



Youth Coalition of the ACT

Supplementary Paper to the

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs**

**Inquiry into the Needs of Urban Dwelling
Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander peoples.**

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Inquiry into the Needs of Urban Dwelling Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT wishes to thank the House of Representatives Standing Committee again for the opportunity to give evidence at the public hearing on 6 June 2001, for its Inquiry into the Needs of Urban Dwelling Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people.

The information contained in this paper relates to the Committee's request to supply examples of Cross Border Issues. (*Refer to the transcript of proceedings, page 502*)

The Youth Coalition regrets that it was unable to supply correspondence to the Commonwealth regarding the Indigenous Social Survey (ABS) and the absorption of ACT data into NSW data. (*Refer to the transcript of proceedings, page 498*)

Cross Border Issues

The geographical position of the ACT means that it is accessed for services and employment opportunities by a large number (approximately 3000) of Indigenous people from surrounding areas, such as Queanbeyan, Yass, Cooma and Tumut.¹

This raises a number of cross border issues for Indigenous young people accessing services, relating to lack of coordination of services and eligibility for programs across borders. Eligibility requirements are often linked to service funding arrangements under each State. The need to address cross border issues has been highlighted in a number of previous Government inquiries², and needs to be addressed to ensure that services within the ACT are appropriately resourced to cater for this group.

“Although net migration to the ACT is low, this masks a very high population flow in and out of the Territory. The average annual migration to the ACT is 17 per cent, compared with a nationwide average of 3 per cent. This figure is higher for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with 63 per cent recording a different address between 1986 and 1991.

¹ ACT Department of Health and Community Care, 1997. *The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT*, Health Status Monitoring Epidemiology Unit.

² For example, ACT Legislative Assembly, *Report on the inquiry into Services for Children at risk in the ACT, 1997*, and, The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Inquiry into Indigenous Health – Discussion Paper*, 1999.

The ACT experiences a drift of rural people to the only large urbanised centre in the region, with people looking for work, to access health and welfare services, for family and other reasons. Another indicator of mobility is that the ACT has double the rate of people using SAAP services who indicate reason for use as 'moved from interstate with out available support.'"³

Difficulties of Access - the Canberra – Queanbeyan border

“..we see the border as a ‘white man’s border...” (Indigenous Health Worker, Queanbeyan)

Difficulties were reported in accessing services across ACT borders. In some cases, such as schools and prisons, there are cross-border funding arrangements between the ACT and NSW governments. These do not seem to exist for Indigenous services.⁴

It is often thought that Queanbeyan, as a result of its physical proximity to the ACT, is disadvantaged in regard to the services it is resourced to offer young Indigenous people. Community workers in Queanbeyan expressed the view that due to its close proximity to the ACT, Queanbeyan is not adequately resourced to cater for the needs of its Indigenous population.

As a relocation area, Aboriginal people from all over Australia come to the ACT, while Queanbeyan attracts local Aboriginal people from NSW.⁵ As one community worker commented, “...we get a lot of kids from the North Coast...but there is nothing for them..”

Although the community and workers in Queanbeyan have continued to lobby for an Indigenous youth centre and an AFP Aboriginal Liaison Officer, Queanbeyan has remained devoid of such services.

The existence of only one youth refuge in Queanbeyan means that a number of Indigenous young people need to access accommodation services within the ACT. Whilst living in Queanbeyan may restrict eligibility for services in the ACT, this also presents Indigenous young people from Queanbeyan with the additional difficulties of continuing education and /or employment programs in Queanbeyan whilst residing in the ACT. Transport continues to be a big issue for young people commuting from Queanbeyan to Canberra to access higher education.

Indigenous young people (0 – 18 years) residing in Queanbeyan who come into conflict with the law and receive a sentence, are be transferred to a facility in NSW (e.g. in Sydney or Wollongong), although a juvenile detention centre (Quamby) exists within the ACT. The current system does not allow for young people to do a custodial sentence in

³ ACT Legislative Assembly, *Report on the inquiry into Services for Children at risk in the ACT, 1997, p14*

⁴ Canberra Journey of Healing Network, *'Ways Forward'-Report of a Workshop of Indigenous Workers held 13 April 1999, p4*

⁵ Michele Maloney, Glenda Humes, Francesca Baas Becking and Gabriele Bammer, *'Finding Out for Ourselves'*, Winnunga Nimmityjah, 1993

the ACT, and hence does not allow for consideration to be given to the young person remaining close to immediate family perhaps residing in Queanbeyan.

Furthermore, it is our understanding that an individual has to have been a resident of the ACT for at least 6 months to be placed on the ACT Housing waiting list. If however, temporary accommodation in Queanbeyan becomes an option due to greater availability or affordability, the young person is not longer eligible to be housed in an ACT Housing property. Cannot be on both lists at once.

A lack of alternate education options for young people with challenging behaviours in Queanbeyan means negotiation with the ACT Department of Education and Community Services to access services in the ACT, with priority given to those young people residing in the ACT.

These examples illustrate the existence of two issues impacting on service delivery for Indigenous young people in the ACT and Queanbeyan. The first being the lack need for additional services within Queanbeyan, and the second being the need for increased access to services within the ACT and Queanbeyan for both populations.

An example of latter is the dental clinic for Indigenous people operating in Queanbeyan, for which ACT residents are ineligible, although such a service does not exist in the ACT.

Recognition must also be given to the work being undertaken by services such as the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Controlled Health Service in the ACT. Winnunga Nimmityjah continues to be accessed by an ever increasing number of Indigenous people from the ACT and from areas as far as Goulburn, the South Coast, Queanbeyan and Yass. However, despite the increase in service provision to a greater population, from a variety of places in the region, Winnunga Nimmityjah has not received any additional core funding for a number of years (Commonwealth funding), nor has it ever received any core funding from the ACT Government.

Such examples illustrate the need for the Commonwealth Government to revisit how funding is allocated in such cases. Under the current system, there is a tendency for both the ACT and NSW to be protective of their 'own patch', rather than having the ability to look at how best to service the larger population in the region.

The Commonwealth has a significant role to play in increasing young people's access to services across State and Territory borders, and in enabling services to provide services to interstate clients. By recognising and accepting the fact that people do access services interstate, and assisting State and Territories to compensate each other, (whether this involves the Commonwealth purchasing services on behalf of cross border consumers, or enabling local governments to purchase services on behalf of their citizens), the Commonwealth has the ability to break down some of these existing barriers.

A National Indigenous Health Plan

It is beneficial to look at how cross border issues have been addressed in previous reports. The Commonwealth Inquiry into Indigenous Health⁶ re-examined these issues with consideration to the different models of funding for health services for Indigenous people. The resulting discussion paper offered a number of suggestions as to how to improve health outcomes by revisiting existing funding and delivery arrangements. Whilst the report acknowledged that Commonwealth, States and Territories were making an effort to work together and to focus on improving outcomes, one of the actions recommended to improve existing arrangements, was through;

“Developing a national Indigenous health plan, which would encompass State and Regional planning and link continuing or additional Commonwealth funding to associated outcomes, based on a more focussed set of performance indicators. The implementation of this plan could be overseen by Health Ministers or a joint Ministerial Committee.”⁷

It is possible that with the Commonwealth in a coordinating role, the ability to address barriers to service, such as cross border issues, could be strengthened by bringing together what is happening at different State and Territory levels as part of a broader national policy or plan, with the provision of reciprocal arrangements for consumers, supported by *“a bipartisan commitment at all government levels, to an extended period of continued and defined funding.”⁸*

Whose Responsibility? – The case of the Jervis Bay Territory

The Jervis Bay Territory, which includes the Aboriginal community of Wreck Bay, (a combined Aboriginal population of 419) is also within the ACT Government’s jurisdiction. Currently the ACT Government is responsible for education and child protection services and also the provision of a community nurse to the Jervis Bay area. Additional health services are purchased from the NSW Health Department.

It is our understanding that service delivery to the Jervis Bay Territory appears to be negatively affected by cross-border uses as a result of its location. In regard to Jervis Bay and the community at Wreck Bay and educational facilities for those young people over the primary school age;

“The questions raised during a Community Meeting at Wreck Bay Community Hall in relation to people who live in the area pay rates to the ACT Government and vote in ACT Elections, but have not been provided with a High School by the ACT, so must send their children to NSW in order for them to attend school.”⁹

⁶ The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Inquiry into Indigenous Health*, Canberra, 1999.

⁷ The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Inquiry into Indigenous Health*, Canberra, 1999,p15

⁸ The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Inquiry into Indigenous Health*, Canberra, 1999.

⁹ Leonard Barratt, *Examples of Concerns Raised by the ACT Indigenous Community paper*, 1999

Related Matters

Transience and Income Support

Accessing the Common Youth Allowance has become increasingly difficult, serving to exacerbate the problems encountered by Indigenous youth. Community workers described the process to access the allowance payments as intimidating and incompatible with the often transient lifestyles of many Indigenous young people; and therefore their access to basic income support is blocked.

It is a fact that many young Indigenous people may be required to leave smaller towns such as Tumut, Yass, Cooma and Wreck Bay, to access further educational, training or job opportunities. One of the Aboriginal Liaison Officers interviewed to inform the Youth Coalition's submission to the Standing Committee, provided the following insight into the experiences of many young Indigenous people who make the move to the ACT of many of these young people entering the ACT.

"...normally they don't have family, so they find someone to crash with when they arrive...often they have no method of money and experience difficulties with getting the Youth Allowance, filling in forms...or even getting the YA is difficult...access to money through crime."

Community workers also commented on the significant number of Indigenous young people known to them who were entitled to claim the Youth Allowance, however did not due to the difficulties in negotiating 'the system.' Centrelink requires additional requirements for a young person moving interstate. For example, the young person is required to check whether the area they plan to move to has a lower unemployment rate, or else they run the risk of losing their entitlements for up to 26 weeks.

Such requirements appear to be based on the assumption that all young people are aware of the requirements, which they are not, and do not account for the circumstances of a young person in crises who may move interstate in an unplanned way.

End