

WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

SUBMISSION

TO THE

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

**“INQUIRY INTO THE NEEDS OF URBAN DWELLING
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE”**

NOVEMBER 2000

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Term of Reference 1	5
“the nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of these people”	
Term of Reference 2	19
“ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements”	
Term of Reference 3	26
“the situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment and homelessness (including access to services funded from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program)”	
Term of Reference 4	33
“the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged”	
Term of Reference 5	38
“opportunities for economic independence in urban areas”	
Term of Reference 6	42
“urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas”	
Conclusion	45
Attachment One	

Introduction

The Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs last reported on the needs of urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in November 1992, publishing a report entitled "Mainly Urban".

Since this time, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has become increasingly urbanised. In 1996, approximately 73% of indigenous people were reported to be living in urban areas.

It is important to note when focussing on 'urban dwelling' Aboriginal people and their needs, that we are not dealing with a monolithic group of people. It is sometimes difficult to separate urban dwelling Aborigines from the general indigenous population, as members of the Aboriginal community often dwell at times in country and rural locations while at other times in urban locations around Western Australia. Living and household arrangements appear to be influenced by seasonal and climatic factors, cultural factors, distance and access to service factors.

It is similarly important to acknowledge that the needs of urban indigenous people vary according to where they live. Urban dwelling Aboriginal people from the Perth metropolitan area for example have very different needs to those in the North West who again vary widely in their needs to those residing in the South of the State.

According to the Aboriginal Affairs Department's Regional Social Indicators for Western Australia (1998), Western Australia's indigenous population is 50,757 representing approx 3 per cent of State's population (based on 1996 census data). The metropolitan area has the highest total Aboriginal population of 17,936, comprising 1.4 per cent of the total metropolitan area population, the lowest proportion of Aboriginal people compared to other regions around Western Australia.

There are four discrete Aboriginal communities located on the outskirts of the metropolitan area, all in the Shire of Swan. Generally, Aboriginal people live in a broad area from Midland through to Balga/Girrawheen, and in the south east corridor from Belmont through to Armadale, with pockets around Coolbellup, Willagee and Kwinana.

Over the last decade, the State's indigenous population has increased at a faster rate than the total population. The growth rate for indigenous persons was 10.5 per cent between 1986 -1991 and 21.3 per cent between 1991 – 1996, whilst the total population grew at a rate of 12.8 per cent between 1986-1991 and 8.5 per cent between 1991-1996.

The State Government is committed to ensuring that the needs of this growing population are adequately reflected in the development of policy, programs and services in Western Australia.

At the recent Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting on 3 November 2000, the Premier of Western Australia joined with Commonwealth and other State and Territory leaders to agree on a series of measures to

promote partnership and shared responsibility for service delivery with indigenous communities.

COAG agreed to priority action in the following areas:

- investing in community leadership initiatives;
- reviewing and re-engineering programmes and services to ensure they deliver practical measures that support families, children and young people. In particular, governments agreed to look at measures for tackling family violence, drug and alcohol dependency and other symptoms of community dysfunction; and
- forging greater links between the business sector and indigenous communities to help promote economic independence.

The State Government also recently released a joint communique between the Western Australian Government and ATSIC, setting out a framework for future cooperation and detailing priorities in Aboriginal affairs and how parties will work together to tackle key issues.

The Western Australian Government and ATSIC have each committed \$2.8 million over three years towards upgrading facilities and services in town based Aboriginal communities. Both parties will also jointly allocate a total of \$500,000 to support family strategies aimed at reducing the incidence of family violence and youth suicide among Aboriginal people.

Matters relating to this Inquiry have previously received attention from all spheres of government through various inquiries and reports and through general community debate. The array of reports and strategies that have variously attempted to identify and address both apparent and underlying needs relevant to the circumstances of Indigenous peoples, including the Task Force on Social Justice WA (Hames Report) 1994, have much to share with the present Inquiry.

The current submission represents a coordinated response to the Inquiry from all of the relevant Government agencies in Western Australia:

Aboriginal Affairs Department; Education Department of Western Australia; Health Department of Western Australia; Police Service, Ministry of Housing; Department of Training and Employment; Office of Youth Affairs; Department of Family and Children's Services; Office of Energy; Department of Commerce and Trade; Gascoyne Development Commission; Great Southern Development Commission; Goldfields Esperance Development Commission; Kimberley Development Commission; Peel Development Commission; Pilbara Development Commission; South West Development Commission, and Wheatbelt Development Commission.

Terms of Reference

1. the nature of existing programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians, including ways to more effectively deliver services considering the special needs of these people;

The Western Australian Government provides a wide range of programs and services available to urban dwelling indigenous Australians.

Services are delivered across a variety of agencies contributing to this Submission, including the Aboriginal Affairs Department, the Department of Commerce and Trade, Regional Development Commissions, Ministry of Housing, Department of Employment and Training, Office of Youth Affairs, Family and Children's Services, Office of Energy, the Police Service and the Health and Education Departments of Western Australia.

While all mainstream government services are available to urban dwelling Aboriginal people, this section focuses on programs and services designed specifically for the indigenous community and on ways agencies have maximised the effectiveness of these services.

Aboriginal Affairs Department

A key role of the Aboriginal Affairs Department (AAD) is to take the lead in developing policy that advances the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in Western Australia based on a 'local approach' to understanding the concerns and needs of clients.

Effective service delivery is based on accessibility, and in 1998, the State Government announced a Regional Expansion Program to increase its regional network from of departmental offices from 7 to 25 by the year 2000 using a Local Area Coordination approach, covering country and metropolitan urban dwelling Aboriginal people.

The strategy involves working at a local level, to ascertain needs, provide advocacy and support and assist Aboriginal people and communities to access services and facilities and monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of services provided to Aboriginal people. Twenty-six new Local Area Coordinator positions have been created through the Regional Expansion Program.

In other initiatives, State and Territory Ministers for Aboriginal Affairs, the Commonwealth Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and ATSIC have recently accepted a proposal by Western Australia that will improve the way the Commonwealth Government, State Governments and Indigenous representatives work together to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

On 10 September 1999 the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) endorsed AAD's recommendations that will lead to the development of agreed performance measures; annual joint reviews of performance and the development of collaborative approaches to improving

performance. The result will be the introduction of a continuous learning framework to Commonwealth/ State relations in Aboriginal affairs.

Now that the broad approach has been agreed, Western Australia is taking a lead role in working with other jurisdictions across Australia to put the proposal into practice. The Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services 2000* notes that this approach can help improve policy by:

- contributing to assessments of progress towards the objective of ensuring that indigenous Australians receive no less a provision of services than that for other Australians;
- influencing the development of improvements in programs and the allocation of resources; and
- underpinning a more whole of government approach to developing clear and agreed outcomes, methods of joint planning and compatible monitoring processes.

The AAD has also been working with other State Government agencies, ATSIC and Aboriginal representatives to develop agreed priorities for action in Aboriginal affairs in WA in line with the Objectives of the *National Commitment*. Agreement on common priorities is an important step in increasing the extent to which government agencies and Aboriginal people work together as partners in achieving better outcomes for Indigenous Western Australians and contribute to achieving national objectives.

A key forum for developing common priorities is the Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee (AACC). This Committee is required under the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act, 1972*. Its function is:

“to coordinate effectively the activities of all persons and bodies, corporate or otherwise, providing or proposing to provide services and assistance in relation to people of Aboriginal descent.”

The Committee brings together the Chief Executive Officers of relevant State Government agencies and the Aboriginal Chairpersons of key advisory bodies such as ATSIC's State Advisory Council, the Aboriginal Justice Council, the Aboriginal Lands Trust and the Aboriginal Education and Training Council.

The aims are to develop clear priorities agreed between government and Aboriginal representatives, to coordinate the activities of government agencies and to provide regular feedback on progress.

The AACC has endorsed five key priorities, including:

- **Justice**
Reduce the over representation of Indigenous people at all levels of the criminal justice system;

- **Youth Suicide**
Reduce suicides and suicidal behaviour amongst Aboriginal youth;
- **Environmental Health**
Eliminate sub-standard living conditions;
- **Economic Development**
Increasing the capacity of Aboriginal communities, individuals and families to engage in commercial enterprise;
- **Heritage and Culture**
Protect and manage Aboriginal heritage and culture through effective working relationships between government agencies.

In order to achieve these priorities, representatives of government agencies are now working together in teams to develop collaborative strategies that are actively supported across government and by Aboriginal people.

Department of Commerce and Trade

Western Australia's first Regional Development Policy was released in 2000 containing 87 strategies to maximise regional development opportunities and make improvements in living standards for families and businesses in non-metropolitan parts of the State.

The policy was developed to ensure a whole of government approach to regional development and the delivery of services. The policy has identified the need for the delivery of services to Aboriginal people, to be undertaken by Aboriginal people. The strategy states:

Strategy 2.2.4: Facilitate delivery of services by Aboriginal groups.
Experience has shown that there can be major benefits to economic and regional development when Aboriginal groups have taken a direct role in the delivery of services. Government agencies will have an important role in identifying opportunities where this may occur and removing impediments to it occurring. The process requires the development of administrative and management expertise, as well as skills enhancement for the delivery of specific services.

The Regional Development Commissions are also pro-active in advancing the effective delivery of services to Aboriginal communities. Many of the Commissions' Corporate Plans contain clear statements to guide activities in relation to indigenous people in the area of services and social and economic development.

A number of Commissions stated that they are working closely with Aboriginal people to develop culturally appropriate projects and programs. Working in partnership with Aboriginal organisations has led to an increase in economic and social opportunities for Aboriginal people, and successful projects in the areas of tourism, culture, training, organisational and housing development.

Health Department of Western Australia

Life expectancy amongst Aboriginal people is significantly lower than that of the rest of the population. In Western Australia, life expectancy of Aboriginal men is around 57 compared to 75 for non Aboriginal men, and from 1990-1994 the mortality rate of Aboriginal men was about 3 times that of non Aboriginal men or 3.6 times in the metropolitan region. The main causes of death during this time were circulatory, injury and poisoning and respiratory disorders. For Aboriginal women in Western Australia, the mortality rate is about 3.6 times that of non Aboriginal women, or 4 times in the metropolitan region, with main causes of death being circulatory conditions neoplasms (cancers) and endocrine conditions (diabetes).

The Health Department purchases a full range of general health services for urban dwelling Western Australians. In recognition of the significant health status differential between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Western Australians and the need for remedial action, the department has established the Office of Aboriginal Health (OAH). The OAH has the responsibility for purchasing Aboriginal specific gap closing programs, improvements and support to the health workforce and health system, and developing, piloting and evaluating innovative Aboriginal health solutions. Western Australia has the second highest gross per capita expenditure on Aboriginal health in Australia. Approximately 13 per cent of the \$19.5 million OAH annual budget is spent of urban Aboriginal Western Australians.

OAH initiatives of particular note in urban Western Australia include:

- The co-location of the South West Aboriginal Medical Service on the South West Health Campus in Bunbury which represents a national benchmark of combined service delivery between Aboriginal communities and the health sector.
- The WA Aboriginal Coordinated Care Trial at two urban sites, involving care plans being developed by Aboriginal Health Workers for individual clients. A pool of funding is used from estimated Medicare pharmaceutical benefits and hospital costs for each client to fund their care, supplementary services and the costs of coordination.
- The innovative Aboriginal Family Futures Program being piloted in Perth and three other areas using Aboriginal Health Workers to provide clinical, promotional, preventative, social, community development and advocacy services for families. These holistic and coordinated health care services aim to provide a more efficient and appropriate service to clients.

In its agreements with health service providers, the Health Department requires that health services to Aboriginal people be undertaken mindful of the social, economic and cultural factors that impact on health improvement for Aboriginal people. The need for a holistic view of health that embraces emotional, social, cultural, spiritual and physical wellbeing of Aboriginal families and communities is emphasised. This requirement is detailed in **Attachment One**, an extract from the business rules within the 2000/01 Western Australian standard Health Service Agreement.

Education Department of Western Australia

The Education Department has a number of strategies aimed at achieving improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, especially literacy and numeracy, and to increase their retention, attendance and participation in the school system. Programs also exist to address health issues, such as Otitis Media, and to maximise the employment of Aboriginal people in schools.

The Western Australian Government is the first State Government to sign an agreement with the Commonwealth Government for the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy. The main objective of the strategy is to achieve equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for indigenous Australians.

The Western Australia Implementation Plan is a cooperative initiative between the department, the Catholic Education Office of Western Australia and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. The plan outlines the education systems' strategies and approaches to achieving more equitable outcomes for indigenous students as well as a series of specific initiatives in targeted locations in Western Australia. The Plan is designed to deliver more effective approaches to improving literacy, numeracy, attendance and Otitis Media (leading to conductive hearing loss) outcomes.

The first government Aboriginal systemic school in Perth commenced construction in Midland and is due to begin operations as a K-3 school in February 2001. The College is a unique construction reflecting Aboriginal cultural needs as well as an environment that will support Aboriginal learning. Initial enrolment is expected to be 150 students, expanding to approximately 1000 when the school eventually reaches K-12. The principal and deputy principal are both Aboriginal and have been appointed along with a specialist early childhood consultant.

Other initiatives include the 'Deadly Ways to Learn' project which seeks to develop instructional materials to specifically acknowledge Aboriginal English and its context, and the Student Tracking System, a cross sectoral project to meet the needs and improve the attendance and education of transient and mobile students.

An Otitis Media strategy has been developed to address the increasing levels of Otitis Media that impact on language acquisition. This strategy will be incorporated across all sectors into the National Indigenous English Literacy, Numeracy and Attendance Implementation Plan in Western Australia.

The Gumala Mirnuwarni Education Project involves financial and in-kind commitments from Hamersley Iron, Woodside Offshore Petroleum and Dampier Salt over three years and aims to improve educational outcomes of Aboriginal students in the Roebourne area to the same level as the broader population to enable fair competition for apprenticeships, commercial cadetships, further education and employment opportunities. The involvement of these major resource companies represents a significant contribution on the part of industry towards improving Aboriginal educational

outcomes, demonstrating their interest in advancing the status of Aboriginal people. The Polly Farmer Foundation acts as manager of the project, which has been formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Education Department.

Department of Family and Children's Services

The Department of Family and Children's Services (FCS) provides a range of services across the state and purchases services from the not-for-profit (non-government) sector.

The department is committed to improving its services to Aboriginal people by ensuring that services are accessible and responsive to their needs by:

- Creating several senior Aboriginal officer positions including a Director, Aboriginal Strategy and Policy (member of executive), a Principal Policy and Planning Officer, a Senior Adviser Aboriginal Services and a Senior Officer Aboriginal Services for each of the nine departmental zones.
- Implementing an Aboriginal Traineeship Scheme to provide for the employment of twenty four Aboriginal Service Delivery Officers across the State.

Family and Children's Services is placing an increased emphasis on providing services specifically designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal families and communities.

The department's current Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services identifies four key areas on which it will focus in addressing services for Aboriginal families. These areas are:

- Services to families
- Services to children in care
- The non-government procurement process for Aboriginal groups, and
- The recruitment, development and retention of Aboriginal staff

The Best Start program is targeted specifically to Aboriginal people and aims to improve life opportunities for Aboriginal children aged 0-5 years by focusing on projects and activities that will improve their health, educational opportunities and social development.

The program is a joint arrangement between three departments. Family and Children's Services is the lead agency working with the Health and Education departments. The Aboriginal Affairs Department also provides expert advice and assistance.

There are sixteen Best Start programs throughout Western Australia, and each one is developed in consultation with the relevant Aboriginal community to ensure its responsiveness to the needs and cultural differences of each community. It is recognised that an essential element of Best Start is community ownership and control, and in general, the service delivery staff are Aboriginal people.

FCS also purchases services from the non-government sector targeted to and managed by Aboriginal organisations. The department acknowledges that Aboriginal people are more likely to access a service if it is staffed by Aboriginal people.

Examples of services purchased by the department from urban Aboriginal groups include:

- A transitional housing program aimed at assisting Aboriginal people who are homeless or about to be homeless;
- Aboriginal family support services;
- An Aboriginal child sexual abuse treatment service;
- Support services for young Aboriginal people, including accommodation services;
- Aboriginal child placement services;
- Financial counselling;
- Aboriginal child care services;
- Aboriginal family violence and domestic violence support services;
- A coordination and referral service for extreme at risk Aboriginal families in the metropolitan area.

Police Service

The Western Australia Police Service recognises that it must continue to work toward improving its relationship with the Aboriginal community. Figures show that Aboriginal people are over represented in the judicial system, and it is acknowledged that delivering appropriate programs and services to the Aboriginal community represents a significant challenge for the Police Service.

The Police Service has adopted a strategic approach starting at the corporate level to ensure that issues of equity, continuity, fairness and consistency, along with a commitment to ensuring improvements in Aboriginal and police relationships are undertaken and demonstrated in practical and meaningful ways.

The Police Service Annual Business Plan 2000/2001 has, in addition to its seven output areas and three primary outcome targets, identified five key management issues, one of which is meeting customer needs and priorities. Within this context, the Police Service recognised that meeting customer service needs is a broad charter and is not exclusive to groups that have special cultural needs. An Aboriginal consultative framework is being developed to enable the Police Service to achieve greater equity, fairness and consistency in this regard.

The consultative framework will establish an improved direction for the Police Service and assist in driving the development of a strategic plan. In particular, it will ensure that the Aboriginal community has access to and clear avenues of involvement in the broad range of services the Police Service provides to the community of Western Australia.

Around Western Australia, local Police are involved in and involve the local Aboriginal community in truancy programs and patrols, street patrols, community warden and warden training schemes, driver training and education schemes, Aboriginal visitors schemes and so on. Police receive cultural training and work closely with Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers, Aboriginal organisations and local governments.

In smaller urban centres, Police are closely involved with communities, represented in joint committees and action groups, attending community meetings, playing sport, visiting schools and generally participating in community life. In Geraldton for example, meetings are staged in partnership with the local Council, under police leadership, to pro-actively address volatile local political and social issues that require reconciliation.

Following are some specific examples of current policing initiatives employed by the Western Australia Police Service to meet the policing needs of the urban Aboriginal community.

Statewide Initiatives

Aboriginal Police Liaison Officer Scheme

The Aboriginal Police Liaison Officer (APLO) Scheme has a new focus on a liaison role rather than an enforcement role. The current approved strength of the Scheme is one hundred and four officers.

The APLO Scheme is seen as an important tool in meeting the policing needs of the Aboriginal community. There has been a concerted effort to increase the ratio of females within the Scheme. In recent times, the ratio has improved from 1 in 20 to 1 in 7 and the Scheme is now more in recognition of the special issues facing Aboriginal women.

Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers are involved in numerous initiatives and projects. In East Perth for example, they are involved in:

- Talkback on Aboriginal Radio 6AR;
- ABC Radio - 'Regional' - Aboriginal issues and recruiting;
- Aboriginal Driver Training at Manguri, Longmore, Cullacabardee, Gnangara and Alternative Learning Initiatives (ALI) Program;
- APLO basketball team attending school & other organisations;
- Lectures to schools and Aboriginal groups on roles of APLOs and other issues such as crime prevention;
- Aboriginal Squad Working Party to assist in recruitment of Aboriginal people into Western Australia Police Service;
- Networking with Aboriginal Development Foundation on Sport and Recreation;
- Veterans Affairs Projects regarding Aboriginal entitlements to Armed Forces Pensions;
- Aboriginal Resource File on networking with other agencies;
- Weekly patrols of parks and streets with staff from other Aboriginal service provider groups.

Aboriginal Community Street Patrols

There have been thirteen Aboriginal community street patrols in operation throughout Western Australia. These patrols generally work in close cooperation with local police. From the limited statistics available, these patrols accounted for approximately 40,000 contacts in 1996/1997. The Police Service has been a major contributor in the establishment and continued support of these patrols.

Sobering Up Shelters

There are seven Sobering Up Shelters in operation throughout Western Australia, with administrative responsibility for all but one of them resting with the Health Department. In 1992/1993, almost 77 per cent of apprehensions for alcohol related matters resulted in police custody. This figure dropped to just over 40 per cent in 1996/1997. The Police Service is actively involved in the identification of future sites for shelters.

Police Service Aboriginal Affairs

Police Service Aboriginal Affairs is the Agency's specialist support area on Aboriginal issues. Police Service Aboriginal Affairs represents the Agency in issues relating to the needs of the Aboriginal community. Its role and function is to support a range of programs and initiatives.

Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC)

Police Service Aboriginal Affairs is responsible for developing new initiatives and monitoring existing initiatives designed to meet the requirements of the RCIADIC recommendations and the consequent reporting of their implementation. The Police Service played a significant part working with the Aboriginal Justice Council and other Government agencies in development of the Monitoring Action Plan (MAP) to be used for that purpose. The MAP is more outcome orientated and customer focused than previous reporting models.

Safe Cell Committee

Police Service Aboriginal Affairs has membership on the Police Service Safe Cell Committee, ensuring that strategies or policies developed comply with the requirements of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Police Service Aboriginal Affairs is conducting a review of all functional police cells and lock up admissions across the state.

Custodial Care Working Group

Police Service Aboriginal Affairs, in recognising shortfalls in the level of custodial care delivered by the Service, chaired a working group looking at issues relating to training and staffing matters in this area. Recommendations have been accepted and will provide for a higher level of training.

Aboriginal Visitors Scheme

The Police Service has a close association with the Aboriginal Visitors Scheme. This initiative's function is to provide a pool of community people to visit police cells and prisons so they can act as a support to those who are detained. The Ministry of Justice has responsibility for administering the Aboriginal Visitors Scheme.

Prisoners Meal Allowance

In recognition of the issues surrounding the payment of an allowance to Police Officers for the provision of prisoner meals, Police Service Aboriginal Affairs played a leading role in the development of a new meal delivery system. The new system was developed in consultation with Aboriginal organisations and it resulted in officers no longer requiring payment for the provision of meals.

Aboriginal Alternative Dispute Resolution Service

Police Service Aboriginal Affairs works closely with the Aboriginal Alternative Dispute Resolution Service. The Police Service does not have administrative responsibility for this service, however, through Police Service Aboriginal Affairs, liaises closely with its members to ensure that the operations of the service are supported and utilised to the fullest extent. Police Service Aboriginal Affairs played an initial role in establishing the service and has a close ongoing working relationship.

Conflict Resolution

Police Service Aboriginal Affairs plays an active role in dispute resolution through mediation for Aboriginal families, groups and the general community. Particular attention is given if there appears to be a breakdown in the relationship with police or if police require case management assistance. These services have been recognised and, indeed, utilised throughout this jurisdiction.

Domestic Violence – Indigenous Women’s Gathering 1998

A joint initiative between the Police Family Unit, Police Service Aboriginal Affairs and other agencies to hold a Metropolitan Indigenous Consultative Gathering to consider matters related to service delivery by police in this area. A comprehensive report was compiled and the resultant outcomes were useful in developing a ‘best practice’ model on family issues for the Police Service. The model was subsequently adopted and is being implemented on a pilot basis in Joondalup.

Ministry of Housing

The Ministry of Housing is responsible for ensuring that all Western Australians have access to suitable and affordable housing. The Ministry assists low-income home buyers and renters, disadvantaged groups and people with special housing needs.

At June 30 2000, Homeswest owned 35,187 rental properties, providing accommodation for 32,893 households. It also held 1443 units in joint venture projects with other organisations and 997 properties built in remote areas for Aboriginal people. The organisation is also a major builder, home financier and land developer in Western Australia.

The Ministry of Housing serves a wide range of customers including many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As a customer-focused organisation, the Ministry has an ongoing commitment to building a workforce which is representative of the community it serves. This helps to ensure a

sensitive approach in dealing with customers, a broader input into decision making and more appropriate and responsive services.

Indigenous people make up almost 18 per cent of Homeswest rental tenancies. To better meet the needs of these people, Homeswest has implemented a range of measures to adjust its workforce profile to better match this customer base. This began in 1992 when Homeswest first introduced its Aboriginal Employment Development Strategy. The strategy was designed to improve the quality of service to Aboriginal customers by increasing the number of Aboriginal staff in customer service areas. This program has continued and expanded to also include non-customer contact areas, which have historically seen Aboriginal people under-represented.

The strategy encourages career development and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people. With only 12 positions designated for Aboriginal people by an exemption under the *Equal Opportunity Act* (50d) and 43 staff Aboriginal staff in positions higher than entry level is a statement to Ministry of Housing's commitment to the advancement of Aboriginal staff as valued members of the organisation. The Ministry has improved the service to its Aboriginal customers by having Aboriginal people in decision-making positions within the organisation.

The Ministry of Housing's commitment to increasing the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is demonstrated by the fact that the targets and strategies for this program have been included in the Ministry's EEO Management Plan and the Executive Director's Performance Agreement.

To help ensure that Aboriginal tenants do not face disadvantage in their housing situation, the Ministry of Housing employs four Aboriginal Customer Support Officers to assist housing applicants and tenants. These Aboriginal officers are aware of cultural issues impacting on Aboriginal people and are able to provide practical advice and assistance.

Their main responsibility is to assist Aboriginal people who are experiencing problems with their tenancy. This might range from problems with rental arrears and sundry debt to overcrowding and other social issues. Assistance is also available to help people with rental housing applications. Most inquiries are handled over the phone, although regional areas are also visited on a quarterly basis.

The Real Estate Institute of WA Pilot Project aims to improve Aboriginal access to the private rental market. The project will target Aboriginal people living in the Perth metropolitan area who are registered on the Ministry of Housing's waiting list for rental assistance. Tenancy support will be provided to 10 families through the Aboriginal Housing Infrastructure Unit Tenant Support Project Officer (TSPO), who will be assigned to act as liaison between Real Estate Agents and tenants. All Aboriginal applicants on the Homeswest waiting list will be invited to participate on the pilot project. The project is voluntary and the participants will remain on the Homeswest waiting list.

The Ministry of Housing also operates the Supported Housing Assistance Program (SHAP) for tenants experiencing a variety of ongoing tenancy problems. This program aims to provide tenants with access to appropriate skills development and support to enable them to fulfil their obligations and responsibilities as tenants. The support provided includes regular property visits, financial counselling, family and child support, home skills and alcohol and drug counselling. This program operates throughout the State and has assisted many families to maintain a satisfactory tenancy.

Department of Training and Employment

The disadvantaged position indigenous people occupy with respect to employment remains one of the significant barriers to accessing an equitable share of the overall wealth of our society. Equitable access to and participation in education and training are considered to directly impact on employment opportunities.

The Department of Training and Employment currently operates within complementary State and National frameworks that express a shared commitment to self determination by indigenous people and communities and a partnership approach to addressing their stated training and community development needs. The frameworks include:

- Western Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Strategic Plan 1997-1999 (Aboriginal Education and Training Council);
- Aboriginal Vocational Education and Training and Employment Policy for Western Australia (Western Australian Department of Training and Employment 1999);
- Indigenous Education Agreement with the Commonwealth Government under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program;
- National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2002 (MCEETYA); and
- Partners in a Learning Culture: Australia's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy for Vocational Education and Training 2000-2005 (ANTA).

The department purchases training from registered training organisations across the State. These include a Statewide network of autonomous TAFE colleges and private training providers, including indigenous training providers, four of which in combination serve metropolitan and rural town based communities. All TAFE colleges have established and maintained the operation of Aboriginal Education, Employment and Training Committees as formal decision making bodies with respect to indigenous specific training proposals and delivery. Considerable support has been provided to the independent indigenous governed training providers, including ANTA infrastructure grants administered by the Department.

The department works in partnership with indigenous peak bodies, communities, industry and other government agencies to extend opportunities for indigenous participation in VET and school and employment based

training, and to foster enterprise development and job creation for regional Aboriginal communities.

The volume of training delivered to indigenous clients, measured in terms of student curriculum hours, rose from approximately 1.1 million in 1995 to 2.12 million in 1999, representing 7.3 per cent of all delivery. Of this total, it is estimated that approximately 50 per cent of training is provided to Aboriginal people in rural towns and the Perth metropolitan area. In 1999, indigenous clients participated in a broad range of training including 'second chance' entry level training, indigenous specific courses, mainstream courses, and school and employment based training. Training was delivered in classrooms and on-site in indigenous communities, with flexible delivery methods such as multiple entry/exit, self pacing and computer assisted learning often employed.

While indigenous participation in training has exceeded the numbers needed to achieve parity with the wider community, outcomes are at lower levels than for students generally. Indigenous students are concentrated in a narrower range of fields of study; over represented at the lower end of the qualification spectrum and experience a lower module load completion rate than other VET students. In addition, fewer indigenous students are likely to be supported by an employer. This is despite the significant increase in the number of indigenous students undertaking traineeships (13.5 per cent of trainees in 1999 and 1.3 per cent of apprentices). Growth in uptake in recent years has been supported by the introduction of indigenous specific traineeships, where retention stands at around 80 per cent compared to 61 per cent in traineeships generally.

The over representation of indigenous people at the lower end of the qualification spectrum, both in VET and employment based training, is not necessarily an indicator of system or client failure, but indicates a legacy of poor schooling and consequent low levels of English literacy and numeracy. It also reflects the reality that a proportion of indigenous clients are adults seeking 'second chance' entry level training.

Office of Energy

Around 18 of the 260 discrete Aboriginal communities in Western Australia have populations of 200 or more and represent significant 'urban centres'. These communities are either connected to the Western Power grid network (town based communities) or have their own power generation facilities (remote communities).

The cost of power generation in communities around the State can be very high. Factors contributing to this include inefficiency of fuel and energy use, lack of day to day maintenance leading to high breakdown costs and short asset life and increasingly complex systems requiring expertise not currently available. State and Commonwealth governments have attempted to address these issues through several cooperative initiatives.

Between 1986 and 1991, the State Government assumed responsibility for the repair and maintenance of electricity services for larger permanent

communities. The Commonwealth, through ATSIC, has retained responsibility for capital works upgrades, and ATSIC also provides part funding for diesel fuel. Commonwealth and State funding is jointly administered through the Remote Area Essential Services Program (RAESP), which aims to provide improved repair and maintenance standards for essential services and utilise preventative measures to reduce the costly repair cycle.

The current service arrangements under the RAESP have led to improved service standards and cost efficiencies; however, responsibility for power provision remains split between Commonwealth and State governments and communities. Reliable service delivery, particularly from the larger remote power stations, requires an integrated service delivery model with clear responsibility for standards to reduce associated environmental health risks.

A major employment and training strategy has also commenced under RAESP involving 50 trainees in communities around the State, supported by funding from the Department of Training and the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB). On completion of training, accredited Essential Services Operators will be employed by regional service providers through a joint funding arrangement negotiated between ATSIC and the State. Savings in service and breakdown costs are expected to offset much of the salary costs for these positions.

The Energy Efficiency Education Package (EEEP) is another initiative of the Office of Energy, Aboriginal Affairs Department, the Ministry of Housing, Western Power, the Alternative Energy Development Board and ATSIC. The Package aims to raise awareness in Aboriginal communities of strategies to reduce energy consumption and power costs and introduce the concept of individual meters as a tool to improve power management.

As part of efforts to assist Aboriginal communities reduce fuel consumption and to assist the State Government assess the cost of future service normalisation, the Office of Energy, Aboriginal Affairs Department and ATSIC have also sponsored a series of energy audits throughout the State.

2. ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in decision making affecting their local communities, including partnership governance arrangements;

Indigenous people in Western Australia have the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process in a number of different ways. State Government agencies are actively encouraging the participation of Aboriginal people in both mainstream and indigenous specific decision making forums through representation on boards and committees, increased training and employment opportunities in government and business and so on.

Aboriginal people participate in decision making forums ranging from ATSIC community elections to the management of Aboriginal Corporations and Businesses. There are many incorporated Aboriginal Groups whose charters are to improve the conditions of Aboriginal people in various fields in the local community and active participation in these bodies is encouraged.

Throughout Western Australia, several Aboriginal persons have been appointed to the Boards of Regional Development Commissions and Local Governments. A growing number of Local Governments are adopting deliberative measures to improve Aboriginal community input to their planning and decision making processes.

The Regional Development Policy for Western Australia has clearly identified the need for Aboriginal people to be involved in the decision making process particularly in developing wealth and employment and in natural resource management. The strategies are as follows:

Strategy 3.3.4 Ensure participation by Aboriginal Businesses in government and private sector activities.

Aboriginal economic development will be assisted through encouraging greater participation by Aboriginal Businesses in government and private sector activities in the regions. It is recognised that resourcing and skills levels need to be developed to achieve this.

Strategy 5.3.3 Review funding and decision making processes.

Aboriginal people should be provided with the support to participate in informed decision making. Funding and decision making processes will be designed to build on their ability to participate in natural resource management. Greater involvement of Aboriginal people in the funding and decision making process will help ensure that development is consistent with Aboriginal interests and/or Aboriginal owners of land.

Regional Development Commissions around the State play an important role in supporting cross agency coordination on indigenous issues and participate regularly in regional Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committees and other policy forums, involving Aboriginal representatives at every opportunity to participate in policy development and planning processes.

The Commissions are frequently involved in consultative forums such as the Indigenous People in Mining Forum operating in the Goldfields Esperance Development Commission region, which consists of key stakeholders focused on encouraging and promoting the training and employment of Aboriginals in the Western Australian mining industry.

Regional Development Commissions employ dedicated officers to provide collective input to a range of issues and work to ensure Aboriginal people are consulted and included in all projects undertaken. Aboriginal Economic Development Officers are employed by the majority of Commissions to enhance the identification of indigenous issues and network with local Aboriginal community members.

The Aboriginal Affairs Department of Western Australia also provides support to several Aboriginal forums with the capacity to influence government policy in the service delivery of programs to country and metropolitan urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These Forums include:

Commission of Elders

The Commission of Elders has been established to provide advice on general directions for Aboriginal affairs policy and planning for the State Government. The key role of the Commission of Elders is to consult with and represent the views of a wide-cross section of Aboriginal people in Western Australia, and to ensure the advice provided to Government is comprehensive and consensual.

The State Commission of Elders Council (SCOEC) provides advice to the State government and assists in overseeing issues which impact on Aboriginal people. The Council comprises of Elders who hold an important and respected place in their own community and have been selected to represent their people at the regional and State level. The main purpose of the Council is to represent and promote the views of Aboriginal people at the State level on issues which affect their lives, and to advocate on their behalf.

The Council is strongly linked through its members to the Regional Commission of Elders (RCOE) and their communities. The Council has a role to influence the actions of Government in relation to Aboriginal Affairs, and to monitor their responsibility and accountability to the Aboriginal people of Western Australia.

Aboriginal Justice Council

The Aboriginal Justice Council (AJC) is a strong, dynamic and active voice for all Aboriginal people in Western Australia. The AJC has a combined monitoring role with its involvement in the implementation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) recommendations as well as a focus on stimulating and supporting the development of community justice issues. The AJC is at the centre of activities that aim to enhance government action on implementation of the RCIADIC recommendations.

The Key Objectives of the State Aboriginal Justice Council are to:

- Monitor the performance of government agencies in the provision of services to Aboriginal people and promote compliance with the 339 recommendations of the RCIADIC;
- Form partnerships with Government to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system through the WA Aboriginal Justice Plan and the Justice Coordinating Council (JCC);
- Meet regularly with relevant agencies to provide advice and advocate for the improved services for Aboriginal people in relation to criminal and social justice issues; and
- Provide support and advocacy as required to Aboriginal families whose family members are in prison custody.

Aboriginal Lands Trust

The Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT) was established in 1972 under the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act*. Its primary task has been to manage land on behalf of Aboriginal people. However, as a result of a review of the Aboriginal Lands Trust in 1996, the primary role of the current membership is to oversee the transfer of the Trust's entire 27 million hectare estate direct to Aboriginal corporate bodies. The ALT's core activities include:

- administration of 27 million hectares of land (12% of the State);
- overseeing the transfer of the Trust estate direct to Aboriginal corporate organisations;
- providing advice on a range of land matters affecting the estate;
- managing the ALT estate;
- assisting Aboriginal organisations in acquiring land; and
- issuing travel, community access and mining access permits over Aboriginal land.

The Trust operates in close association with the regional offices of the State's Aboriginal Affairs Department. The Trust meets on a quarterly basis to consider policy development, land management issues, budget matters, progress of the Land Transfer Program and other land related issues.

Coalition of Aboriginal Agencies

A relatively small number of Aboriginal families, including extended family, in the Perth metropolitan area account for a disproportionate level of involvement by Aboriginal people in the criminal justice and welfare systems. Government agencies have had limited success in dealing with issues that affect these families such as juvenile offending, education, family violence, child welfare, housing and health. The financial cost to government is high. The less tangible costs to the community are also considerable.

International research indicates that success with indigenous families facing extreme difficulties is greater if indigenous people are involved in the design and the delivery of intervention strategies.

This project is the result of a request by the State Government to address the level of involvement in the criminal justice system of Aboriginal people from the Perth area. This led to the establishment of the *Perth Aboriginal Reference Group* (PARG) in 1998 and discussions between PARG and the Premier in March 1999.

In late 1999, the leaders of Aboriginal agencies (Manguri Aboriginal Corporation, Nyoongar Alcohol and Substance Abuse Service, Aboriginal Legal Service, Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service, Yorganup Child Care Service and the Aboriginal Advancement Council) undertook a process of partnership development to formalise a *Coalition of Aboriginal Agencies*. The Coalition has been formed to build the capacity of participating Aboriginal organisations to work in partnership with State Government agencies to better coordinate their own resources. Its first program has been the *Indigenous Family Program*. This is an initiative to support families considered to be at extreme risk.

The *Coalition* has now built effective working relationships between its members and the capacity to link their resources. The development of a coordinated casework approach, which is more appropriate and suitable for urban Aboriginal extended families, has been completed. It was trialled with one family as a means of testing the concept of the *Indigenous Family Program* and the lessons learned from that trial were incorporated into a set of practice principles, a procedures manual and a description of staff training needs. The first staff have been employed and prepared and liaison has been undertaken with regional managers from relevant government agencies to ensure effective communication at the operational level. Work has now commenced with 'at risk' families.

The Health Department of Western Australia has indicated that as part of its commitment to the Commonwealth/ State Bilateral Framework Agreement on Aboriginal health, it funds the Western Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to act as an umbrella body and formal mechanism to assist the Government Health Industry maximise Aboriginal people's involvement in health decision making.

The Office of Aboriginal Health (OAH) is committed to advancing Aboriginal self determination and gives preference to delivery of health services to Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people. About 80 per cent of funds provided by the OAH every year are directed towards Aboriginal community controlled health service providers.

The 2000/01 Western Australian standard Health Service Agreement (see **Attachment One**) requires that health service providers establish local mechanisms to ensure full and formal Aboriginal participation in decision making at the Health Service level, and where appropriate, provide services under such partnership arrangements with community controlled organisations acceptable to constituent or target Aboriginal communities.

The Police Service also has a number of mechanisms to ensure Aboriginal participation in decision making regarding service delivery. Local Aboriginal Police Relations Committees for example are initiatives between police and

local communities. They function as a forum at the local level where advice is given in relation to operational matters, as appropriate. These committees are seen as a valuable forum for resolving issues of concern to the entire community.

The Perth Police District holds an 'Integration Meeting' each Tuesday morning, which is attended by various interest groups. Groups representing indigenous people are actively encouraged to attend and assist in developing policing strategies relating to their people and provide feedback on existing initiatives. The purpose is to encourage open, two-way communication.

In an attempt to instil trust and understanding in dealings between police and the Aboriginal community, the Police Service has also undertaken a review of attendance protocol for visiting Police Officers to the Swan Valley Nyungah Community. The formalisation of such a protocol serves a dual purpose and places obligations upon both parties to contribute and work toward improved relations. To reach consensus, concessions on both sides must be made.

The Education Department of Western Australia identifies improving Aboriginal community participation in schools and increasing the involvement of Aboriginal people in decision making processes as two distinct key focus areas in its 1997-2000 Aboriginal Education Operational Plan. The Department is keen to involve more Aboriginal parents in school decision making processes, including membership of school councils which will be established in 2001 with the introduction of the new *School Education Act 1999*.

A number of existing initiatives in place within the Education Department include the establishment of District Councils of Aboriginal Education in every education district as a mechanism for Aboriginal people to advise on the range of issues that impact on Aboriginal education and ensure that the needs of Aboriginal students are taken into account in local decision-making processes. Each district has at least one Coordinator of Aboriginal Education and one Aboriginal Liaison Officer.

The National Indigenous English Literacy, Numeracy and Attendance Strategy, a joint Commonwealth/ State initiative, includes a 'Parent Attendance Trust' strategy focusing on building more effective partnerships between parents and schools to ensure a supportive family environment enabling students to attend school regularly and experience a positive learning environment both at school and at home. The strategy will have an emphasis on families and students valuing education, raising the expectations of parents and teachers alike, so that parents and their children work cooperatively with teachers to achieve the best they can.

In relation to the State's Housing portfolio, under the State/Commonwealth Aboriginal Housing Bilateral Agreement signed in December 1997, the Aboriginal Housing and Infrastructure Unit undertakes joint regional planning with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Regional Councils to determine housing needs in urban and rural/remote areas.

A series of Local Aboriginal Housing forums are also being conducted in 16 locations throughout Western Australia. The forums:

- Are a mechanism to assist with the development of programs and initiatives for the Aboriginal Housing Board and the AHU;
- Provide an opportunity for individuals and Aboriginal community organisations to raise issues of concern relating to public rental housing;
- Provide an opportunity for Aboriginal people to have an input into the Ministry of Housing policies and programs; and
- Provide the Ministry of Housing with an avenue to inform the Aboriginal community of its services, products and policies.

One of the most effective ways to extend the involvement of urban indigenous people in the decision making process is to provide greater employment opportunities within government and ensure a workforce which properly represents the community it serves, including a large customer base of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. State Government agencies are actively working to increase the number of Aboriginal people they employ.

The Education Department has indicated that it is a priority to increase the number of ATSI employees, especially those in schools. The department has established an Aboriginal Career Opportunities Working Party to explore options to enhance ATSI career opportunities. Work is also continuing on a career structure for district Aboriginal Liaison Officers and Coordinators of Aboriginal education.

The department has produced an Aboriginal Employment and Career Action Plan that seeks to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed; and create and maintain a welcoming work environment to which Aboriginal people will be attracted and in which their retention and advancement can be fostered.

The Department of Family and Children's Services has established a network of Aboriginal staff throughout the department and across the state to ensure that Aboriginal families and community are well informed and involved in decision making at a local level.

The employment of nine Senior Officer Aboriginal Services within each of the department's nine zones provides local expertise to continually examine ways in which services are delivered for Aboriginal families. These officers are expected to liaise with Aboriginal people within their local area.

The Ministry of Housing introduced its Aboriginal Employment Development Strategy in 1992, reinforcing its commitment in 1994 with the introduction of a specific target of 10 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff representation by the end of 2000.

Before the program commenced in 1992, only about 1.5 per cent of the Ministry of Housing's staff were of Aboriginal descent. At June 30 1998, this had reached 9.6 per cent, or 78 Aboriginal employees, representing an increase of more than 530 per cent since the strategy began. The target of 10

per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees was actually reached in April 1998, but declined slightly by June due to staff movement to other government agencies. At June 2000, the proportion of Aboriginal staff was just under 8 per cent.

In addition to increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, the profile of these staff has been enhanced by ongoing recruitment to higher levels within the Ministry of Housing. Currently, the Ministry has the second greatest proportion of Aboriginal employees of any government department, second only to the Aboriginal Affairs Department.

There are currently 71 Aboriginal staff employed by the Ministry of Housing and with twelve trainees to commence one year traineeships in the near future.

Training of Aboriginal employees is also a vital component of the State Government's efforts. A new course – the Certificate II/III in Business (Office Administration) – has recently been established to provide higher qualifications for Aboriginal employees, and the first graduates completed the course in August 2000.

Over the past four years, four Aboriginal staff in the Ministry of Housing have been successful in gaining agency scholarships to undertake the Graduate Certificate in Housing Management & Policy conducted by Swinburne University of Technology. Other staff are being supported to attend Curtin University of Technology's Community Management & Development Program, as well as postgraduate studies in Indigenous Research and Development.

A new initiative in Housing is to support the Juvenile Traineeship program established by a joint agreement between Balga Aboriginal Corporation and the Commonwealth Department of Education, Workplace Relations and Small Business. This program is a 6 month pilot program which supports Aboriginal youth opportunities to break the cyclic offending pattern.

The Ministry of Housing (Homeswest) received the Premiers Award – Equal Opportunity Recognition, for its Aboriginal Employment Development Strategy in 1998, having previously been acknowledged as a finalist in 1997.

The active provision of employment opportunities for indigenous people and the encouragement of further education and training results not only in immediate social and economic benefits but opportunities for greater participation in the community policy making forums outlined above.

Resources are continually being allocated to building and maintaining the capacity of Aboriginal communities to take control and determine their own priorities and service needs, especially in some urban areas where strong and effective Aboriginal groups do not exist.

3. the situation and needs of indigenous young people in urban areas, especially relating to health, education, employment and homelessness (including access to services funded from the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program);

The Aboriginal population is becoming increasingly younger. The age structure of the indigenous population in Western Australia differs significantly from that of the total population. The indigenous population is concentrated in the younger age groups while the total population had a far higher proportion of aged persons. 40 per cent of indigenous people are under 15 compared with 22.5 per cent of total population, with only 6.3 per cent over 55 compared with 18.5 per cent of the total population.

The needs of indigenous young people in urban settings are critical. Aboriginal young people are leaving school at an earlier age than non-Aboriginal youth, have poorer health, poorer job prospects, are more likely to come into contact with the justice system and are becoming increasingly alienated from mainstream society. These young people are the Aboriginal community's future and it is recognised that Government services need to target and assist young indigenous people in key areas.

In Western Australia, the State Aboriginal Youth Council was established as a result of recommendation 2 of the "State-wide Aboriginal Youth Forum", an across Government initiative between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, Aboriginal Affairs Department, Aboriginal Justice Council and Office of Aboriginal Health (Health Department of Western Australia). The purpose of the Council is to provide Aboriginal youth with a voice in communities and government, which will enable them to raise their concerns and influence government policy. It will also foster the development of future leaders amongst Aboriginal communities.

The Aboriginal Youth Forum held in June 1999 identified many health issues and concerns for Aboriginal youth, enabling discussion of the main factors which they believed caused young indigenous people to harm themselves or commit suicide. Youth suicide remains of great concern to Aboriginal youth, with the indigenous youth suicide rate being 1.4 times that of non Aboriginal people.

The Youth Delegates identified a range of concerns including:

- **Parenting and Family Issues**

Problems within the family, poor communication, family disunity and feuding were seen to be of concern to youth and contributed to low self esteem

- **Men's Issues**

The relationship and communication between fathers and sons and between Aboriginal men were seen to be a cause of distress among young males who often find it hard to talk to people, leading in many cases to drug and alcohol abuse

- **Drugs and Alcohol**

Boredom and relationship problems were seen as contributing factors to alcohol and drug use. Using alcohol and drugs was accepted behaviour within many communities especially amongst peers. Youth delegates called for more drug and alcohol programs to help change behaviour

- **Sexual Abuse and Sexuality**

Sexual abuse was identified as a significant factor in suicides. It is a problem not discussed amongst communities and many adults do not know how to deal with abuse occurring within families. Homosexual Aboriginal youth are committing suicide because of lack of tolerance for sexual preferences

- **Boredom**

The lack of recreation facilities, sporting carnivals, youth clubs, discos and employment opportunities were seen to cause boredom and lack of motivation, often leading to self harming behaviours. Aboriginal youth would like to be given the opportunity to learn more about their own cultures and participate in cultural and traditional activities such as bush camping, fishing and hunting

- **Community Involvement**

Youth Delegates also believed that young people should have a voice in their communities and decision making at a regional and state level

Consultation with Aboriginal youth is a priority for agencies in Western Australia. Youth Advisory Councils (YAC) have been established throughout the State in conjunction with local governments, and Aboriginal youth are encouraged to participate. The Councils are made up of young people elected by their peers to represent their communities and are designed to enable members to advise Government about issues facing young people and ways in which to address them.

The Peel Development Commission was closely involved in the presentation of a Regional youth forum held earlier this year to identify, develop and implement strategies to address the needs of young people. Conclusions of the forum were that health, education and employment all required further development to meet the needs of young people in the region. Homelessness, a lack of support for youth hostels and no accommodation for young women in crisis (long term) were emphasised.

The South West Development Commission also established a 2029 sub-committee of its Board, made up of young people representative of the region and including a young indigenous person, with input to issues relating to education, health, natural resource management, employment and youth.

The Office of Youth Affairs is a sponsor of the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey currently being conducted by the TVW Institute for Child Health Research to study the health and wellbeing of Western Australian Aboriginal children, teenagers and their families. The results of the Survey will be used to plan programs and upgrade services in education, social welfare, housing, justice, health and other government and private organisations focused on the needs of Aboriginal youth and their families.

The Office of Youth Affairs is a member of the Youth Suicide Advisory Committee established by the Minister for Health, and the Aboriginal Youth Suicide Prevention Steering Committee, chaired by the Aboriginal Affairs Department. These mechanisms were established to play an active role in developing, implementing and monitoring suicide prevention programs and policies.

The Office of Youth Affairs also funds five pilot Community and Peer Support Programs targeting at risk young people, including indigenous young people.

Through the Youth Grants WA Program, funding has been provided to a wide range of community organisations to develop projects that encourage the participation of young people in innovative and challenging community projects and activities, and for the development of services and facilities to achieve these outcomes. A number of grants have been provided to Aboriginal community groups to administer programs for young people supporting their cultural traditions, art and music.

The Department of Family and Children's Services also provides services to young people aged 12-18 years. These services range from prevention and life skills services through to crisis intervention services. For general services to young people, 24 per cent of customers for departmental youth services and 54 per cent of customers of non-government services were Aboriginal (includes drop-in centres, outreach and streetwork).

Aboriginal youth are able to access all Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services. Throughout the State, 13.1 per cent of Aboriginal young people use these services. A number of SAAP services operate specific programs to assist young Aboriginal people including young Aboriginal families. All SAAP accommodation services provide case management support to assist customers achieve maximum independence. Most SAAP services employ Aboriginal staff.

The Ministry of Housing's Community Housing Branch manages the Crisis Accommodation Program (CAP), providing housing to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Support funding is provided under SAAP, and under the CAP, preference is given to applications that have SAAP funding.

Applications are submission based and are invited through an annual funding round. Advertising for the 2001/2002 funding round will actively encourage Aboriginal organisations to apply. The Ministry has previously funded several organisations under the CAP that target Aboriginal people.

The Manguri Corporation receives \$150,000 per year in SAAP funding to manage 15 Ministry of Housing properties for dysfunctional tenancies. This program was developed to assist those families who had been evicted because of anti-social behaviour and which Homeswest would not allow back into the system without some support. Manguri, through their Resource Workers, is responsible for rent collection, property maintenance, property standards and tenant behaviour.

The Police Service provides a number of programs and services specifically designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal youth. Police Service Aboriginal Affairs has undertaken research to identify trends and issues in relation to the behaviour of Aboriginal youth in the inner city. This research is being evaluated with the intent of using the findings to develop new policing strategies for the area, designed to meet the needs of youth and the community as a whole. A joint initiative was also undertaken between the Police Service and Edith Cowan University Justice Studies, resulting in a survey and questionnaire providing a quantifiable audit and identification of trends and issues for youth in inner city Northbridge

In recognition of the fact that many juveniles attracted to the city are in need of care and protection, the Perth City Police Station has formed the Juvenile Aid Group, staffed by 8 dedicated officers, including 3 full time Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers, to focus on welfare and liaison rather than enforcement. The group deals with homeless youth, those affected by substance abuse, juvenile prostitution, inter-family conflict and other like issues.

Police Service Aboriginal Affairs has worked closely with the Police Service Juvenile Aid Group and the Perth City Mission to provide an alternate option to police custody when dealing with 'at risk' youth within the Northbridge area. This has resulted in the development of the "On Track" Project, which has helped facilitate greater cooperation and a network of agencies and groups that provide services to youth in the inner city.

The Police Service also works closely with Aboriginal youth in schools in an effort to positively influence youth to stay at school and maintain a path towards qualifications and employment.

At a recent workshop including members of the Aboriginal community, Education and Health Departments, Local Governments, Police and other support services, truancy was agreed as the dominant cause of most juvenile offences. As a result of this, truancy patrols are being conducted. Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers also work with members of the Aboriginal community to target Aboriginal truants by visiting with families in times of conflict and breaking down barriers between Police and local communities.

Police regularly work with students at metropolitan high schools, participating in workshops and running seminars using well known Aboriginal personalities to act as presenters and role models offering encouragement for youth to stay at school. In Wanneroo, local Police are developing an initiative whereby students from a local Aboriginal school are being introduced to quarterly Youth Development Camps. This interaction with Aboriginal students and teachers is expected to develop strong working relationships and improve cross cultural understanding. In Midland, Operation Breakthrough was designed to enhance the natural sporting talents almost universally inherent in the Aboriginal target group. The Operation aims to increase self esteem, discipline and add focus and direction to the lives of Aboriginal youth.

Youth are also a focus for Police in urban communities outside the Perth metropolitan area. In Broome for example, the local Police and Citizens

Youth Club offers students after school supervision, with study periods broken up by sporting and recreational activities and a nutritious evening meal provided prior to students being conveyed to their homes. Broome Police Station also offers local Aboriginal school leavers traineeships to help prepare them for the workplace environment.

In Geraldton, Police Officers and Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers run an “Early Birds Breakfast Program” at local high schools, where youth are provided with breakfast, assistance with their homework and arranged activities in which they can participate. A multi-agency pilot program is also operating in Geraldton, targeting Aboriginal youth at a very young age with the intent of interrupting the criminal socialisation process by early intervention.

Truancy patrols are also undertaken in regional centres, with the role of Police Officers often extended so that officers spend time with community members discussing key safety and security issues, resolve disputes and provide advice on youth issues.

Other Police initiatives focussing on youth issues in Western Australia include the Juvenile Crime and Vehicle Theft Working Party, convened by the Commissioner of Police in 1997 to examine issues and develop strategies in this area. Work is currently being undertaken on a consultative strategy with target groups. Police Service Aboriginal Affairs, in partnership with the Ministry of Justice Psychological Services, has developed an extensive survey that is being administered in detention centres to research decision making and motivation of young people who steal cars and become engaged in high speed pursuits.

Aboriginal Police Liaison Officers from Police Service Aboriginal Affairs also work in conjunction with a community based Aboriginal organisation to deliver the Aboriginal Driver Training Program, that facilitates youth with poor driving histories in obtaining a driver’s licence. Police Service Aboriginal Affairs also provides advanced defensive driver training for Aboriginal community groups and organisations.

In terms of education, Aboriginal people continue to remain the most severely disadvantaged group in Western Australia, with social, cultural, environmental, economic and health factors all contributing to Aboriginal students being alienated and not achieving in the schooling process.

Despite substantial State and Commonwealth funding committed to Aboriginal education, educational outcomes remain disappointing. Many areas of concern have been identified, such as student attendance, achievement, retention rates and the range of factors traditionally related to students at educational risk.

In an effort to better manage the transitional of Aboriginal youth into the workforce, the Department of Training and Employment has established an initiative that addresses the needs of indigenous youth. The Aboriginal School Based Traineeship Program was successfully piloted at the Fitzroy Crossing High School in 1998 and has since been established in six other regional centres. The Program is a result of a partnership between

indigenous communities, the Department of Training and Employment, the Education Department, regional senior high schools and group training schemes, offering students in their final years of school a transitional pathway from school to employment. Advantages are that students are able to retain higher levels of motivation to successfully complete school with a 'real' employment option on completion of training.

The Program provides post-compulsory indigenous students in years 11 and 12 with a two year school based traineeship, structured so that participants spend two days at school, two days at work and one day in vocational education and training. This allows participants to gain work related knowledge, skills and experience while improving self confidence and self esteem.

In 1999, the traineeships attracted 41 students and involved 13 senior high schools and 6 group training schemes in the regions. A number of trainees were offered apprenticeships and the retention rate was 80 per cent. The Program will be expanded to create an additional 100 traineeships in 2001 and 160 in 2002.

The Great Southern Development Commission has also established support for Aboriginal employment initiatives in the private sector, successfully promoted industry level partnerships such as establishment of work hire agreements between Fletchers Abattoirs and Noongar clients sourced through Skillhire, a private employment agency in Albany. Similar employment initiatives will be promoted this year in partnership with the timber industry and Southern Aboriginal Corporation (SAC).

The Commission manages employment initiatives in conjunction with the Area Consultative Committee (ACC), Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB) through the Southern Region Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee. The Commission also addresses health, education and homelessness amongst indigenous youth through specific projects providing economic and employment opportunities for Noongar people in the region.

There is a close relationship between current low levels of educational outcomes and poor health, overcrowded housing and poor access to government services and infrastructure.

It is critical to continue to develop mechanisms that will break the collective impact of poor health, housing and other issues on the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. All government providers and agencies need to work together to develop cross portfolio mechanisms to ensure there is educational equality for all Aboriginal students.

Indigenous young people need also to be made aware of the level of services to which they are entitled. Many urban and remote based indigenous people accept a lower standard of service as they are unaware of or unable to deal with service inequities. Training and awareness raising in the school environment would assist in addressing these inequities in the long term.

Training and awareness is also important to re-establish family values and culture amongst indigenous youth. The important role of elders, parents and significant others in the community should not be overlooked.

4. the maintenance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in urban areas, including where appropriate, ways in which such maintenance can be encouraged;

The maintenance and recognition of indigenous culture in urban areas is critical to the future of the Aboriginal population of Western Australia. Indigenous people and their descendants, especially those in urban areas, often experience alienation and difficulty reconciling cultural traditions so important to a balanced and fulfilling way of life with the obligations of the urban environment.

Western Australian Government agencies recognise the importance of providing programs and services that are culturally appropriate to the Aboriginal community. Aboriginal groups are regularly consulted in the design and delivery of services to ensure that services and programs are developed in a way that respects Aboriginal culture and diversity, reaffirming traditional family structures and so on while catering to the evolving needs of the urban population.

The Health Department of Western Australia indicates for example that the Aboriginal holistic view of health requires that health services acknowledge and incorporate culture within service delivery. Health service providers are required to consider and demonstrate the extent of their consideration and incorporation of Aboriginal cultural security, values and expectations in the organisation and delivery of health services within their districts.

A number of state government agencies provide employees with special training on indigenous issues. The Ministry of Housing for example ensures that all staff attend cross cultural awareness training which includes the involvement of respected Aboriginal community leaders in presenting the training program.

Aboriginal Cultural Awareness training has been an important element of the Ministry of Housing's efforts to value diversity in the community and its workforce. Its objective is to enable all staff to respond more sensitively, not only to Aboriginal customers, but also to co-workers who are of Aboriginal descent. This two-day course – which includes information on Aboriginal history and culture as well as a field trip to the Perth Museum's Aboriginal exhibition - is now compulsory for all Ministry of Housing staff. An evaluation of the course found that the majority of participants believed that they had benefited both personally and professionally from attending the course. Aboriginal staff stated that their relationships had improved with non-Aboriginal staff who had attended the course.

By conducting these courses, a more productive working environment has been created for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff and, in turn, the Ministry's Aboriginal customers receive the benefits. The Ministry's support of improved management practices has had positive outcomes for both Aboriginal employment and the Ministry of Housing's customer base.

The course is revised on a regular basis and Aboriginal community groups are consulted and participate in the course presentation. All presenters of the course are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Visiting the recently revised Aboriginal exhibition at the WA Museum also gives staff the opportunity to experience the diversity of Aboriginal culture within West Australia.

The Education Department has developed an Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Package, "Our Story", in conjunction with the Aboriginal Education and Training Council, the Catholic Education Office and the Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia. All school districts are required to develop an implementation plan to encourage employees to undertake Aboriginal cultural awareness training. The implementation of "Our Story" ensures that all employees of the Education Department have a better understanding of Aboriginal people and the contexts in which they live.

Aboriginal community members are encouraged to participate in the development of culturally appropriate programs and services. The Ministry of Housing continues to acknowledge cultural issues in the development of its policies and procedures and ensures that Aboriginal people are represented on its Ministerial Policy Advisory Committee (Housing Advisory Committee). Additionally, the Ministry ensures that officers attend and are committed to all Government and non-Government committees which are set up across the State to deal with issues impacting on Aboriginal people.

The Education Department provides professional leadership designed to allow local Aboriginal people to assist teachers to implement Aboriginal studies. The teaching of Aboriginal studies will establish more effective partnerships between the school and the Aboriginal community.

The ABC of Two-Way Literacy and Learning uses Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal personnel to target schools across the state. Aboriginal people participate and contribute to their own knowledge and expertise in the delivery of inclusive curriculum for the benefit of all students.

The principles are acceptance of Aboriginal English, bridging to Standard Australian English and cultivating Aboriginal ways of approaching experience and knowledge.

Professional development has been provided to staff in schools and districts through a train the trainer model, which promotes the development of two-way bidialectical approaches to education. This allows non-Aboriginal students to understand Aboriginal ways of approaching experience and knowledge and Aboriginal students to achieve improved outcomes in Standard Australian English and Literacy.

The provision of cultural awareness training to service delivery staff combined with the participation of Aboriginal people in the service delivery process has resulted in the development of services and programs across government that better cater to the specific needs of the urban indigenous community.

The Ministry of Housing recognises the cultural obligations of Aboriginal families in terms of providing support for one another and in that regard, tolerates rental arrears of seven times that of non-Aboriginal families. Further, in terms of property care, the Ministry spends three times as much on maintenance to Aboriginal occupied properties compared to non-Aboriginal occupied properties.

In consultation with the Aboriginal community in Port Hedland, the Aboriginal Housing Board (AHB) is now designing more culturally appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of the extended family. The “breeze way” design has been constructed in Port Hedland, Newman and Wiluna.

To allow indigenous families to continue the care of elders, the AHB piloted the construction of two units on one site, that is, a 3-bedroom family unit and 2-bedroom aged persons unit (APUs) in Geraldton. It is proposed that this initiative will be extended to cater for younger family members (3-bedroom family unit and 2-bedroom singles unit) in Bunbury.

While the normal practice dictates that APUs contain 1-bedroom, the AHB only constructs 2-bedroom APUs to allow for the culturally appropriate care of the elderly by a carer or “granny”.

Like housing, culturally inclusive school environments are vital for future Aboriginal generations. The Education Department ensures that all future curriculum policies are inclusive of Aboriginal students.

A key objective during the development of the Aboriginal Studies K-10 curriculum materials was to construct a program of study to provide students with an avenue for understanding and appreciating Aboriginal histories, cultures and values that reflect an Aboriginal perspective. One of the roles of the District Councils of Aboriginal Education is to advise on appropriate localised curriculum content and to recommend ways to involve the Aboriginal community in the delivery of Aboriginal studies.

Aboriginal languages are a part of the list of designated priority languages under the department’s Languages Other Than English (LOTE) 2000 policy. A number of Aboriginal languages are being taught to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in schools across the State. The language programs are cooperative efforts between schools and the Aboriginal community, with languages taught identified by the community and a language team established to develop and teach the program.

The Aboriginal Speakers/ Elder Speakers Program also allows Aboriginal people the opportunity to become actively involved in the schooling process at all levels and in an enjoyable way. Cultural programs for students are presented by local Aboriginal identities involving activities and talks on Aboriginal culture and history.

Through forums such as Regional Commission of Elders and the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee, urban Aboriginal people in Western Australia express the need to increase general awareness of heritage matters, the preservation of sites, the use of Aboriginal languages, dance and other art

forms. A constant request from urban dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is for the establishment of cultural centres. Some tertiary institutions have Aboriginal studies programs and promote culture in a number of ways including storytelling, language classes, song and dance.

With substantial assistance from arts agencies, the activities of Yirra Yaakin Noongar Theatre, AbMusic and others are now helping Noongar culture to flourish strongly in and around Perth. Progress is also being achieved in such places as Broome, Carnarvon and Kalgoorlie. There is also healthy growth being experienced in arts, crafts, cultural awareness training and cultural tourism in Perth and many country urban centres.

Over the last two years, the Ministry for Culture and the Arts, Commerce and Trade, the Lotteries Commission and others have established a high level of team work that enables an effective response to the cultural aspirations of urban Aboriginal communities. In many regional centres, this effort extends to include work undertaken by Regional Development Commissions.

The Regional Development Commissions support and encourage Aboriginal culture in the regions throughout Western Australia. Assistance and project support are provided in the delivery of cultural events such as the Bilyidar Baldja Cultural Tourism Project, Nanakat Tours and the Fish Mungah Festival in the Peel region.

The South West Development Commission recently participated in a study entitled 'The State of the Aboriginal Arts Industry in the South West of Western Australia', co-funded by the Commission and the Office of Aboriginal Economic Development to investigate issues and barriers to Aboriginal Arts industry development.

The study recognised that there were a number of skilled Aboriginal artists but no coherent structure to nurture developing artists or assist artists in earning an income from their work. It recommended initiatives to overcome highlighted barriers and provide opportunities for local Nyungar artists to develop individually and as an industry.

The study recommended:

- A project to revitalise the Nyungar culture through art, and give younger artists a source of meaning and inspiration for their work from the stories of elders, overcoming the lack of continuity of traditional culture identified as a barrier to artistic development. Combining the knowledge of older members of the community with the enthusiasm and skills of younger artists would result in quality art and the further development of the industry.
- The establishment of a central hub to house studio space, administration and a gallery, and regional arts centres, as a long term environment in which artists can develop and operate effectively. This would give artists access to materials and workspace, developmental resources and peer interaction, and establish clear exhibition and commercial channel, in addition to ancillary employment opportunities.

- A feasibility study of Aboriginal Arts Industry in the South West of Western Australia, where clear potential exists for a well nurtured industry to thrive. The economic and social benefits are evident given that a basic pool of artists already exists and research into tourist trade suggests favourable market reaction.

Urban Aboriginal communities need to continue to be encouraged to support traditional cultures and study new ways of interpreting culture utilising for example telecommunications and IT for multimedia, interactive interpretive displays, the arts and music.

Cultural maintenance in indigenous communities can lead to economic and social benefits and a consequently enhanced standard of living. Urban Aboriginal communities remain in a better position than remote communities to generate sales income for cultural maintenance as a result of their proximity to domestic and visitor markets.

5. opportunities for economic independence in urban areas;

In many ways, opportunities for economic independence are much greater for Aboriginal people living in urban areas than those in remote locations. Measures taken by Government have helped to produce a pool of expertise on business matters within many urban Aboriginal communities, which in turn produces a high level of utilisation of the Government's Aboriginal economic development services and programs.

Some of the industry sectors that have proven to be a source of opportunity for economic independence include trades, services to the public and private sectors, building and construction, arts and crafts, tourism, transport, retail, hospitality, media and, in some regions, fishing.

Building the capacity of Aboriginal people to participate in industry through training leading to long term employment opportunities and involvement in the management and delivery of services to their own communities remains a key to achieving economic independence for communities in urban areas.

The Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee has endorsed the development of a coordinated, inter agency strategy to build the capacity of Aboriginal individuals, families and communities by improving the management and administration of their own communities. The strategy is being progressed by the Aboriginal Affairs Department through a Working Group consisting of Commonwealth, State and local government agencies.

The North Australian Research Unit (NARU) was appointed by the Aboriginal Affairs Department in January 2000 to examine the issues relating to effective community management and capacity building and to assist in developing an effective inter agency strategy. The consultant's report was completed in June 2000 and will form the basis for further work in this area in 2000/2001.

The Aboriginal Lands Trust (ALT), which manages approximately 12% of Western Australia (including reserves, pastoral stations, special leases, and a Crown grant in trust and freehold land), is also in the process of transferring holdings to Aboriginal ownership on a case by case basis. The ALT is looking at landcare issues and how to expand assistance to Aboriginal people to improve land use for economic development purposes and so on.

Economic independence can be created through such management opportunities, paid employment, owning businesses and being skilled to make good investment decisions. Financial management, both individual and organisational, training in business skills – basic office and bookmaking skills, accounting, marketing and business management training will enhance employment opportunities and assist in the self management of grants and funding.

Training in the telecommunications area, web-based technologies, e-commerce and information services designed to promote indigenous tourism has also been a key focus in recent times. TAFE now supports web page editing as a generic competency within existing training modules. The Aboriginal Economic Development Unit's (AEDU) role in business planning for

the Kodja Place Interpretative and Visitor's Centre in Kojonup, has for example led to greater use of IT in marketing and promoting indigenous tourism products.

The Department of Commerce and Trade's approach to Aboriginal economic development has been to increase the access of urban indigenous communities to persons who can provide advice, information and support in relation to business matters.

For metropolitan communities, this includes the funding of a Client Based Business Planner based at the Perth Enterprise and Employment Development Aboriginal Corporation, and the frequently utilised staff of the Office of Aboriginal Economic Development (OAED).

For country urban communities, a further eight Client Based Business Planner positions have been established in various centres and most Regional Development Commissions have established a position of Aboriginal Economic Development Officer. These resources have been supplemented by the development of collaborative arrangements involving Regional Development Commissions, the Office of Aboriginal Economic Development, Business Enterprise Centres, other agencies and the private sector.

The operation of the Aboriginal Economic Development Council (AEDC) also serves to monitor the needs of country communities. The AEDC holds three of its six meetings each year in regional centres and meets numerous Aboriginal people during these visits.

The Department of Commerce and Trade's Regional Communities and Strategies Branch has a team of qualified facilitators, with experience in working with Aboriginal communities who will help the communities with the planning process.

The Regional Development Policy of Western Australia has identified the need to accelerate Aboriginal economic development. Under the Goal of Developing Wealth and Employment, the objectives and strategies clearly support the development of opportunities for economic independence for Aboriginal people:

Objective 3.3: Accelerate Aboriginal economic development.

The involvement of Aboriginal people in economic enterprises is a key regional objective. The benefits will be improved wellbeing and security for Aboriginal people, especially where the economic activities are suited to their cultural values, aspirations, employment needs and lifestyles. Aboriginal peoples' contribution to regional economies through their local purchasing can also be capitalised on.

Consistent with the strategic planning objectives outlined in the State Government's Regional Development Policy, the Regional Development Commissions provide advice and information to regional Aboriginal groups on economic development initiatives in Western Australia. The Commissions

work with private and public sector agencies around the State, working to begin accelerate Aboriginal economic development at both a project and client-based level.

The Great Southern Development Commission (GSDC) for example employs an Aboriginal Economic Development Officer (AEDO), with a part time Arts/Cultural Development Officer (CDO) currently being recruited. The AEDO's pivotal role is to work with other government agencies to enhance economic and employment opportunities for Noongar people in the Great Southern Region. The recruitment of a CDO to work with Noongar agencies, artists and suppliers will help achieve objectives outlined in Regional Business Opportunities Audits. The CDO's industry and market level focus will complement enterprise development work undertaken by the Southern Aboriginal Corporation, ostensibly by building partnerships between Aboriginal organisations and providing client access to international and interstate markets.

The Peel Development Commission is also developing economic independence opportunities for Aboriginal people and organisations through the employment of an Aboriginal Economic Development Officer. There is recognition of potential growth in the Aboriginal economic development area and the Commission works in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities to explore further opportunities. Projects currently in progress are the development of tourism opportunities – tours and developing markets for tourism products; supporting art exhibitions, training in entrepreneurship and accounting, and exploring the possibility of marketing indigenous plants.

The South West Development Commission also employed an Aboriginal Economic Development Officer in October 2000 to assist Aboriginal enterprises wishing to establish in the region and manage and coordinate the Commission's operations in relation to Aboriginal economic development in the region.

The Wheatbelt Development Commission is facilitating a project with the local Mulark Aboriginal Corporation to develop an Aboriginal cultural tourism precinct in Northam. Undertaken in conjunction with the Aboriginal Affairs Department and TAFE, the project will provide skills development and employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people and enhance cultural development. Catering for a growing demand for Aboriginal tourism products, the precinct will serve as a model for the development of similar precincts in region, leading to ultimate goal of Aboriginal tourist trail.

The Department of Training and Employment also funds and supports an Aboriginal Economic and Employment Development Officer Program, that provides for the placement of ten officers within Indigenous organisations across regional Western Australia, who work in partnership with communities to determine and support their economic development and employment needs.

The provision of training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal people is widely recognised by State Government agencies as vital to increased economic independence for indigenous communities.

The Office of Aboriginal Health for example directs around 80 per cent of funds provided each year towards Aboriginal community controlled health service providers. A wide range of initiatives have been implemented by the Health Department of Western Australia to improve Aboriginal employment in health. These include development of a career path for Aboriginal Health Workers; increasing the total number of Aboriginal Health Workers; providing scholarships and cadetships for Aboriginal people training in the health professions; and State wide cross-cultural education programs to improve cultural awareness amongst non Aboriginal health staff.

Health Service providers are also required to demonstrate appropriate incorporation of the potential Aboriginal employment, training and economic opportunities generated by health services delivery within their control.

The Department of Family and Children's Services purchases a number of services from Aboriginal community groups in a not for profit capacity, enabling Aboriginal community groups and individuals to gain employment opportunities and experience in managing services, which is transferable to other settings.

Since 1996, the Ministry of Housing has been working in partnership with the Mid West Training Group in Geraldton to enable training of Aboriginal apprentices. The Ministry allocates units from the construction program directly to Mid West Training Group who construct under license, and train the apprentices on those projects. The program has been extremely successful with eight trainees graduating to fully qualified tradespersons this year. 15 three and four bedroom units have been completed since the program's inception.

The Ministry is encouraging expansion of this program to other areas and earlier this year hosted an information forum aimed at generating further interest. Similar programs will commence in Albany (Albany Chamber of Commerce and Industry), Kalgoorlie (Goldfields Group Training) and the Perth metropolitan area. Construction projects will be provided from the AHU Urban Construction Program to provide continuity of work for the trainees.

Mobile Maintenance Teams have also been established in Broome, Narrogin, Albany, Port Hedland, Wyndham, Kalgoorlie and Cannington with the assistance of the Ministry of Housing. Seed funding is provided to purchase tools, a vehicle and for the payment of wages and ten per cent of Homeswest zone vacated maintenance contracts is allocated to provide a work base through which teams can develop appropriate skills. It is envisaged that teams will become self-sufficient after the first year and will be able to bid for other Ministry of Housing contracts and work in the private sector.

6. urban housing needs and the particular problems and difficulties associated with urban areas.

Successfully addressing the housing needs of urban Aboriginal people is critical to the future health and wellbeing of the Western Australian Aboriginal community. Problems and difficulties associated with urban Aboriginal housing are social, economical, environmental, physical and emotional, relating to extremes of overcrowding, homelessness and low levels of home ownership in the indigenous population.

There is a clear link between housing conditions and health with environmental conditions at home impacting in particular on respiratory and other health conditions. A number of urban health programs in Western Australia, such as “Healthy Homes-Healthy Families” specifically target the relationship between health and housing with the aim of maintaining family occupancy of healthy dwellings.

The need for better, more flexible, culturally appropriate and specific housing has been recognised by the State Government. Indigenous people make decisions to reside urban areas around the State for a number of reasons including better access to services. Aboriginal homes in urban areas are often overcrowded due to visiting extended family seeking an urban base and similar access to services.

Dwellings available to indigenous people both in country and metropolitan areas need to recognise cultural needs and variable occupation densities through appropriate purpose built designs. Houses must be provided for extended family situations as well as specifically for youth, unemployed and the elderly. Programs that build culturally appropriate communication channels between agencies and clients are continuing to improve mutual understanding of needs and the shared responsibilities of taking possession of housing and caring for a housing asset.

Sensitivity must be used in the placement of Aboriginal tenants in the context of their families and communities. Allocation of housing can inadvertently lead to either separation from family or overcrowded situations that both cause a range of social problems. Cultural issues including for example previous deaths and family spirits in dwellings also present unique management issues for the Ministry of Housing, and these are continually addressed in building programs.

Aboriginal people also have a low rate of home ownership. Housing stock provided by the Ministry of Housing is limited and the Aboriginal community does not generally access the private rental market. Addressing levels of home ownership is a challenge given that many urban Aboriginals exist on low disposable incomes.

The Ministry of Housing has a number of initiatives aimed at addressing the housing needs of Aboriginal people.

Public Housing

The Urban Construction Program provides for construction or purchase of Aboriginal rental housing properties in urban locations throughout Western Australia to respond to the ongoing strong demand for accommodation by Aboriginal people. There are approximately 2,500 homes that have been acquired under this program which are allocated exclusively to Aboriginal people. While the names of Aboriginal applicants are placed on the mainstream waiting list along with all other customers when they apply for rental accommodation, they are able to move ahead of the mainstream list if one of the additional homes allocated for Aboriginal housing becomes available in the area they have nominated. In 2000/01, \$5.288 million will be allocated to commence 51 and complete 57 units.

Aboriginal Home Ownership Scheme

The Aboriginal Home Ownership Scheme is designed to help Aboriginal people make the transition from renting to home ownership. Run by Aboriginal people, the scheme offers practical help in terms of finance, as well as counselling, should any problems arise once a loan has been taken out. It also has a number of innovations, such as the ability to buy only part of the home in a shared equity arrangement with the Ministry. The remaining share can be purchased at a later date when the borrower can afford it.

In the past five years, 265 loans valued at \$24.195 million have been approved under the scheme, with one third of all Aboriginal applicants now able to buy their own home. In 1999/2000, 48 loans valued at \$4.796 million were approved.

Perth Noongar Regional Indigenous Housing Organisation

The Perth Noongar Regional Council is establishing a Regional Indigenous Housing Organisation (RIHO) for the Perth Metropolitan area. The RIHO will operate on a commercial basis owning and managing rental stock for Aboriginal people in Perth.

The RIHO plans to sell properties to tenants in occupation after a "proving" period with funds going back to the association for the purpose of obtaining further stock. The key aim of the Regional Council is to increase Aboriginal home ownership in Perth and move away from a welfare housing model.

In the spirit of the bilateral agreement the Ministry of Housing will act as Trustee and project manager for the Perth Noongar Regional Council until the RIHO is established.

Aboriginal Tenants Support Service

The aim of the Aboriginal Tenants Support Service (ATSS) is to provide culturally appropriate support and information to Aboriginal tenants or prospective tenants in regional areas of Western Australia to assist them to understand their tenant rights and responsibilities and thereby obtain housing and maintain their tenancy.

The target group of ATSS services is Aboriginal people living outside of the Perth metropolitan area who:

- are seeking assistance with their application for housing with the Ministry of Housing;
- are new tenants of the Ministry of Housing and have little experience in renting housing or a history of poor tenancy; and
- are tenants of the Ministry of Housing and need assistance with tenancy issues.

ATSS services will be provided by:

- Kuwinyardu Aboriginal Resource Unit, Carnarvon - covering Carnarvon only.
- South West Aboriginal Medical Services, Bunbury - covering Bunbury and Collie.
- East Goldfields Aboriginal Corporation Resource Agency, Kalgoorlie - covering Kalgoorlie/Boulder, Leonora and Laverton.
- Joorook Ngarni Aboriginal Corporation, Wyndham - covering Wyndham, Kununurra and Halls Creek.
- Southern Aboriginal Corporation, Albany - two services covering the upper and lower Great Southern.
- Port Hedland Regional Aboriginal Corporation, Port Hedland - covering Port and South Hedland only.

Conclusion

As outlined in this Submission, the Western Australian Government provides a wide variety of programs and services aimed at urban dwelling indigenous Australians living in this State.

The Government works with Aboriginal families and communities at every opportunity to ensure that service delivery is practical and culturally appropriate, and the wider community, business, non government organisations and other spheres of government to ensure that resources are utilised in the best possible and most coherent way.

The Western Australian Government thanks the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs for the opportunity to contribute to the current inquiry into the Needs of Urban Dwelling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and trusts that this Submission will be of interest to the Committee during its deliberations.