

Wamba Niglee Burru Ngardu Aboriginal Corporation

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27th February 2009.

Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Men's Health
Department of the Senate
P O Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra

Dear Sir,

Re: Derby Men's Service

On behalf of the Wamba Nilgee Burru Ngardu Aboriginal Corporation which runs the Derby Men's Centre situated at 2 Ashley Street Derby Western Australia I wish to make a submission to the Select Committee.

The Derby Men Service was established in 2001 to look after the needs of the local indigenous males who suffer the ill effects of drug and alcohol abuse. From the beginning the question of funding has been an issue. We have to date been funded by the Attorney General's Department, Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs – Shared Responsibility program and lastly by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs – Local Answers Program. The Local Answers grant will terminate on 30th June 2009 and to date we have been unable to obtain any information regarding the future of the program.

Repeated requests to the department have had the same reply "the department is carrying out a review of the program". On a recent visit to Canberra I was told that the Federal Government's intention was to request that the state government should come to the table and fund programs within their portfolio. I have on two occasions visited different officials in the Department of Indigenous Affairs in Perth and on both occasions the reply has been "we have no funds suggest you look elsewhere". The obvious question is "apart from paying exorbitant rents in a high rise building in St Georges Terrace presumably matched by equally exorbitant salaries what is the Department of Indigenous Affairs funded for?"

The Office of Aboriginal Health called for a grant submission to be received by 15th October 2008. We submitted an application on 10th October for the sum of \$183 700 to run the various programs at the Derby Men's Centre. In November we were informed that our application was unsuccessful as they had no funds.

With regard to point ii of the terms of reference the existing education and awareness campaigns in Derby are inadequate in that the local medical staff does not have the personnel to run these campaigns. A few years ago the Derby Aboriginal Health Service ran a "pit-stop" program. This was successful in that it was run in a local park and open to any males who passed by. Recently I asked about repeating the program and the reply was that the staff levels would no longer be in place.

At the Derby Men's Centre there are a number of men who require eye tests. There is no optician in Derby. There is a private OPSM optician in Broome whose fees are beyond the financial abilities of these men. A state optician visits Derby periodically from Kununurra.

With regard to point iii of the terms of reference. At the Derby Men's Centre we attempt to change the men's attitudes to such things as personal hygiene, public hygiene, and healthy foods and have recently installed a state of the art kitchen with a grant from the Foundation for Regional and Rural Renewal. We have men who are illiterate, even one who had never previously used an electric stove and most of these men would not normally clean the utensils, stove and floor. Over a period of 18 months we have encouraged at least 40 individuals to accept hygiene habits which were previously unknown to them.

With regard to iv of the terms of reference I would suggest that the funding of men's health in the remote areas of Western Australia is not only inadequate but that those in both the federal and state government of Western Australia are indifferent to the need to fund services which deal with men's health.

The result of an indifferent attitude by both the federal and state agencies to the fate of the Derby Men's Centre is that we have been forced to apply to philanthropic private trusts to help the Centre to continue.

Finally I am willing to travel to Canberra to appear before the Committee.

Yours sincerely



Garth Robertson

Coordinator