number of other national programs and discretionary expenditure for regional councils (see chapter four).<sup>68</sup>
- 3.89 By having structures of elected councillors and commissioners at the regional, state and national level, ATSIIC should be ideally placed to represent Indigenous people from the planning to delivery of mainstream services at the national and local level. ATSIIC also delivers a range of services to Indigenous people in urban and non urban, some of which are described in more detail in later chapters.
- 3.90 The Committee sees an emerging role for ATSIIC as a 'broker' of services as distinct from being a service deliverer in its own right – particularly in urban areas. As a broker, ATSIIC is ideally placed to bring together agencies from different levels of government, the private sector and Indigenous organisations into partnerships to deliver services in a coordinated and flexible way. To this end, the Committee notes ATSIIC's involvement in a number of working relationships with policy makers and service providers.<sup>69</sup>
- 3.91 ATSIIC has memoranda of understanding with the Department of Health and Aged Care; the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs; and DEWRSB. Several state governments too have signed formal communiques with ATSIIC to strengthen joint efforts in policy development and service delivery.<sup>70</sup> ATSIIC has also entered formal agreements with state, territory and other Commonwealth agencies providing ATSIIC with an integral or representative role in the planning and delivery of services.<sup>71</sup>
- 3.92 ATSIIC's expenditure on its own service delivery programs, in urban areas at least, may achieve better results if it is used as leverage to bring mainstream agencies, their programs and others together to provide more

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67 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, *Social Justice Report 2000*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, p. 116.

68 ATSIIC, *Submissions*, pp. S618-19.

69 ATSIIC, *Submissions*, pp. S696-97.

70 ATSIIC, *Submissions*, pp. S698-708. Agreements with other states are due to be signed in 2001.

71 ATSIIC, *Submissions*, pp. S696-97.

effective service delivery. In a sense, this allows value adding to ATSIIC's own funds.

### **Recommendation 10**

- 3.93 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission investigate the greater use of its program allocations as leverage to encourage new and more efficient service delivery partnerships between mainstream agencies at the Commonwealth, state and local government level, Indigenous organisations and the private sector.**

## **Conclusion**

- 3.94 The Committee commends those governments at all levels which are adopting partnership arrangements with Indigenous groups and others. The Committee sees these arrangements as the best strategy to better meeting the needs of Indigenous people. In the urban context, this requires a particular focus on ensuring that mainstream services as seen by the Indigenous end user are accessible and meet his or her needs in a culturally sensitive way. It is possible and it is happening. The Committee is convinced that these new approaches, as they develop from novelty to orthodoxy will lead to real improvements in outcomes.

