



NACCHO

National Aboriginal Community
Controlled Health Organisation
Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands

www.naccho.org.au

Inquiry into regional inequality in Australia

Senate Standing
Committee on Economics

SUBMISSION

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About NACCHO

NACCHO is the national peak body representing 143 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) Australia wide on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing issues. NACCHO's work is focused on liaising with governments, its membership, and other organisations on health and wellbeing policy and planning issues and advocacy relating to health service delivery, health information, research, public health, health financing and health programs. Our members provide about three million episodes of care per year for about 350,000 people across Australia, including about one million episodes of care in very remote regions.

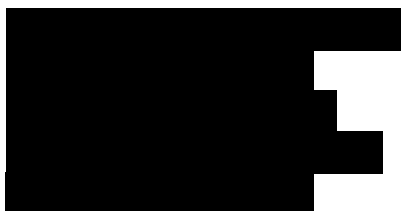
Sector Support Organisations, also known as affiliates, are State based and represent ACCHOs offering a wide range of support services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health programs to their members including advocacy, governance and the delivery of state, territory and national primary health care policies.

ACCHOs range from large multi-functional services employing several medical practitioners and providing a wide range of services, to small services which rely on Aboriginal Health Workers/Practitioners and/or nurses to provide the bulk of primary health care services, often with a preventive, health education focus. ACCHOs contribute to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing through the provision of comprehensive holistic primary health care, and by integrating and coordinating care and services. Many provide home and site visits; medical, public health and health promotion services; allied health; nursing services; assistance with making appointments and transport; help accessing childcare or dealing with the justice system; drug and alcohol services; and help with income support.

Collectively, we employ about 6,000 staff, 56 per cent of whom are Indigenous, making us the single largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the country.

Any enquiries about this submission should be directed to:

NACCHO



Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to respond to your inquiry into regional inequality in Australia. The Terms of Reference for this inquiry touch on a number of issues that directly impact the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in rural and remote communities.

With input from NACCHO affiliates Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC) and Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) in New South Wales, In this submission we particularly focus on:

- employment;
- income (and income support); and
- building the workforce;
- infrastructure.

We present a full list of recommendations at the end of this submission, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss these with you.

Employment

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas often want to work, but often there are no jobs which creates fiscal and social inequalities.¹ The creation of new industries, and new jobs, in regional areas would bolster the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.

Unemployment and under-employment experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas is considerably high (the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) defines employment as someone engaged in one or more hours of work a week^{2 3}). In addition, there are high levels of people classified as not in the labour force (NILF) in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly in remote areas, with estimates as high as 60 per cent amongst the 16–24 age group in some parts of the Northern Territory.⁴

The impact of unemployment

There are a range of complex and interconnected issues pertaining to unemployment and under-employment experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people and in regional communities that must be taken into consideration, which include:^{5 6 7 8 9}

- the lack of jobs and market opportunities;
- high levels of unemployment and reliance on income support payments;
- lower levels of job retention due to limited access to and high costs in transportation and communication, as well as family, cultural, land and other responsibilities/obligations;
- racial bias on the job and/or in recruitment processes, with employers and employment agencies not having undertaken cultural awareness training;

¹ Koori Mail, 2019, How red tape is killing job hope, 457 p. 8

² Creative Spirits, 2019, Aboriginal employment, jobs and careers

³ ABS, 2016, <https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject>

⁴ Havnen, O. 2012. Office of the Northern Territory Coordinator-General for Remote Services Report, pp. 175–177

⁵ Creative Spirits, 2019, Aboriginal employment, jobs and careers

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010, Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians

⁷ Koori Mail, 2019, GenOne in push for job debate, 502 p. 40

⁸ Koori Mail, 2019, Insights provided in report, 459 p. 39

⁹ Koori Mail, 2019, Inept Govt policy denying Indigenous jobs - report, 471 p. 36

- poor health conditions and inequities in social determinants of health (including housing, education, social relationships, income, incarceration rates and poverty), which compounds challenges in finding and keeping a job;
- difficulty affording costs associated with searching for employment, including the purchase of suitable clothing for an interview and safety clothing and equipment, as well as transportation and communication costs;
- difficulty finding and maintaining employment due to not having a drivers' license;¹⁰
- short-term, unsustainable contracts; and
- inadequate and inappropriate education and training opportunities.

In light of these determinants of health and health disparities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas, there is dire need for a new or revised National Strategy of Rural and Remote Health to be co-produced with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with involvement of ACCHOs and other Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs). Furthermore, holistic health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional communities would be attained by supporting and actioning the priority recommendations made at the 15th National Rural Health Conference held in March 2019.

It is vitally important to create jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in regional and remote areas, as the impact of unemployment and/or under-employment on them and their families can involve:

- many families and households receiving inadequate income to cover living expenses, which is compounded by high numbers of dependents and people with vulnerabilities living under the same roof—including children and youth, people with a disability, people with a burden of disease and/or other health condition/s, the elderly (due to high costs and lack of culturally safe and/or local aged care services) and people who do not speak English as a first language;
- frustration, anxiety and depression, generally affecting physical and mental health; and
- the amplification of family/domestic conflict and violence.

This chain of issues often impacts on school attendance and performance.

Building upon existing initiatives

NACCHO appreciates that the Australian Government has undertaken a range of initiatives in seeking to develop regional communities, including:

- the Productivity Commission's Study Report *Transitioning Regional Economies* (December 2017);¹¹
- the appointment of an external Expert Panel to respond to the House of Representatives Select Committee's *Regions at the Ready: Investing in Australia's Future* report (February 2019);¹²
- the pending Regional Australia White Paper that will outline the Government's regional development policy following the Green Paper public consultation process; and
- the National Rural Health Commissioner's inquiry into *Improving access, distribution and quality of Rural Allied Health Services*.¹³

¹⁰ The Conversation, 2019, <https://theconversation.com/-a-licence-to-drive-but-also-to-work-31480>

¹¹ Productivity Commission, 2017, *Transitioning Regional Economies*, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/>

¹² The Conversation, 2019, Report recommends big ideas for regional Australia, <https://theconversation.com/report->

¹³ National Rural Health Commissioner, 2019, Policy Options to Improve Access, Distribution and Quality of Rural Allied Health Services, <https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/>

However, despite these initiatives considerably more is required to increase employment and industry opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas.

We also acknowledge there are a number of other regional development initiatives aiming to expand industry and create employment opportunities, including:

- Regional Development Australia—a collaboration with relevant stakeholders for identifying economic opportunities, leveraging private and public sector investment and connecting regional businesses, councils and industry sectors with international trade partners and investors;¹⁴
- Regional Jobs and Investment Packages—has a \$222.3 million budget to assist regions across Australia to diversify their economies, stimulate long-term economic growth and deliver sustainable jobs;¹⁵
- Indigenous Business Sector Strategy—builds upon the government’s Indigenous Procurement Policy to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander entrepreneurs’ access to business and financial support; and
- Regional Australia Institute—informs government and communities on the impact of:
 - gaps in training and re-skilling in particular regions;
 - the massive churn in people coming into and going out of regional areas;¹⁶
 - the shrinking pool of labour to fill regional jobs; and
 - new and emerging industries in regional areas, including agribusiness and tourism.¹⁷

By co-producing employment solutions with ACCHOs and other ACCOs, these regional development initiatives may be more effective in creating greater job and industry opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

The same applies with state-based initiatives. Two (2) initiatives currently underway in Western Australia include:

- Regional Economic Development Grants, which focus on community-led projects to boost regional economies and create jobs. Eight (8) Pilbara projects are set to receive almost \$700,000, and Tappa Tappa Pty Ltd are proposing a start-up Aboriginal-owned and operated tourism business;¹⁸ and
- Diversify WA: Strong Economy Creating Jobs Diverse Industries report (2019), which proposes: strengthening Aboriginal heritage tourism; creating 150,000 new jobs by mid-2024; and awarding three (3) per cent of new contracts to Aboriginal-owned businesses.¹⁹

There are also a range of initiatives that assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas to find employment that can be built upon, including:

- Indigenous Careers & Employment—a website that displays Aboriginal Identified job opportunities posted by 100 per cent Aboriginal owned and operated companies;

¹⁴ Australian Government, 2019, Regional Development Australia, <https://www.rda.gov.au>

¹⁵ Regional Jobs and Investment Packages, 2019, <https://www.regional.gov.au/regional/programs/>

¹⁶ Houghton, 2019, Regional Australia Institute, <https://kimhoughton.com/2014/06/10/why-do-so-many-people-lob-into-regional-areas-and-then-leave-again/>

¹⁷ Regional Australia Institute, 2019, <http://www.regionalaustralia.org.au/home/our-current-work/current-project-agenda/>

¹⁸ WA Government, 2019, Regional Economic Development Grants, <http://www.drd.wa.gov.au/rfr/REDG/Pages/default.aspx>

¹⁹ WA Government, 2019, Diversify WA: Strong Economy Creating Jobs Diverse Industries <https://www.dpc.wa.gov.au>

²⁰ Indigenous careers and employment, 2019, <http://www.indigcareers.com.au/>

- The North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA)—guided by a culture-based economy approach in collaboration with Traditional Owners, remote communities and land and sea management practitioners, builds community resilience, and in particular identifies Aboriginal employment opportunities in land, sea and resource management enterprises;
- The Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia (CRCNA)—under a Board with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, invests \$75 million of Commonwealth funds over ten (10) years to support industry-led research collaborations into agriculture, food and aquaculture, health service delivery and traditional owner-led business development; and
- Norforce—which monitors Australia's northern coast for suspicious activity, employs patrolmen of whom nearly 70 per cent are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Co-production and diversification of solutions

Such regional development initiatives must be co-produced with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, and have a substantial focus on creating jobs and markets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Co-production of solutions permits self-determination and community control, in line with United Nations Declaration of Rights for Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) Articles 3, 4, 5 and 18:

Indigenous peoples have the right of self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development (Article 3).

Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions (Article 4).

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions, while retaining their rights to participate fully, if they so choose, in the political, economic, social and cultural life of the State (Article 5).

Indigenous peoples have the right to participate in decision-making in matters which would affect their rights, through representatives chosen by themselves in accordance with their own procedures, as well as to maintain and develop their own indigenous decision-making institutions (Article 18).

Involvement of ACCHOs in the co-production of solutions would result in innovative initiatives that increase Aboriginal employment and address local priorities. For instance, ACCHOs are successfully demonstrating delivery of aged care services, early childhood educational services, National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) delivery and other innovative workforce opportunities such as barista training and healthy food café projects. It must be noted that while NDIS provides an opportunity to address the gaps between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability and other Australians with a disability, it is imperative that this runs parallel to government spending on specialist services—including those delivered by ACCHOs.

In this co-production with ACCHOs, diversification of local economies in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rural and remote communities is imperative given the fragile employment and business opportunities associated with high costs in transporting goods and challenges in recruiting and maintaining the right employees. The impacts of climate change, which include restrictions on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities accessing land and water, also justify

²¹ North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance, 2019, <https://nailsma.org.au/>

²² NAILSMA, 2012, <https://nailsma.org.au/uploads/resources/KS-011paper-Whitehead.pdf>

²³ Cooperative Research Centre for Developing Northern Australia, 2019, <http://www.crcna.com.au/about/>

²⁴ SMH Good Weekend, 2011, *Brothers in arms*, p. 23

this diversification. Some of the industries ripe for growth and further diversification include healthcare, traditional medicines, cultural practices and tourism, and housing and other infrastructure construction.

Healthcare

The healthcare sector is the largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.²⁵ Accordingly, a greater investment in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce is one of the best ways for expanding their economic participation in regional areas and, subsequently, achieving better health and wellbeing outcomes. The recommendation we put forward in April 2019 as part of our Federal Election 2019 goals still stands²⁶:

Increase support for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and increase support for the ACCHO sector workforce, which includes the non-Indigenous health professionals on which ACCHOs rely.

More jobs should be created within ACCHOs by extending their service delivery remit, including via employing Aboriginal Environmental Health Workers who deliver environmental health services. NACCHO supports calls for a specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce strategy for building a culturally competent workforce and achieving short-term and long-term outcomes.

It should be noted that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population are an ageing workforce across a range of professions, and rural and remote areas have a significantly higher workforce turnover. Having more locally trained workers would reduce the workforce turnover, and ensure culturally appropriate and community-connected service delivery is provided in regional communities. Currently not enough in being invested in this workforce capacity building.

Disability workforce

An informal disability workforce already exists in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. There is potential for NDIS-related employment and training opportunities to be created in regional areas, with potential positions including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Workers, Support Coordinators, and Interpreters, which require disability support qualifications. Such opportunities could be created in partnership between ACCHOs, Registered Training Organisations and local clinical schools and universities. Appropriate, additional funding for ACCHOs would allow them to facilitate greater choice and control for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability to access needed services and support. Federal and/or state government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to undertake TAFE courses to gain the required qualifications to become Disability Community Workers would not only create more employment opportunities but also optimise the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas who would access the services delivered.

A specific area of need is for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workers, which can be achieved by funding scholarships in disability related qualifications such as Allied Health Certificate III. Greater training should also be provided to regional Community Based Workers, Support Coordinators, and Interpreters to gain disability support qualifications. Greater investment in culturally responsive training, resources and strategies for NDIS staff would enhance their effectiveness in sharing pre-planning information in regional communities.

Traditional medicines

Opportunities to broaden Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's engagement and business enterprises in traditional medicines should be better supported by federal, state and local government, in alignment with UNDRIP Article 24:

²⁵ ABS, 2016, <https://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/2016>

²⁶ NACCHO Federal Election 2019 recommendations, <http://www.naccho.org.au/media/voteaccho/>

Indigenous peoples have the right to their traditional medicines and to maintain their health practices, including the conservation of their vital medicinal plants, animals and minerals. Indigenous individuals also have the right to access, without any discrimination, to all social and health services.

South Australia's public health system caters for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients in the state's hospitals to access Traditional Healers called Healers from Anangu Ngankari Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation (ANTAC). The Healing practices, which are thousands of years old, are centred on massage and spiritual connection techniques, and since 2012 ANTAC has engaged in extensive research and hands-on work in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands to refine their techniques.²⁷

With additional federal and/or state funding, ACCHOs could be more actively involved in co-producing employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in traditional medicines.

Cultural practices and tourism

Federal, state and local governments should also support the endeavours of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in maintaining and showcasing their cultural practices, including via tourism, as per UNDRIP Article 31:

Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.

Construction/housing

There is a significant need for new and improved housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas (discussed later in this submission). In NSW, approximately 56% of Aboriginal people are renting compared to 32% of other Australians.²⁸ New, improved housing would not only substantially help improve health and wellbeing but also expand employment opportunities in the construction sector. The NSW Government's Housing for Health project outlines the need for more housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and for the housing to be safe and accommodate healthy living practices.²⁹ A recommendation in NACCHO's Federal Election 2019 goals that remains relevant, was for the Australian Government to:

Establish and fund a program that supports low cost social housing and healthy living environments in urban, regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

With ongoing involvement from ACCHOs, other ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, new housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be built and existing housing stock upgraded to meet engineering standards and to endure the impacts of climate change impacting regional areas. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be consulted throughout the co-production of solutions for expanding sustainable and affordable housing, and training and employing local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to construct them. Low cost and accessible apprenticeship and training courses for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be made available.

²⁷ Welcome to Country, 2018, Meet the Traditional Aboriginal Healers, <https://www.welcometocountry.org/>

²⁸ AIHW Housing circumstances of Indigenous households: tenure and overcrowding, 2014

²⁹ NSW Government, 2019, Housing for Health project, <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/aboriginal/>

Increasing access to and the use of land and water

To optimise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and community control in the development of industry and jobs in regional areas, land and water rights need to be upheld, as per UNDRIP Articles 26 and 27:

Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired; Indigenous peoples have the right to own, use, develop and control the lands, territories and resources that they possess by reason of traditional ownership or other traditional occupation or use, as well as those which they have otherwise acquired; and States shall give legal recognition and protection to these lands, territories and resources. Such recognition shall be conducted with due respect to the customs, traditions and land tenure systems of the indigenous peoples concerned.

States shall establish and implement, in conjunction with indigenous peoples concerned, a fair, independent, impartial, open and transparent process, giving due recognition to indigenous peoples' laws, traditions, customs and land tenure systems, to recognize and adjudicate the rights of indigenous peoples pertaining to their lands, territories and resources, including those which were traditionally owned or otherwise occupied or used. Indigenous peoples shall have the right to participate in this process.

Primary and secondary industries requiring access to land and/or water including mining, farming, fishing and manufacturing are prevalent in regional areas. Increasing land and water access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would foster greater innovation in business ventures in primary and secondary industry, generate new income streams and build community infrastructure and sustainability. Enabling this access would also increase connection to Country and cultural practices, while improving the health and strengthening the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people overall.

Industry expansion and further job creation in ecological services

While there are some jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas in the delivery of ecological services, there is scope for more. Enabling the creation of more jobs in ecological services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is upheld in UNDRIP Article 29:

Indigenous peoples have the right to the conservation and protection of the environment and the productive capacity of their lands or territories and resources. States shall establish and implement assistance programmes for indigenous peoples for such conservation and protection, without discrimination.

In our Federal Election 2019 goals we recommended that the incoming Government:

Increase the baseline funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to support the sustainable delivery of high quality, comprehensive primary health care services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

This recommendation remains relevant. In consultation and negotiation with individual ACCHOs, such additional funding could be used by ACCHOs to include ecological and environmental health services in their service delivery remit. This would necessitate the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rangers and Environmental Health Workers. Greater federal, state and local government fiscal support could also go to providing more training opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in ecological services.

Rangers

One area of employment ripe for expansion, subject to further investment,³⁰ is that of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rangers, who draw upon traditional skills and connection and knowledge

³⁰ <https://theconversation.com/indigenous-rangers-dont-receive-the-funding-they-deserve-heres-why-115916>

of land.³¹ One particular function of Rangers is clearing the land and engaging in back burning to prevent the damage of bushfires. More than 700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed as Rangers around Australia, but there is room for more.³²

By investing in more Ranger and other jobs in ecological services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, federal, state and local government will optimise employment opportunities, strengthen household incomes in regional areas and achieve positive ecological outcomes.

Clean energy

Clean energy and energy efficiency technology is an emerging industry in regional as well as urban areas. At present a very low number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed in this industry.

ACCHOs do a lot to utilise renewable resources and mitigate their environmental impact, for example:

- Paupiyala Tjarutja Aboriginal Corporation (aka Spinifex Health Service) in Kalgoorlie recently committed significant funds to installing and connecting solar panels to the grid; and
- Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service (PAMS) are currently seeking funds to install solar panels at its Newman clinic.

ACCHOs are open to making further contributions to reducing their environmental footprint, but require additional, allocated funding to do so as their funding to deliver core comprehensive primary health care into urban, rural and remote communities is already stretched. ACCHOs might also be able work with other organisations to train and equip Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people to develop skills in the delivery of clean energy services, but such possibilities would need to be negotiated with individual ACCHOs, and resourced adequately.

Recommendations

1. That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with involvement from ACCHOs, co-produce with government a new or revised National Strategy of Rural and Remote Health be
2. That the priority recommendations made at the 15th National Rural Health Conference held in March 2019 be supported and implemented.
3. That existing regional development initiatives place greater focus on expanding industry and creating jobs specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, via negotiation and co-production with ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
4. That in genuine collaboration and co-production with ACCHOs:
 - a. more, diversified jobs be created for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Aboriginal and mainstream healthcare sector; and
 - b. the baseline funding for ACCHOs be increased to allow for a greater range of services to be delivered and more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas to be employed, including in environmental health and other ecological services.
5. That land and water access and control for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas be expanded, including for business enterprises.

³¹ https://www.countryneedspeople.org.au/improving_health

³² <https://www.countryneedspeople.org.au/>

6. That clean energy initiatives, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified jobs attached, be co-produced (from design to implementation) with ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Income (and income support)

The legacy of colonisation, continuing impacts of racism and a range of social determinants of health results in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living well below an 'acceptable standard of living'. Dispossession from land and resources has made many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people impoverished while other Australians considerably well off.

Compared to other Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have higher unemployment rates, earn lower household incomes and are more likely to receive a government allowance as their main source of income. In 2015, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with incomes in the bottom 20 per cent of weekly household incomes was 37 per cent (twice as high as other Australians).³³

Inadequate income results in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people missing meals, sleeping rough and struggling through winter without electricity. Adequate housing is often overly expensive which can lead to overcrowding, while more affordable (but still expensive) housing is inadequate in terms of health, safety and cultural appropriateness. In addition, many recipients are unable to access mainstream healthcare and other services due to cost and distance, particularly in rural and remote communities. All these factors have a significant impact on physical, social and emotional health and wellbeing.³⁴

Low income, often associated with reliance on income support payments, creates a range of large, complex and intertwined issues. Some of the issues include:

- long term reliance on income support payments;
- significant challenges meeting employment obligations and keeping a job due to transportation, communication and other costs, and family, cultural, land and other responsibilities/obligations;
- complications engaging with and meeting Community Development Program (CDP) obligations, resulting in penalties being issued (further reducing the low payments);
- intergenerational trauma as a result of working with faith-based organisations (often involved in the removal of Aboriginal children from their families/running missions) that run CDP and job search services;
- worsening health conditions and inequities associated with social determinants of health (housing, education, social relationships, etc.);
- the disincentive of accepting extra employment shifts/hours when the additional income exceeds Centrelink income limits.

Income support

Current income support arrangements require review to find ways to better support those experiencing underemployment and insecure employment. Disincentives to recipients accepting additional employment shifts/hours when the extra income would exceed additional income limits and reduce payments is one area that needs to be reviewed.

Despite large increases in living costs over the last 25 years, there has been no increase to Newstart Assistance and other forms of income support, and people living in regional areas—where jobs are few and so reliance on such support is high—are most affected. When Newstart Assistance was

³³ AIHW, 2019, Australia's Welfare 2017: in brief, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/>

³⁴ Rosenberg, 2019, Implementation not recommendation the key to Productivity Commission success in mental health, <https://croakey.org>

introduced in 1997, it was not intended for long-term income reliance, but for short-term assistance while a recipient looked for work. An alternative pension was provided for long-term assistance, which was only slightly higher to Newstart Assistance. Seven (7) years ago, in 2012, a Senate Committee Inquiry deemed Newstart Assistance to be inadequate.³⁵

Today, more than ever due to increased living costs, the payment does not provide recipients with the capacity to purchase basic essentials, let alone provide an adequate safety net.³⁶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise a large proportion of those most impacted, and particularly those in rural and remote communities where unemployment and the costs of goods and services are much higher. Accordingly, we support the call by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) for an increase to Newstart Assistance to better help recipients meet daily living expenses and to create an estimated 12,000 new jobs in regional communities,³⁷ and for people in rural and remote communities who experience vulnerabilities, payments should be even higher—according to their individual need.

Rent Assistance

Rent Assistance also falls far short of meeting the high rental costs in regional areas. As with Newstart Assistance, over the years Rent Assistance has not increased despite rent and other living expenses increasing substantially. According to the Grattan Institute, a 40 per cent increase in the maximum rate of Rent Assistance would provide the same real level of assistance to low-income earners as it did 15 years ago.³⁸ Other than increasing Rent Assistance, it is also important in terms of rent and home ownership that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas are given more options to buy the home they are renting, and 'Relocation Assistance' to assist families to move for employment, education and other opportunities.

Periodical increases and indexation

While increasing the rate of Newstart Assistance, Rent Assistance and other income support payments must be an initial measure, ongoing increases are essential to ensure recipients continue to enjoy an appropriate standard of living into the future.³⁹ This should involve periodically reviewing the payments against community living standards and costs of goods and services. As recommended by ACOSS,⁴⁰ payments should be indexed to annual increases in wages (rather than CPI alone) and Rent Assistance according to actual rental costs.

CDP

CDP does not benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities. The program does not achieve the goals it set out to do, and is discriminatory against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who comprise more than 80 per cent of participants across Australia. Fining members for missing a session, with no consideration at all to the complexities of the social determinants and cultural obligations facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is unacceptable and directly discriminates against them. A program that is targeted at remote employment and development must recognise that there is a significantly greater burden of disease and higher mental health conditions among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared to other Australians, and that these issues can greatly impact on program attendance. Also, despite working more than 25 hours of work per week, CDP participants are not considered to be employees and are hence excluded from the Fair Work Act 2009 legislation, do not receive superannuation and are excluded from occupational health and safety laws. The discrimination and harm of CDP has been ongoing, and reinforces the need for an Aboriginal-led model that ensures Aboriginal and

³⁵ Parliament of Australia, 2019, The adequacy of the allowance payment system, <https://www.aph.gov.au/>

³⁶ UNSW, 2019, Budget Standards: A new healthy living minimum income standard, <https://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au/>

³⁷ ACOSS, 2019, Raise the Rate, <https://raisetherate.org.au/>

³⁸ The Grattan Institute, 2019, The inadequacy of income support payments, <https://grattan.edu.au/?s=Newstart>

³⁹ McClure Review, 2019, https://www.aph.gov.au/about_parliament/parliamentary_departments/parliamentary

⁴⁰ ACOSS, 2019, Raise the Rate, <https://raisetherate.org.au/>

Torres Strait Islander people are receiving an appropriate income, and addresses the unique social settings and limited labour markets within remote communities.

Already low income support payments attached to CDP are further reduced by \$50 a week (from \$244.85 to \$194.85) when recipients are unable to participate in mandatory CDP activities. Due to high costs, ill health, mental health conditions, homelessness, disability, remoteness, family, community, country and cultural obligations and language barriers, participants sometimes cannot avoid missing or being late for CDP activities, and being unable to notify activity organisers in advance. Communities with high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants were issued with the highest number of these fines in 2018, with participants in one Aboriginal community fined an average of 15 times. Various aspects of the former CDEP program worked better for participants and communities than the current CDP, including the 'employment' of Environmental Health Workers and other workers.

The Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) has worked with a coalition of organisations, including CDP providers, non-governmental organisations and peaks⁴¹, to develop a proposal that creates real job opportunities in remote communities and is based on dignity and local community control, in place of the existing, discriminatory CDP.

The determination of payments based on specific vulnerabilities

A range of factors should be understood and factored in when determining individual income support payments. Particular consideration should be given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with barriers to finding and keeping work, particularly those: with a disability; caring for people with a disability and/or young children (parents and other care-givers); living in rural and remote regions where jobs are scarce and costs are high; youth; and the elderly. Other specific factors that restrict employment and the accessibility of income support payments should also be given consideration, including: homelessness; mental health conditions; English proficiency; and discrimination and/or a lack of cultural competency from service providers.

Greater support needs to be given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access the income support payments for which they are eligible. Assistance also needs to be extended to help with filling out forms, attending Centrelink appointments and understanding and fulfilling payment obligations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability

Consideration needs to be given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are twice as likely to have a disability than other Australians, with 9 per cent (compared to 4 per cent) having a severe condition. Around 60,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a significant disability that could make them eligible for NDIS support, which represents 13 per cent of the potential 460,000 NDIS participants. However, they comprise only 5 per cent of current NDIS participants. While many of this 5 per cent have NDIS plans they do not receive assistance due to appropriate services not being available where they live. An inquiry into these huge discrepancies is long overdue, and immediate assistance must be given to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability to access the Disability Support Pension as well as NDIS support.

All Department of Human Services, Department of Social Services and National Disability Insurance Agency staff involved in social and health payments and services (e.g. income support payments) should receive training to help them assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access the services and payments for which they are eligible and need.

⁴¹ This group of organisations has adopted the name, Fair Work and Strong Communities Alliance

Recommendations

7. That the Australian Government:
 - a. increase Newstart Assistance, Rent Assistance and other income support payments;
 - b. periodically review and increase and apply indexation to all income support payments to ensure recipients experience an acceptable standard of living;
 - c. introduce a 'Relocation Allowance' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people looking to move for employment opportunities;
 - d. provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with more options to buy the home they are renting; and
 - e. consider the specific vulnerabilities of income support recipients, including remoteness, local cost of living, lack of jobs, disability, family, community and country (land and water) responsibilities.
8. That, in consultation and negotiation with ACCHOs, additional, adequate funding be allocated to ACCHOs to deliver services that:
 - a. support people trying to access income support payments; and
 - b. further extend their existing financial counselling and social and emotional wellbeing services into more regional (including remote) communities.
9. That a watchdog body to better monitor and ensure salaries match local living costs into the future be established in co-production with and ongoing involvement from ACCHOs, other ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
10. That an inquiry be conducted and a watchdog body established to review and report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are not receiving the Disability Support Pension despite being eligible.
11. That CDP be reviewed and revamped with a view to optimising the income and wellbeing of participants.

Building the workforce

More can be done to build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in regional areas and to get better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, via:

- ensuring fair pay and work conditions;
- providing greater training and education opportunities; and
- facilitating cultural awareness training.

Ensuring fair pay and work conditions

UNDRIP points out the rights of Indigenous people in regard to fair pay and conditions under Article 17:

Indigenous individuals have the right not to be subjected to any discriminatory conditions of labour and, inter alia, employment or salary.

With the introduction of new jobs and industry must come fair pay and work conditions Australia has a history of denying such rights to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with many not being able to access meaningful work and adequate working hours and income. This leads to a high reliance in regional areas on grossly inadequate income support payments. Not only income support payments but also job wages must be reviewed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access fair pay and experience an acceptable standard of living.

A key program element of the proposed Fair Work Strong Communities scheme⁴² is the federal funding for the creation of 10,500 part time jobs in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across CDP areas, working on specified projects and services. The funding would cover 20 hours per week jobs at the minimum wage and on costs. These would be ordinary jobs, paid at award wages with standard employment rights and conditions, including superannuation. The jobs would be open to local unemployed people. Any community based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation would be able to apply for funding to employ people. A training account would be available to enable skills development, including workplace literacy and numeracy.

Training and education opportunities

Locally-focused workforce training and support opportunities that prepare and adequately upskill existing and potential future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers be co-produced with ACCHOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people in regional areas.

Extending greater training and education opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas would assist in the attainment of relevant qualifications for securing adequate employment. More innovative services in the education and training sector may assist more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers, including school leavers, overcome barriers and increase their readiness to pursue further education, training and qualifications. An increased investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training, including building the resources of registered training organisations (RTOs) to better deliver training, is essential.

As course costs Due to are a large barrier to finding employment being course costs, free or subsidised training and higher education opportunities would be of great assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This assistance would support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to obtain jobs and avoid crippling HECS-HELP debts.

Innovative approaches to training and education may provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with opportunities to train on country—for example the Little Bay RTO, overseen by Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC), which is trialling the delivery of Primary Health Care training at a regional ACCHO so 15 Aboriginal Health Workers don't need to leave their families to undertake the training.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth should be given concerted assistance to pursue further education and training, to assist them to secure long-term, secure and meaningful employment. The competing family and cultural responsibilities they face, the risk of not completing study or not finding work after study, and discrimination from education and training providers must be addressed.

Cultural awareness training

Cultural awareness training for employers is essential due to the diverse cultures and life circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are currently working for them or who may in the future work with them. This training It should be made compulsory for government and non-government agency staff involved in job creation and recruitment, and those determining eligibility for and providing support to access income support payments. The training should be delivered by ACCOs, NACCHO affiliates and Aboriginal-led consulting companies and/or RTOs registered training organisations and with a focus on increasing understanding and appropriate responses to these barriers to employment facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This should be reflected in government and non-government agencies' Reconciliation Action Plans.

⁴² The full scheme can be accessed at https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/f2d5cf_0c505e9d8fe5437b874edd90f73e9c52.pdf

⁴³ Raciti, 2019, Career construction, future work and the perceived risks of going to <https://apo.org.au/node/251251>

Recommendations

12. That locally-focused workforce training and support opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the health sector be co-produced with ACCHOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas.
13. That there be greater investment in regional communities in:
 - innovative services in the education and training sector;
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified traineeships and apprenticeships; and
 - free or subsidised training and higher education opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
14. That cultural awareness training be made compulsory for government and non-government agency staff involved in job creation and recruitment, delivered by ACCOs (or Aboriginal organisations respected by the local community), and with a focus on increasing understanding and appropriate responses to barriers to employment facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
15. That all federal, state and local government staff receive training in how to better assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access the services and payments for which they are eligible.

Infrastructure

To prevent and respond early to health and wellbeing problems experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities, greater investment needs to be made into a range of social determinants—including housing and community infrastructure. Investment must also be placed in reducing and responding to the impacts of climate change.

Housing

Unemployment, under-employment and inadequate income prevents recipients from purchasing a home, or from maintaining their mortgage repayments and keeping their home. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are often stereotyped and discriminated against from purchasing and renting private housing, and Aboriginal housing and other public housing is often unavailable or inadequate (often run down), and private housing often overly expensive to rent. More housing, that meets engineering standards and takes into consideration Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family systems, sizes of households and related infrastructure needs is required. Adequate Rent Assistance needs is also required.

Housing shortages in rural and remotes communities, including in WA, result in overcrowding and homelessness and the expedience of poor health. Living in overcrowded housing increases the likelihood of health problems, from ear and eye infections to mental health issues. The impact of deteriorating housing on occupants, and also the lack of air-conditioning and heating, is made more severe where there is overcrowding and an inability to maintain hygiene. The effects of climate change are likely to necessitate some occupants spending longer periods of time within the house, including the aged, disabled and chronically ill, which can increase the psychosocial stress and risk of infectious disease transmission.

There are also considerable problems with the quality of existing houses. Aboriginal housing and public housing used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is often not constructed from high quality materials, and older houses (over 10 years old) often did not adhere to building codes. Extreme weather events increase the speed and extent of deterioration of this low quality housing, resulting in the formation of mould, rusting of pipes and damage to doors and windows, which adversely effects occupants' wellbeing and safety. Resultantly, occupants' physical health, economic productivity, psychological wellbeing, social vigour and protection from health hazards and security (from break-ins) is compromised. Not only do existing structures need to be upgraded, but future

developments need to be designed and engineered to appropriate standards (including environmentally sound cooling, heating and ventilation systems). In addition, maintenance and repairs need to be carried out effectively by a transparent and accountable process⁴⁴, in accordance to the changing environmental conditions.

Community infrastructure

There is an increasing need to upgrade aged and deteriorated community infrastructure. In many rural and remote communities there are no footpaths, limited sealed roads, curbing and guttering, and unsafe recreational areas. More so, inadequate town planning and development standards are not uncommon, and local councils often face a backlog in infrastructure repair and maintenance requests.

A greater investment in health infrastructure is also required, including renal and maternity (mums and bubs) services and patient transport systems, for enhancing access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider population in regional areas. NACCHO affiliate Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC) have championed maternity and patient transport services in remote Queensland which could inform similar national initiatives.

Mitigating the impacts of climate change

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth, mothers and babies, the elderly and people with a disability and/or chronic condition in rural and remote communities are particularly susceptible to the impacts of climate change. This includes susceptibility to diseases and infections, with notifications of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples having bloodborne, gastrointestinal, vaccine preventable and vector borne diseases, and bacterial and sexually transmissible infections remaining high.⁴⁵ Strategies for mitigating the impacts of climate change must centre on the prevention and early intervention of diseases and infections, and also strengthening protective factors—including adequate housing and community infrastructure. Also, there have been ongoing significant social and emotional impacts of the 2019 drought, largely in NSW, with AH&MRC provide social and emotional wellbeing services to assist affected families and communities.

It is important that government plays a role in developing, administering and enforcing design standards for housing appropriate to not only household needs but predicted climate change conditions, which allow for flexible and locally responsive housing design approaches.⁴⁶ Adjustments to the housing policy environment should be made to enforce appropriate housing standards and design guidelines, while allowing sufficient flexibility to tailor designs and materials to local conditions.

We put forward the recommendations we made in our 2019-20 pre-budget submission to the Australian Government:

- expand the funding and timeframe of the current National Partnership on Remote Housing to match at least that of the former National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing;
- establish and fund a program that supports healthy living environments in urban, regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, similar to the Fixing Houses for Better Health program, and ensure that rigorous data collection and program evaluation structures are developed and built into the program, to provide the Australian Commonwealth Government with information to enable analysis of how housing improvements impact on health indicators; and

⁴⁴ WA Auditor General Report, 2015, https://audit.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/report2015_08-AbServices.pdf

⁴⁵ Department of Health, 2019, National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System: Numbers of notifications of all diseases

⁴⁶ AIHW, Housing strategies that improve indigenous health outcomes, 2012/2013

- update and promote the National Indigenous Housing Guide⁴⁷, which is a best practice resource for the design, construction and maintenance of housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Queensland has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Action Plan 2019-23⁴⁸ that can be drawn upon in revising or creating a new national housing plan.

What ACCHOs are doing to mitigate the impacts of climate change

ACCHOs in urban, rural and remote regions mitigate their contribution to climate change in a number of ways. Often, these initiatives are highly innovative and developed within restricted funding. Some large ACCHOs have invested in larger initiatives.

ACCHOs are open to making further contributions to reducing their environmental footprint—including other affordable innovations to cut carbon emissions and optimise sustainability. PAMS, for example, is aiming to install solar panels at its Newman Hub Clinic and is seeking funding for this. Electricity is the biggest overhead to clinics in the Pilbara and Kimberley regions in WA, and ACCHOs are dependent on the mining sector to provide this utility.

Additional funding to build new and to improve existing staff housing and infrastructure that meets engineering and World Health standards and can withstand extreme weather, would greatly assist in recruiting, retaining and ensuring the health, wellbeing, safety and resilience of ACCHO staff.

Recommendations

16. That, in co-production with and ongoing involvement from ACCHOs, other ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, the Federal Australian Government establish and fund a program that supports the construction of low- cost social housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas that meets engineering standards and endures the impacts of climate change.
17. That there be greater federal, state/territory and local government investment in housing and community infrastructure and systems, including:
 - the construction of new houses and upgrading existing houses to meet engineering standards and well as with withstanding the impacts of climate change in mind (including the installation of solar panels and distillation plants for clean drinking water);
 - the regular and transparent service maintenance of housing and community infrastructure to be carried out;
 - reviewing and updating town planning and development standards;;
 - rectifying the backlog of housing and infrastructure management and maintenance;
 - upgrading footpaths, roads, gutters, drains, recreational areas and other community infrastructure;
 - securing healthy food (ensuring food security) and potable water sources and systems, and ensuring regular tests and maintenance procedures are conducted for all communities, commencing with communities most susceptible to waterborne diseases; and
 - sewerage and sustainable waste disposal systems that meet not only human rights standards but industry standards, and these be regularly monitored and maintained under a transparent and accountable process.

⁴⁷ National Indigenous Housing Guide: <http://web.archive.org/web/20140213221536/>

⁴⁸ https://www.hpw.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/5214/atsihousingactionplan.pdf

18. That, across regional areas, the Australian Government:
 - expand the funding and timeframe of the current National Partnership on Remote Housing to match that of the former National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing; and
 - establish and fund a program that supports healthy living environments in regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (similar to the Fixing Houses for Better Health program), which includes rigorous data collection and program evaluation structures.
19. That a greater investment be made into health infrastructure, including renal and maternity (mums and bubs) services and patient transport systems in regional areas across Australia.
20. That mechanisms and bodies for inter-sectoral emergency planning and responses to natural disasters be established, which brings together local, state, /territory and fFederal government, ACCHOs and other ACCOs, and other service providers and community members.
21. That in negotiation between individual ACCHOSs and government, greater funding be given for:
 - the construction and refurbishment of ACCHOS's' infrastructure and staff housing thatto withstands extreme weather and meets engineering and World Health standards; and
 - the delivery of social and emotional wellbeing and resilience programs for all ACCHO staff.
22. That, in consultation with ACCHOs, additional funding be allocated to ACCHOs in regional areas to:
 - employ Environment Health Workers to deliver environmental health services;
 - extend social and emotional health and wellbeing programs in urban, rural and remote communities, with a focus on building resilience against the impact of climate change;
 - extend public awareness raising on good household and personal health behaviour;
 - contribute to the teaching in regional schools of good household and personal health behaviours, with a focus on local issues and solutions; and
 - mitigate any environmental footprint ACCHOs might have, including making modifications to existing infrastructure and service practice for mitigating the footprint be identified.

Full list of recommendations

1. That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with involvement from ACCHOs, co-produce with government a new or revised National Strategy of Rural and Remote Health be
2. That the priority recommendations made at the 15th National Rural Health Conference held in March 2019 be supported and implemented.
3. That existing regional development initiatives place greater focus on expanding industry and creating jobs specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, via negotiation and co-production with ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
4. That in genuine collaboration and co-production with ACCHOs:
 - a. more, diversified jobs be created for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Aboriginal and mainstream healthcare sector; and
 - b. the baseline funding for ACCHOs be increased to allow for a greater range of services to be delivered and more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas to be employed, including in environmental health and other ecological services.
5. That land and water access and control for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas be expanded, including for business enterprises.
6. That clean energy initiatives, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identified jobs attached, be co-produced (from design to implementation) with ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
7. That the Australian Government:
 - f. increase Newstart Assistance, Rent Assistance and other income support payments;
 - g. periodically review and increase and apply indexation to all income support payments to ensure recipients experience an acceptable standard of living;
 - h. introduce a 'Relocation Allowance' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people looking to move for employment opportunities;
 - i. provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with more options to buy the home they are renting; and
 - j. consider the specific vulnerabilities of income support recipients, including remoteness, local cost of living, lack of jobs, disability, family, community and country (land and water) responsibilities.
8. That, in consultation and negotiation with ACCHOs, additional, adequate funding be allocated to ACCHOs to deliver services that:
 - c. support people trying to access income support payments; and
 - d. further extend their existing financial counselling and social and emotional wellbeing services into more regional (including remote) communities.
9. That a watchdog body to better monitor and ensure salaries match local living costs into the future be established in co-production with and ongoing involvement from ACCHOs, other ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
10. That an inquiry be conducted and a watchdog body established to review and report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are not receiving the Disability Support Pension despite being eligible.

11. That CDP be reviewed and revamped with a view to optimising the income and wellbeing of participants.
12. That locally-focused workforce training and support opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the health sector be co-produced with ACCHOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas.
13. That there be greater investment in regional communities in:
 - innovative services in the education and training sector;
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14. That cultural awareness training be made compulsory for government and non-government agency staff involved in job creation and recruitment, delivered by ACCOs (or Aboriginal organisations respected by the local community), and with a focus on increasing understanding and appropriate responses to barriers to employment facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
15. That all federal, state and local government staff receive training in how to better assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access the services and payments for which they are eligible.
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 - the construction of new houses and upgrading existing houses to meet engineering standards and well as with withstanding the impacts of climate change in mind (including the installation of solar panels and distillation plants for clean drinking water);
 - the regular and transparent service maintenance of housing and community infrastructure to be carried out;
 - reviewing and updating town planning and development standards;;
 - rectifying the backlog of housing and infrastructure management and maintenance;
 - upgrading footpaths, roads, gutters, drains, recreational areas and other community infrastructure;
 - securing healthy food (ensuring food security) and potable water sources and systems, and ensuring regular tests and maintenance procedures are conducted for all communities, commencing with communities most susceptible to waterborne diseases; and
 - sewerage and sustainable waste disposal systems that meet not only human rights standards but industry standards, and these be regularly monitored and maintained under a transparent and accountable process.

18. That, across regional areas, the Australian Government:

- expand the funding and timeframe of the current National Partnership on Remote Housing to match that of the former National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing; and
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19. That a greater investment be made into health infrastructure, including renal and maternity (mums and bubs) services and patient transport systems in regional areas across Australia.

20. That mechanisms and bodies for inter-sectoral emergency planning and responses to natural disasters be established, which brings together local, state, /territory and fFederal government, ACCHOs and other ACCOs, and other service providers and community members.

21. That in negotiation between individual ACCHOSs and government, greater funding be given for:

- the construction and refurbishment of ACCHOS's' infrastructure and staff housing that to withstands extreme weather and meets engineering and World Health standards; and
- the delivery of social and emotional wellbeing and resilience programs for all ACCHO staff.

22. That, in consultation with ACCHOs, additional funding be allocated to ACCHOs in regional areas to:

- employ Environment Health Workers to deliver environmental health services;
- extend social and emotional health and wellbeing programs in urban, rural and remote communities, with a focus on building resilience against the impact of climate change;
- extend public awareness raising on good household and personal health behaviour;
- contribute to the teaching in regional schools of good household and personal health behaviours, with a focus on local issues and solutions; and
- mitigate any environmental footprint ACCHOs might have, including making modifications to existing infrastructure and service practice for mitigating the footprint be identified.