



Australian Government
National Indigenous Australians Agency

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**CHARLES PERKINS HOUSE
16 BOWES PLACE
WODEN**

Reference: EC21-001570

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APONT)

Dear APONT Governing Group,

As you are aware, the Government has announced it will replace the current Community Development Program (CDP) with a new program in 2023. Over many years, there have been many discussions, debates and ideas on the best approach to employment services for remote areas of Australia. This includes the proposal prepared by the Aboriginal Peaks Organisations Northern Territory (APONT), the *Fair Work and Strong Communities* proposal.

NIAA is committed to co-design and consultation being defining characteristics of the reforms to remote employment services. I would like this to reflect our highly successful and collaborative approach to designing recent reforms to the *Aboriginal Lands Right Act (ALRA)*. This is consistent with the NIAA's broader practice and the Closing the Gap agreement.

On 1 September, Minister Wyatt released a public discussion paper. We will soon begin co-designing with communities and organisations on different approaches across a number of pilots. The Government's intention is to test a number of components of an employment and engagement program across the pilots. I anticipate many of these components will be similar to those identified and explored in APONT's work. This might include support for job seekers who have the skills and experience to work, but are having difficulty finding work; support for job-like placements and traineeships, especially for young people; vocational training options for job seekers that will lead to real jobs in their communities; and providing the right support, at the right time, to job seekers with complex needs.

To make the most of this reform opportunity, NIAA intends to initiate a co-design working group to help steer a pilot in the Northern Territory (NT). We will shortly write to you and other key NT organisations and stakeholders, as well as NT Government, about this process. It is important to have many voices in this process to ensure the new program benefits from the decades of work and experience in this area. In the meantime, NIAA would like to express our commitment to working with APONT on this process.

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The Government recently introduced the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Remote Engagement Program) Bill 2021 (the Bill). This Bill provides one component among many that communities could choose to pilot. The Bill introduces a new supplementary payment for eligible job seekers in pilot communities so they are rewarded for engaging in a job-like placement. The aim will be for placements to build job seekers' skills in roles delivering goods or services to benefit local communities and provide a pathway for job seekers to find a job. It will be paid at a fixed fortnightly rate (between \$100 and \$190 per fortnight). This would be in addition to primary income support payments and other supplements for eligible job seekers. This Bill is innovative in a number of ways and has been specifically designed to facilitate co-design by setting high level parameters, while leaving most detail to be worked out in legislative instruments through co-design.

The approach set out in the Bill is designed to sit alongside other approaches that do not require legislative change, including training, skills development and non-vocational support. In practice, a Pilot region may choose to use this approach for a targeted group of job seekers, such as young people. The approach might be coupled with other approaches, such as creating new paid employment positions and be tailored for people with barriers to employment.

During the pilot phase, using the approach in the Bill will be entirely voluntary. First, communities will need to choose this element as part of the co-design process, then job seekers within the community will have the option to volunteer for a placement. Although it is only a small part of the overall pilot and consultation approach, we believe it has the potential to be an important tool for communities to explore ways to positively change the program.

Importantly, the Bill has an end date of 2024, as it is only intended to be used during the pilot phase. We acknowledge that following consultation, a different legislative approach will be needed for the full roll-out of the new program.

I acknowledge the work APONT has been leading in developing options for remote employment services. I look forward to working with you closely over the coming months and years. I will ask my team to reach out to you this week to set up a time to discuss further.

Yours sincerely

RYAN BULMAN
Group Manager
Economic Policy and Programs Group

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