

SUBMISSION TO THE
SENATE INQUIRY INTO
PETROL SNIFFING AND
SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN
CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

FROM THE
DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES HOUSING
COMMUNITY SERVICES AND INDIGENOUS
AFFAIRS;
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGEING;
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
EMPLOYMENT AND WORKPLACE
RELATIONS; AND
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

22 August 2008

TERMS OF REFERENCE

On 17 June 2008 the Senate referred matters relating to petrol sniffing and substance abuse in central Australia to the Community Affairs Committee for inquiry and report by 16 October 2008:

1. The Senate:
 - a. notes the report of the Community Affairs References Committee, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*, dated June 2006, and the current expenditure on programs aimed at addressing petrol sniffing; and
 - b. expresses concern at recent reports on the increase of petrol sniffing in central Australia.
2. That the following matters be referred to the Community Affairs Committee for inquiry and report by 16 October 2008:
 - a. the ongoing effectiveness of the eight-point plan in combating petrol sniffing in central Australia;
 - b. the extent of the roll-out of *Opal* fuel;
 - c. the delivery of youth services in affected areas;
 - d. the effectiveness and adequacy of resources provided to address petrol sniffing and substance abuse in central Australia; and
 - e. what more needs to be done to effectively address petrol sniffing.

Written submissions are invited and should be addressed to:

The Secretary
Senate Community Affairs Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

The Petrol Sniffing Strategy 8 Point Plan is implemented by four Australian Government Departments. Coordination and implementation is overseen by a Senior Executive Service Steering Committee.

Any questions on information contained in this submission, or on any matter related to the Petrol Sniffing Strategy please contact:

Jan Lawless, Branch Manager, Network Management (FaHCSIA) (Chair)
Email jan.lawless@fahcsia.gov.au
Phone (02) 6121 4999

John Boersig, Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Law and Justice Branch (AGD)
Email john.boersig@ag.gov.au
Phone (02) 6250 6330

Rachel Balmanno, Assistant Secretary, Family Health and Wellbeing Branch,
Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (DoHA)
Email rachel.balmanno@health.gov.au
Phone (02) 6289 4969

Stephen Goodwin, a/g Branch Manager, Indigenous Education Policy Branch
Email Stephen.goodwin@deewr.gov.au
Ph (02) 6240 7293

SUMMARY

The Petrol Sniffing Strategy 8 Point Plan to address petrol sniffing in a tri-state region in central Australia was developed by the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments and announced in September 2005.

The Strategy is implemented by four Australian Government Agencies: The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), and the Attorney-General's Department (AGD). This submission has been prepared jointly by the four Departments.

This submission provides information on each element in the Inquiry terms of reference.

The Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy Unit (CAPSSU) based in Alice Springs is a multi agency unit responsible for local implementation of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy. Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) are whole of government offices responsible for the implementation of Australian Government programs that assist Indigenous people. CAPSSU and the majority of ICCs were consulted in the preparation of this submission

Chapter 1 provides background into the relationship between the recommendations contained in the report of the Community Affairs References Committee, *Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities* (2006) and Australian Government activities to address petrol sniffing.

Chapter 2 comments on recent reports on the increase of petrol sniffing in central Australia, reviewing media reports, comments by non-government service providers in central Australia; and quantitative and anecdotal reports on levels of petrol sniffing over the past three years. The comments from non-government service providers and evidence from research demonstrates a significant decrease in the incidence of petrol sniffing in central Australia since the implementation of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the introduction of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy, and Attachment A provides the report of a recent Review of the Implementation of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy. This review was conducted by Urbis and provides independent comment on the strengths and limitations of the implementation of the Strategy to date.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the roll-out of *Opal* fuel, information on the challenges and limitations of the roll-out, and evidence of *Opal* fuel's positive impact.

Chapter 5 comments on the delivery of youth services in affected areas. This includes providing information on youth service providers in central Australia, limitations of current models of funding and supporting the work of these organisations and comment on the high levels of need among young people in central Australia.

Chapter 6 provides information on resources committed to central Australia to combat petrol sniffing and other substance misuse, and to support young people. This is not confined to resources provided under the Petrol Sniffing Strategy, but includes funding under other Australian Government initiatives, including elements of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, commitments under the Council of Australian Governments. It also provides information on resources allocated to combat petrol sniffing outside central Australia.

Chapter 7 and Chapter 8 address possible future development of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy.

CHAPTER 1
COMMENT ON THE 2006 SENATE INQUIRY

In mid 2005 the Australian Government began conducting discussions on the development of a strategy to address petrol sniffing in Indigenous communities in central Australia. In September 2005 the Government announced a comprehensive 8 Point Petrol Sniffing Strategy to address petrol sniffing in central Australia.

In October 2005 the Senate referred the matter of petrol sniffing in affected Indigenous communities to the Community Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report. The report *Beyond Petrol Sniffing: Renewing Hope for Indigenous Communities* was released in June 2006.

The Inquiry report noted the development of the 8 Point Plan and there are significant overlaps between elements of the Plan and many of the recommendations made by the Senate Committee. The body of this submission provides substantial detail on the implementation to date of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy. However the following summarises briefly how the implementation corresponds with Inquiry recommendations.

- **Recommendation 7** notes the development of the 8 Point Plan and calls for its implementation more widely. The Australian Government responded to this recommendation by funding the Petrol Sniffing Strategy significantly in the 2006 budget, and additional Petrol Sniffing Strategy Zones were agreed with State Governments. These include the Central Australian Expanded Zone (NT), the East Kimberley Zone (WA), and the Mornington Doomadgee Zone (Qld).
- **Recommendations 9 to 11** call for action in the areas of policing and community justice activities. In January 2006 the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk was funded by the Australian Government, and commenced operations from a base in Alice Springs. The desk operates through cooperation between the Northern Territory, Western Australian, and South Australian police forces, to achieve consistent policing strategies in the cross border region in central Australia. It has been notably successful in limiting the trafficking of illicit substances, has seized sizeable quantities of drugs, guns, and money, and led to significant arrests. In addition, the Attorney General's Department has overseen the implementation throughout the Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Zone of restorative justice projects, the employment of restorative justice program officers, and funded remote area community (night) patrols.

In addition to the Petrol Sniffing Strategy, under the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) additional police personnel are active in communities and additional stations have been constructed. In the central desert region there are new or additional police in Haasts Bluff, Imanpa, Mutitjulu, Nyirripi, Santa Teresa and Willowra. Police stations in Willowra and Nyirripi have been or will be upgraded.

- **Recommendations 14 and 15** call for community based youth programs with strong local community engagement. Under the Petrol Sniffing Strategy the Northern Territory Integrated Youth Strategy (NTIYS) provides intensive youth programs with community involvement in their management and program design in the communities of Mutitjulu, Finke, Docker River, and Imanpa. Funding is provided by DoHA and by FaHCSIA for school holiday programs to provide positive activities for young people during these high risk periods. AGD and FaHCSIA have funded sporting programs throughout the APY lands in South Australia with significant community participation including training for and involvement by community members as

umpires, referees, team managers etc. In Western Australia the Ngaanyatjarra Shire has been provided with funding for youth workers and youth worker accommodation.

- **Recommendation 17** calls for additional funding for new and existing rehabilitation facilities. Under the strategy DoHA has provided funding in partnership with the Northern Territory Government for a youth residential rehabilitation facility in Alice Springs. FaHCSIA has provided funding in partnership with the South Australian Government for the construction of a treatment and rehabilitation facility at Amata in South Australia. FaHCSIA and DoHA provide funding to the Mt Theo program.

Outside the Petrol Sniffing Strategy, in 2006 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) developed a package of \$130 million over four years. This included a contribution by the Australian Government of \$49.3 million for substance and alcohol rehabilitation and treatment services, particularly in remote areas. In December 2007 the Australian Government agreed to contribute an additional \$50 million for substance and alcohol rehabilitation and treatment services.

- **Recommendations 18 to 23** call for expansions to the roll-out of *Opal* fuel. *Opal* fuel now has a significant footprint far beyond central Australia, and the DoHA continues to negotiate with fuel distributors, retailers and communities to expand its availability.

Recommendations of the 2006 Senate Inquiry that are outside the scope of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy include:

- Recommendations 1 and 2 which call for the revisitation of the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody and ongoing role for the Council of Australian Governments in the monitoring and implementation of programs to address petrol sniffing.
- Recommendation 3 called for the involvement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner role in matters related to petrol sniffing.
- Recommendation 4 and 5 called for changes in the ways deaths are recorded and data is collected relating to volatile substance misuse and Indigenous people. Deaths are recorded by the State or Territory Governments, however DoHA have been working with the National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information and Data to improve data collection on substance misuse by Indigenous people.
- Recommendation 6 called for the evaluation of Indigenous Coordination Centres. A review was commenced in 2005 and completed in 2006. The report is being considered by the Australian Government in the ongoing evolution of the network.
- Recommendation 8 called for changes to the ways government programs for Indigenous communities are funded. This is currently the subject of work being undertaken by a Cross Agency Working Group which reports to the Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs.
- Recommendations 12 and 13 addressed the need for safe houses in communities affected by volatile substance misuse. Under the Northern Territory Emergency Response, Safe Houses have been provided in Pmara Jutunta, Hermannsburg, Yuendumu, Ti-Tree, and Finke.

- Recommendation 16 acknowledges the success of Yuendumu programs including the Mt Theo Outstation. The Australian Government continues to recognise the success of the Mt Theo program by providing funding through a range of programs.
- Recommendation 23 calls for the Government to examine the use of contracts to prevent contractors taking regular unleaded petrol into Indigenous communities.

The Australian Government continues to address petrol sniffing and related substance misuse issues across a range of policy and program areas. The findings of the 2006 Senate Inquiry and other evidence sources continue to inform policy and program development and implementation.

CHAPTER 2

COMMENT ON RECENT REPORTS ON THE INCREASE OF PETROL SNIFFING IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

For the purposes of this chapter, ICCs were consulted about recent reports of petrol sniffing and other substance misuse by Indigenous young people in their region. Where numbers of sniffers are taken from published reports the source is identified. ICCs and CAPSSU were consulted in the preparation of this submission and asked to provide information on recent reports of substance misuse in their region. Where ICCs are attributed, the information is from recent intelligence received by ICC Managers in the course of their work.

Numbers of people sniffing petrol in central Australia

It is difficult to obtain definite figures on the numbers of people engaging in petrol sniffing. This is partly due to the young age of many sniffers. The episodic and opportunistic nature of petrol sniffing, particularly in areas where supply reduction strategies are in place can also make measuring numbers of people engaging in petrol sniffing difficult. Events such as changes in the availability of alcohol or the movement of people to areas where premium or regular unleaded is available have been blamed for renewed outbreaks. However, when looking at trends from various reports, it is clear that over the past two years the incidence of petrol sniffing in central Australia has reduced significantly.

The 2006 Senate Inquiry report stated that there was an estimated 600 Aboriginal people in the central desert region of the Northern Territory sniffing petrol regularly (Page 3).

In July 2007 the study *Data Collection for the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program* undertaken by Peter d'Abbs and Gillian Shaw of James Cook University for DoHA, estimated that there were 244 petrol sniffers in the central Australian area of the Northern Territory¹. This included marked reductions across the range of petrol sniffing behaviours, including heavy/chronic sniffers, regular sniffers, and experimenters.

In July 2008 the Central Australia Petrol Sniffing Strategy Unit (drawing advice from non-government service providers including the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service (CAYLUS)

¹ The report *Data Collection for the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program* by d'Abbs and Shaw (2007) is confidential. It contains information about communities that if released would jeopardise the privacy of some community members. A summary of the report is available on the Department of Health and Ageing Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program website at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/petrol/publishing.nsf/Content/reports>

and BushMob) estimated that there were approximately 85 people currently or recently sniffing petrol in the central Australian portion of the Northern Territory. This includes:

- 15 outbreaks across 9 communities (including 2 outbreaks in one community and 3 outbreaks in 2 communities) (total of 53 people);
- 2 outbreaks in Alice Springs (total of 20 people); and
- 3 outbreaks in 3 Alice Springs Town Camps (12 people).

BushMob report an increase in petrol sniffers in Alice Springs and surrounding communities..

These studies, and statements made by prominent non-government youth service providers in central Australia demonstrate that there have been significant reductions in the incidence and impacts of petrol sniffing in the Northern Territory portion of central Australia since the roll-out of *Opal* fuel and implementation of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy.

Similar reductions are also being experienced in the APY Lands in South Australia which are also part of the original Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Zone. In February 2007, survey results from the Nganampa Health Council in the APY Lands showed the number of petrol sniffers in the Lands between the ages of 10 and 40 years had fallen to around 70 people aged between 10 and 40 years in 2006 compared with 178 people in 2005.

The Port Augusta ICC is active in implementing the Petrol Sniffing Strategy in the APY Lands. When asked in July 2008 about outbreaks of petrol sniffing in the APY Lands, the ICC reported that outbreaks may happen on an intermittent basis. Anecdotally petrol sniffing has been very limited or non-existent during the past six months on the APY Lands.

Port Augusta ICC quoted from the recent Tjungunguku Kuranyakutu Palyantjaku (TKP) **Action Plan, March 2008 Report:**

DoHA stated that “A recent report found a 50% reduction in the number of petrol sniffers in the APY Lands since October 2006. This follows the 80% decrease already reported since the introduction of Opal fuel.”

The TKP report further stated that: “With the roll-out of Opal fuel, the number of persons detected by police sniffing petrol has reduced to the point that detection rates have been zero for several months. Anecdotal evidence suggests a minor resurgence in recent times; however no sniffers have been detected by police. Police maintain a data-base in relation to detected sniffers. Currently it appears instances of petrol sniffing have declined to such a level that this action is no longer relevant with respect to petrol sniffing.”

When asked in July 2008 about outbreaks of petrol sniffing in the Ngaayatjarra Lands (WA) portion of the Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy Zone, the Kalgoorlie ICC reported that petrol sniffing now occurs only sporadically.

Outbreaks outside central Australia

Evidence about rates of petrol sniffing and other substance misuse by young people is difficult to obtain. However, there have been outbreaks of petrol sniffing in the following ICC Regions in the past 6 months as reported by ICC Managers.

- Tennant Creek (2 sniffers/1 community)
- Katherine (5 communities – 1 large group; 4 smaller outbreaks)

- Nhulunbuy (large outbreak in one community – appears to be episodic in nature)
- Ceduna (new generation of sniffers and bullying other young people to sniff; *Opal* fuel currently being introduced in a neighbouring community)
- Kununurra (small outbreaks in Kununurra and Kalumburu by a person from Balgo, where there is a group of adult sniffers)
- Cape York (2 communities, including influences by migrating Northern Territory families)
- Mt Isa (Doomadgee and Mornington Island – since alcohol has been restricted)
- Brisbane (Cherbourg)

ICC Managers report that in general, petrol sniffing is associated with remote areas, and that the inhalant drug of choice in urban settings tends to be paint (chroming).

Marijuana is a widespread problem in both urban and non-urban areas. Anecdotally, in some instances, where petrol sniffing has decreased, marijuana use has increased (for example, Darwin region, APY Lands).

Alcohol is a widespread problem where it is available (and often also where it is restricted). Anecdotally, petrol sniffing has increased in some places where alcohol has been banned. The ICCs report that petrol sniffing appears to have ‘migrated’ into some communities (such as a few in Cape York and the East Kimberley, as well as Katherine in the Northern Territory) as a result of alcohol bans in the Northern Territory. This appears to sometimes occur when a family moves, with the older people looking for access to alcohol and the younger people using petrol.

Other drugs, such as amphetamines, appear to be more of a problem in urban areas (where presumably they are more freely available). However, there are reports of growing use of methamphetamines (including Ice) in the north west of Western Australia.

Petrol Sniffing does not only occur in central Australia. On a state by state basis the situation appears to be as follows:

Northern Territory

In the Tennant Creek ICC Region two known sniffers were recently removed from one community with parental assistance.

In the Katherine ICC Region there have been reports of outbreaks of petrol sniffing in at least 5 communities in the past 6 months:

- one community has had a core group of 3-10 male and female heavy sniffers since December 2007, as well as children as young as 10 years old; and
- four other communities have reported a number of incidents involving 1-5 youths.

Katherine and Jilkminggan are two areas in which the communities have claimed that increased petrol sniffing has been a result of the alcohol restrictions/bans.

In the Nhulunbuy ICC Region there has been a major outbreak in petrol sniffing in a large community – an increase from 1 or 2 to 24 people involved. 14 of these are recent sniffers (2-6 weeks) and are under 12 years old.

There appear to be episodic outbreaks in this community (a similar outbreak occurred in 2007). It is intended that *Opal* fuel will be available in Nhulunbuy from the end of September 2008.

The Darwin ICC reports that there has been minimal petrol sniffing in their region (although there have been some recent incidents reported in the NT media in July 2008).

In another community there has been no petrol sniffing for around 10 years. However, there has been a major increase in marijuana use since then. The ICC also notes that there are limited drug and alcohol services in the Top End, for remote residents, with only two operating in Darwin for Indigenous adults, and none for young people (although mainstream services do cater for Indigenous clients, and the majority of clients are in fact Indigenous).

South Australia

The Port Augusta ICC only has information on petrol sniffing in the APY Lands. The ICC reports that there have been claims that people going into the APY Lands from Coober Pedy or Marla with normal fuel pose a risk for petrol sniffing, and that chronic sniffers are able to access this with some people taking jerry cans onto the Lands. There is no evidence to substantiate these claims. On the APY Lands, alcohol abuse tends to occur with older members of communities, while younger people seem to engage in heavy cannabis use.

The Ceduna ICC reports that a new generation of sniffers has emerged in a large community in the Ceduna ICC Region. Recent reports suggest there are 4 chronic sniffers and a number of recreational users in a 14-18 year age group, mixed gender. Roll-out of *Opal* fuel in this area is just commencing.

There have been 24 recent arrests for sniffing in the community, 6 breaches of bail related to sniffing, and 4 associated offences (such as breaking into vehicles). Bullying to coerce other young people to sniff is prevalent.

Petrol sniffing in this community is episodic, with flare-ups occurring during the warmer months and during school holidays, when people are visiting communities.

There were 4 suicide attempts at one community in the region in December 2007/January 2008 following a high usage of a combination of substances.

There are anecdotal reports of activity in the Murray Bridge region.

Western Australia

The Derby and Broome ICCs report that petrol sniffing does not appear to be a problem in the West Kimberley, with no outbreaks reported. Anecdotally, alcohol and marijuana are the substances of preference for youth in the Derby ICC Region. There is a prevalence of alcohol and other drug use in the West Kimberley. There is a high correlation between death by self harm and alcohol and cannabis abuse (State Coroner Hope, February 2008).

The Kununurra ICC reports that there have been one or two outbreaks of petrol sniffing by small groups in Kununurra and Kalumburu. The instigator in both incidents was a person from another community. Petrol sniffing generally appears to be circumstantial or opportunistic by nature where it occurs in the East Kimberley region. There is a small group of petrol sniffers in Balgo that have a long history of sniffing behaviour. The majority of participants are adults. Marijuana is also a major issue across the East Kimberley region.

Queensland

The Cairns ICC (incl. Cape York) reports that, historically communities including Aurukun, Napranum and Lockhart River have had significant issues with petrol sniffing. However, in recent times, Lockhart River has seen some significant reduction due to the implementation of Wet Season programs.

Two communities in the northern part of Cape York have recently reported core groups of regular petrol sniffers. One of these communities has also seen a migration of individuals and families from the Northern Territory, allegedly due to tighter alcohol restrictions.

The alcohol bans in the Northern Territory have seen increases in migration of individuals and families into Cape York communities and Far North Queensland townships, including Napranum, Mareeba and Cairns. It is believed that younger family members of migrating groups have been responsible for the increase of petrol sniffing in Cape York (rather than older persons generally responsible for the increase in alcohol related issues).

While an evaluation of the State Government Alcohol Demand Reduction has been limited (due to a lack of data to date), it is suggested that the initiatives have not really increased sniffing as this is usually undertaken by the younger people who are unable to access alcohol.

Chroming is a significant problem in Cooktown with a group of approximately 16 (non-Indigenous) youths being identified as regular users.

Petrol sniffing does not appear to be a problem in the Townsville ICC Region, with no outbreaks reported. When outbreaks of substance sniffing have occurred in the past, it has generally been paint and located in the smaller towns in the region. The outbreaks have been effectively managed and contained by local service providers. Responses to this issue have incorporated a community-driven and multi-faceted response by health, retail, education and other community service providers.

The Mt Isa ICC reports that there have been significant increases in petrol sniffing in Doomadgee and Mornington Island communities. On Mornington Island, there has been an increase in home brew, chroming, petrol sniffing, drug misuse and gambling (since the Tavern closure). Children and youth are therefore being exposed to a wider range of substances for misuse and are taking them up.

There are some minor reports in the Mount Isa town area, but the main substance of misuse for youth in Mount Isa is chroming.

The Rockhampton ICC reports that there have been no outbreaks reported in the past 6 months. *Opal* fuel has been sold in Woorabinda Aboriginal Community for the past 18 months. During this time, the number of young people sniffing petrol in the community has decreased.

The Brisbane & Roma ICCs report that there has been a recent outbreak in petrol sniffing in Cherbourg Aboriginal Community, involving approximately 35 youth between the ages of 7 and 16.

New South Wales

The Queanbeyan ICC reports that there has been one isolated case reported in a town on the far south coast, but no evidence to support the claim. No other areas in New South Wales reported recent outbreaks.

CHAPTER 3
ONGOING EFFECTIVENESS OF THE 8 POINT PLAN

The Petrol Sniffing Strategy 8 Point Plan was developed by the Australian Government in 2005 to address the incidence and impact of petrol sniffing in central Australia. In June 2005 there was a Coronial inquiry into the deaths of two people from Mutitjulu. The public hearings in that community drew significant public and media attention, including drawing attention to the presence of people sniffing petrol at the hearings. There was also an inquest into the 2004 death of a man in Willowra. All of these deaths were attributed to petrol sniffing.

In July 2005, the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, Clare Martin wrote to the Prime Minister, John Howard requesting his assistance to deal with the issue of petrol sniffing in central Australia. As a result of this request senior officials from a number of Australian Government agencies met to develop a response. Meetings were also held with senior officials from Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. There was also significant input from the non-government sector in the form of a Strategy Advisory Group.

These meetings recognised that while the availability of *Opal* fuel was an important element in any effort to address petrol sniffing, the issue required a more comprehensive approach that addressed prevention, early intervention, and treatment and rehabilitation operations on a regional basis. The Petrol Sniffing Strategy 8 Point Plan for central Australia was announced by the Australian Government in September 2005. The new strategic approach was agreed with the South Australian, Western Australian and Northern Territory governments. The strategy was to apply to a tri-state region in central Australia.

The 8 points of the plan are:

- Consistent legislation;
- Appropriate levels of policing;
- Further roll-out of *Opal* fuel;
- Alternative activities for young people;
- Treatment and respite facilities;
- Communication and education strategies;
- Strengthening and supporting communities; and
- Evaluation.

The Australian Government has funded the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk, located in Alice Springs and staffed by Northern Territory Police, to target such trafficking in the cross-border regions of the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia, together with an operational drug detector dog unit.

Joint Policing Operations have been conducted in those regions by the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk:

- to gather intelligence;
- to educate communities, roadhouse operators and local police; and
- to conduct enforcement activities.

These activities have resulted in drug related arrests and charges; seizures of drugs, petrol and alcohol; and seizures of cash and property. Between January 2006 and March 2008 this totalled:

- 932 intelligence reports received
- 118 search warrants executed
- 901 arrests and summons
- 1,206 charges
- 99 drug infringement notices
- 24 drug house notices
- 7 declared drug premises
- 177 police interventions related to incidences of petrol sniffing
- 17.9 litres of petrol seized
- 33.104 kilograms of cannabis seized
- 16 firearms seized
- 10 vehicles seized
- 317.20 grams of amphetamines seized
- 81.5 grams of MDMA (ecstasy) seized
- \$87 300 cash seized
- 1 178.45 litres of alcohol seized
- 47 target profiles

In June 2008 a second Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk was opened in Katherine in the Northern Territory, funded by the Australian Government as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

In 2006 two new areas were declared as Petrol Sniffing Zones. These were the Central Australia Expanded Zone in the Northern Territory, and the East Kimberley in Western Australia. In December 2007 the Mornington/Doomadgee zone was agreed with the Queensland Government. Criteria for choosing these regions were:

- There was an identifiable petrol sniffing problem in a number of communities in the proposed region;
- The communities agreed that there was a problem with petrol sniffing and were prepared to address the problem; and
- The relevant State or Territory Government agreed that the proposed region had an identifiable problem and they are prepared to address this in partnership with the Australian Government.

The goals of the strategy as they were developed are:

- To reduce the incidence and impact of petrol sniffing in a defined area of central Australia by addressing the complex mix of interrelated causes and contextual factors contributing to this activity; and
- To evaluate the effectiveness of a regional and comprehensive response to petrol sniffing to determine whether and how it might usefully be expanded to other regions with similar issues.

Given the complexity of the issues being addressed, the Strategy was to be in place for a minimum of 10 years. While the rolling evaluation strategy and ongoing relationships between stakeholders was to

inform adjustments to the strategy, it was agreed that a long-term commitment from the respective governments was required.

Four Australian Government Departments are responsible for the implementation of the Strategy. They are the Department of Families Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Department of Health and Ageing, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Affairs, and the Attorney-General's Department. Considerable work is undertaken at the national level and at State and Territory office level of these agencies to coordinate their activities under the strategy. After agreement on the strategy and the declared zones, work with State and Territory Governments over the implementation of the strategy is also undertaken at the State Office level of the Australian Government agencies.

Review of the Implementation of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy

In late 2006 Urbis was engaged by FaHCSIA to undertake a review of the first phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy. The review was to:

- Define the theory behind the Strategy;
- Examine the causal logic of the impact of the Strategy on the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) headline indicators;
- Describe the policy context of the Strategy and how well the Strategy has been designed;
- Answer questions about how well the Strategy is being implemented in accordance to its original design;
- Examine the suitability of the success criteria, their measures and the performance reporting approach;
- Describe how the Strategy has progressed in its initial implementation (ie. outputs/activities achieved to date);
- Provide stakeholder and participant feedback on the appropriateness and satisfaction of programs/services/activities implemented to date;
- Describe the reach of the Strategy to date (e.g. numbers and locations of sites receiving *Opal* fuel, number, age and gender of youth participating in various youth diversionary activities implemented to date, reach of the communication strategy in Alice Springs etc);
- Describe the coordination and implementation of the whole of government approach between the Australian, State and Territory governments; and
- Provide options for consideration about how the Strategy can be improved, noting that the strategy is currently being expanded to other areas.

The review was primarily concerned with the period July 2006 to December 2007 and focused in particular on the Northern Territory. The report provides a comprehensive and independent overview of the development and early implementation of the Strategy. For this reason, discussion of the history and rationale behind the Strategy has only briefly been discussed in this submission.

The report of the review can be found at ATTACHMENT 1.

The findings of the review are quite detailed, however in summary the reviewers found that:

- The theory underlying the Strategy was well-grounded in the limited research and anecdotal evidence concerning petrol sniffing available at the time. The theory behind the Strategy has become more clearly articulated over time.

- The objectives of the Strategy are consistent with the priority areas identified by the OID headline indicators and there is a sound causal logic in the assumption that the Strategy may have an impact on these.
- The Strategy was developed quite quickly in response to a combination of research evidence, high profile coronial cases relating to deaths linked to petrol sniffing, and government, political and community concern. Nonetheless, the Strategy is well conceived.
- There are a number of points regarding how well the Strategy is being implemented. Factors that have facilitated or enhanced implementation of the Strategy include the allocation of Commonwealth funds to support key elements of the Strategy, together with the efforts of both Commonwealth and State/Territory agencies. Factors that may have adversely affected implementation include insufficient inter-agency communication and coordination, the lack of specific funding for some parts of the Strategy, and the launch of the Northern Territory Emergency Response immediately after the start of work on the Integrated Youth Strategy project. Sustainability of the various activities initiated under the Strategy is essentially a matter of adequate and continuing funding, together with appropriate management arrangements within and among the responsible agencies.
- Success criteria for the Strategy need further development and clarification.
- Implementation of some of the elements of the Strategy is well advanced (e.g. roll-out of *Opal* fuel), however less progress has been made on other elements (e.g. uniform legislation). There was general agreement from stakeholders that suitable youth activities and support are crucial to the success of the Strategy, but that it is too early for there to be any consensus on the adequacy and effectiveness of the specific steps taken so far.
- There was a range of stakeholder views on the importance of maintaining a specific focus on petrol sniffing vs. embedding the Petrol Sniffing Strategy within a wider substance misuse context. It was widely felt that while there are high levels of sniffing in communities this has very damaging results that call for a clear focus on sniffing per se. As levels of sniffing are significantly reduced, issues around sniffing can appropriately be seen in the broader context of drug and alcohol problems and of policy responses to this.
- Continued implementation requires a more active, consistent and comprehensive whole of government approach.

The four departments responsible for the implementation of the Strategy have agreed to the release of this report. The recently (February 2008) reconstituted Petrol Sniffing Strategy Senior Executive Service Steering Committee will take the recommendations of the report into consideration in the ongoing implementation of the Strategy.

In addition the Steering Committee is examining:

- National inter-government leadership in alignment with the new Government's arrangements and priorities;
- The need for focussed strategic intention in identifying and developing opportunities for education, training and employment activities within the 8 Point Plan;
- What further work needs to be undertaken to address the point on consistent legislation; and
- Maintaining coordination and cohesion within the strategy across the jurisdictions and regions while maintaining flexibility and the capacity to meet local needs.

As stated above, the Strategy was conceived as a 10 year strategy to address a complex issue. It is anticipated that the Strategy will evolve as implementation continues.

CHAPTER 4
THE ROLL-OUT OF *OPAL* FUEL

This chapter of the Australian Government's submission will provide the Inquiry with an update on the progress of the roll-out of *Opal* fuel as at 1 July 2008. This chapter will also address recommendations from Chapter 6 of the Community Affairs References Committee report "*Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*" that relate to the roll-out of *Opal* fuel (Recommendations 18 – 23).

CONTEXT

The regional roll-out of *Opal* fuel forms the third element in the Australian Government's Petrol Sniffing Strategy. The roll-out of *Opal* fuel is administered by the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program in DoHA.

Since 1998, the Australian Government has subsidised the supply of low aromatic fuel to reduce the incidence and impact of petrol sniffing in remote Indigenous communities. The Comgas Scheme initially provided subsidised Avgas to Indigenous communities to replace regular unleaded petrol. Following the prohibition of leaded fuels in Australia, *Opal* fuel was developed by BP Australia as a low aromatic alternative to regular (91 octane) unleaded petrol. *Opal* fuel has been supplied to participants registered on the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program since February 2005.

An evaluation of the Comgas Scheme in 2004 provided clear evidence of the effectiveness of low aromatic Avgas as a harm minimisation strategy. The evaluation recommended the expansion of the Comgas Scheme into commercial outlets on highways to complement the work in Aboriginal communities to stop petrol sniffing. In response to this and the development of *Opal* fuel, the Australian Government committed significant funding for a more comprehensive regional approach to the roll-out of *Opal* fuel.

Successive funding commitments have expanded and reinforced the regional approach. This approach is consistent with Recommendation 18 of the of the Community Affairs References Committee report "*Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*"². The funding that has been allocated to assist in the reduction of petrol sniffing including *Opal* fuel is outlined in more detail in chapter 6 of this submission.

Funding for the roll-out of *Opal* fuel is provided in recognition of the more expensive production and distribution costs than regular unleaded petrol. The two subsidies for *Opal* fuel are:

- **Production subsidy** – this cost arises because unleaded *Opal* fuel is more highly refined and is produced in smaller quantities than regular unleaded petrol.

² Recommendation 18: That the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments establish priorities for extending the roll-out of *Opal* fuel to the current production capacity of 20 million litres. The strategy should include: the identification of critical roadhouses and townships in close proximity to *Opal* communities; promotion of the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program to roadhouses and townships; and identifying and combating barriers that prevent a complete roll-out of *Opal* throughout the Central Australian region.

- **Distribution subsidy** – this cost arises as a result of the storage arrangements for *Opal* fuel. *Opal* fuel is currently stored in bulk in one location, Largs North, South Australia. The costs of distributing *Opal* fuel to remote communities, from this one location, are in some instances higher than with regular unleaded petrol. This subsidy is paid directly to fuel distributors and varies depending on the delivery location.

Although *Opal* fuel is predominately distributed to sites located in the Petrol Sniffing Strategy Zones (refer to Attachment 2), it should be noted that the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program has scope through the 2006-07 Budget measure to coordinate the roll-out of *Opal* fuel to other regions and communities outside these boundaries. *Opal* fuel may be provided to sites outside of the designated zones when a community or area is experiencing petrol sniffing or where petrol sniffing may become a significant issue in the future.

PROGRESS OF *OPAL* FUEL ROLL-OUT

In line with Recommendation 21 of the Community Affairs References Committee report “*Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*”³, in May 2006 BP Australia advised that it had increased capacity to enable production of up to 40 million litres of *Opal* fuel per annum from their refinery at Kwinana. The Australian Government has entered an agreement with BP Australia that ensures this production capacity is available until 30 June 2010. Options beyond 2010 are currently being considered.

Increased production capacity and additional funding in the 2006-07 Budget to expand the roll-out in new regions and Alice Springs saw a significant increase in the uptake of *Opal* fuel. As outlined in the Department of Health and Ageing’s 2006-07 Annual Report, regular unleaded petrol was replaced with *Opal* fuel in an additional 45 sites during the 2006-07 financial year.

As at 1 July 2008 there are 117 sites that supply *Opal* fuel including 82 communities, 32 service stations/roadhouses and 3 pastoral properties. More than 35 million litres of *Opal* fuel have been sold in remote Australia since its introduction in February 2005. Currently there is no legislation in place to mandate the use of *Opal* fuel, therefore its uptake has been on a voluntary basis.

Table 1 provides a breakdown of participants supplying *Opal* fuel based on their State/Territory location. To maintain the privacy of individual communities, the Australian Government does not publicly publish the names of communities participating on the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program. DoHA is in the process of seeking approval from communities to release this information in the future.

Table 1 – Participants Receiving *Opal* Fuel by State/Territory as at 1 July 2008

	Communities	Pastoral Property	Service Station/Roadhouse	Total
South Australia	15	0	3	18
Northern Territory	45	3	24	72

³ Recommendation 21: That the Commonwealth undertake a study with BP Australia to determine the potential to increase the current 20 million litres production capacity at Kwinana; and approach other refineries to use their existing production capacity to produce *Opal*.

Western Australia	15	0	5	20
Queensland	7	0	0	7
TOTAL RECEIVING	82	3	32	117

Central Desert and Expanded Central Desert Zones

The Central Desert Zone covers the tri-state cross-border area that includes the Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands. The Expanded Central Desert Zone extends the Central Desert Zone to include up to Kintore, Alice Springs and just above Ti Tree in the Northern Territory.

As at 1 July 2008, there were 65 sites receiving *Opal* fuel in the Central Desert Zone and Expanded Central Desert Zone. The roll-out of *Opal* fuel in these areas now focuses on a few roadhouses in the Expanded Central Desert Zone where *Opal* fuel is not yet available. The Australian Government continues to consult with these stakeholders to progress the introduction of *Opal* fuel to these locations.

East Kimberley Zone

The East Kimberley Zone in Western Australia extends from the communities of Kalumburu to Balgo and along the Western Australian and Northern Territory border.

As at 1 July 2008, there are 5 sites supplying *Opal* fuel in the designated East Kimberley Zone. The Australian Government has received a commitment to a regional roll-out of *Opal* fuel across the East Kimberley from key stakeholders including Aboriginal communities, state government bodies, petrol suppliers and other organisations. Despite in-principle support, the comprehensive roll-out of *Opal* fuel to the East Kimberley Zone has been delayed as a result of commercial supply chain and fuel distribution issues.

To overcome the supply chain issues, DoHA is working to identify a more efficient and accessible option for *Opal* fuel distribution in remote areas in northern Australia. This is likely to be achieved by establishing a bulk storage facility for *Opal* fuel in Darwin, in addition to the current storage site in Adelaide. This is expected to be resolved by the end of the 2008-09 financial year.

Queensland Zone

The Queensland Zone covers a small area around Mornington Island and Doomadgee in the Gulf of Carpentaria.

As at 1 July 2008, there were 3 sites supplying *Opal* fuel in the designated Queensland Zone. These sites provide substantial access to *Opal* fuel given the small size of this zone.

The Queensland Fuel Subsidy Scheme (QFSS) provides a subsidy to retailers, the majority of which is passed onto consumers. When *Opal* fuel was first introduced, the legislation governing the scheme did not recognise *Opal* fuel as a motor spirit, therefore fuel retailers receiving *Opal* fuel were not entitled to the subsidy. The Queensland Government indicated that *Opal* fuel would be included in the QFSS for a trial period of 15 months. Subsequent to Recommendation 19 of the of the Community Affairs References Committee report "*Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous*

*communities*⁴, the Queensland Government's Revenue Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2006 received royal assent on 10 November 2006 and took effect on 1 December 2006. This means that *Opal* fuel is now a standard retail fuel product attracting the fuel subsidy in its own right under the QFSS therefore effectively ending the Queensland *Opal* fuel trial and allowing the expansion of *Opal* fuel into communities without any price difference.

Continued Roll-out of *Opal* Fuel

As part of the response to addressing and preventing petrol sniffing in remote Australia, a coordinated approach to the introduction of *Opal* fuel to other areas is being planned. These areas include:

- Tennant Creek, Northern Territory
- Katherine, Northern Territory
- Kakadu, Northern Territory
- Gove, Northern Territory
- The Nullarbor, South Australia
- The Gulf, Queensland
- Cape York, Queensland

In response to the ongoing incidence of petrol sniffing in Yalata located in the Nullarbor region of South Australia, DoHA has recently partnered with the South Australian Government to provide funding to the community. This partnership will allow for the purchase of portable fuel tank systems including petrol pumps that will supply *Opal* and Diesel fuels to the community as a solution to lack of suitable infrastructure in Yalata.

The portable facility will enable community members to purchase *Opal* and Diesel fuels from two 30,000 litre fuel tanks set inside specially constructed shipping containers. An outdoor payment terminal will provide the opportunity for 24 hour access and a cashless system of fuel supply with significant labour cost reductions.

The Yalata project provides an opportunity to trial the portable fuel tank system and to evaluate the effectiveness of this arrangement. Indigenous Business Australia has expressed an interest in supplying *Opal* fuel in close proximity to the stores they are acquiring across the Northern Territory. The portable fuel tank system may allow the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program to supply *Opal* fuel to areas that, for various reasons, are having difficulty accessing the product.

CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS OF THE ROLL-OUT OF *OPAL* FUEL

Availability of premium unleaded fuel

Premium unleaded fuel is still available in the designated regions as there is currently no substitute available. The Australian Government continues to work with the fuel industry to identify options for a suitable premium fuel alternative.

⁴ Recommendation 19: That the Commonwealth and Queensland Governments agree on a complementary subsidy approach that ensures *Opal* can retail in Queensland for the same price as regular unleaded.

To mitigate the impact of the availability of premium fuel and consistent with Recommendation 20 of the of the Community Affairs References Committee report “*Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities*”⁵, the Australian Government has developed “*Guidelines for the Responsible Sale of Premium Unleaded Petrol*”. The Guidelines outline the preferred standards for the responsible sale of premium unleaded petrol, complementing existing Guidelines for the Responsible Sale of Volatile Substances. A copy of the draft Guidelines is at **Attachment 3**.

The Guidelines have been developed in consultation with the fuel industry and community organisations and will be provided to fuel retailers in the designated regions. The dissemination of the Guidelines will be supported by communication materials and workshops for fuel retailers. Support for the implementation may include training to educate retail staff in commercial outlets about the Guidelines.

Distribution in Northern Australia

As noted earlier in this submission, the expansion of the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program to areas in northern Australia has been delayed as a result of commercial supply chain and fuel distribution issues. These issues arise because *Opal* fuel is currently only stored and distributed from Largs North, South Australia.

DoHA is currently investigating options for a second storage site for *Opal* fuel in Darwin, Northern Territory. This will decrease the cost of distribution and improve the availability of *Opal* fuel in northern Australia.

Communication Strategies and Promotion of *Opal* fuel

During the initial introduction of *Opal* fuel in Alice Springs in September 2006, *Opal* fuel was hampered by unsubstantiated rumours and negative press articles expressing concern about the safety and reliability of *Opal* fuel in car engines. These reports undermined consumer confidence in the product and caused some retailers to revert to supplying regular unleaded petrol.

An eight week communication campaign was developed to support the full replacement of all regular unleaded fuel in Alice Springs in March 2007. The campaign materials were developed based on extensive consumer research into attitudes surrounding *Opal* fuel and were thoroughly market tested in Alice Springs to ensure they met the information needs of Alice Springs consumers.

The communication campaign was informed by independent tests of *Opal* fuel commissioned by DoHA. The testing found that all four samples tested, from Alice Springs and surrounds, complied with the national standard as set down in the *Fuel Standard (Petrol) Determination 2001*. Other analyses of the effects of *Opal* fuel on vehicle performance, durability, drivability, materials and emissions concluded that *Opal* fuel complies in all respects with the National Fuel Quality Standards.

All 11 service stations in Alice Springs have fully replaced regular unleaded petrol with *Opal* fuel since March 2007.

⁵ Recommendation 20: That Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments develop systems to secure premium and other sniffable fuels at key roadhouses and townships, which can then be applied in larger centres such as Alice Springs

Following the roll-out of *Opal* fuel in Alice Springs in March 2007, a communication strategy was developed for the ongoing roll-out of *Opal* fuel. The strategy was developed to address the ongoing need to educate residents and tourists in the designated regions about the effectiveness and reliability of *Opal* fuel and to overcome any negative perceptions about the product. The strategy's aim was to establish a communications and information framework to support the introduction of *Opal* fuel into new communities throughout remote Australia.

In late 2007, DoHA made the decision to suspend the implementation of this strategy. This included ceasing the distribution of all existing communication materials such as brochures and collateral material. This decision was made as a result of the Coronial Inquest into the death of Kenny Malthouse from sniffing fuel, thought to be *Opal* fuel and possible questions raised by the Northern Territory Coroner regarding the safe promotion of *Opal* fuel.

In May 2008 the Northern Territory Coroner found that the cause of Mr Malthouse's death was accidental suffocation secondary to the inhalation of vapour from *Opal* fuel. Independent tests have concluded that *Opal* fuel is considered less toxic than regular and premium unleaded petrol, under conditions of chronic exposure. Despite the low aromatic content and less toxic effect of *Opal* fuel, the death of a young boy highlights the dangers of sniffing any volatile substance, including *Opal* fuel.

Subsequently, in the Coroner's report it was recommended *"That the Northern Territory Government, the Commonwealth Government and BP Australia ensure that any promotion in relation to Opal does not give the impression that it is a harmless substance or that it cannot cause death if ingested or sniffed."*

As a result of the Coroner's findings into the death of Kenny Malthouse being handed down on 12 May 2008 and consistent with Recommendation 22 of the of the Community Affairs References Committee report *"Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities"*⁶ the Australian Government will be working closely with BP Australia and communication experts to review the ongoing *Opal* fuel communication strategy and develop a suitable campaign. Similar to the Alice Springs campaign, the development of materials will be informed by a market research component to ensure that the messages are delivered in an appropriate format for the target audience.

Legislation

To date, the supply of *Opal* fuel by communities and retailers is on a voluntary basis as there is limited legislation in place that allows the supply of *Opal* fuel to be mandated.

In accordance with Recommendation 23 of the Community Affairs References Committee report *"Beyond petrol sniffing: renewing hope for Indigenous communities"*⁷ under the *Northern Territory Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act 2005*, communities in the Northern Territory can put in place a community management plan that enables individual communities to ban petrol and paint and to control the supply and sale of petrol and paint in their council area. These community management plans are subject to Northern Territory Ministerial approval.

⁶ Recommendation 22: That the Commonwealth Government discuss with BP Australia what role they may have to assist the distribution of information on *Opal* and the distribution of *Opal* identification stickers.

⁷ Recommendation 23: That the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments examine the procedure at Maningrida whereby contracts are used to prevent contractors bringing regular unleaded petrol into their communities and facilitate the adaptation and spread of this technique to other communities.

The community of Papunya in the Northern Territory has successfully applied and received approval to ban regular unleaded fuel in their community. A number of other communities located in central Australia are working to establish similar bans in their council areas.

The Australian Government is not aware of any equivalent legislation in other state jurisdictions.

Community Locality

The roll-out of *Opal* fuel has been successful in reducing petrol sniffing in areas where the supply of regular unleaded petrol can be limited or significantly reduced.

If a community is not sufficiently isolated, it is not always possible to efficiently limit the supply of regular unleaded petrol. Generally, communities are only approved to receive *Opal* fuel if located at least 100 kilometres from the nearest source of regular unleaded fuel.

There has been success in overcoming this issue through undertaking regional roll-outs that target all fuel supplies in an area. This approach is limited to remote and regional areas of Australia that, as a region, can be isolated from regular unleaded fuel supplies.

Substitution

There are reports from central Australia and other communities accessing *Opal* fuel, that since the introduction of the low aromatic petrol, sniffers have moved to other substances such as glue, paint, marijuana, alcohol and mouthwash.

This highlights that supply reduction strategies such as *Opal* fuel, although effective, are only one element in addressing substance use. The other elements of the Australian Government's Petrol Sniffing Strategy provide increased support for dealing with not only petrol sniffing but also other substance use through better policing, treatment and respite facilities, communication and education, and alternative activities for young people. The continued roll-out of programs and resources under the Petrol Sniffing Strategy will not only impact on the rates of petrol sniffing but also other substance misuse.

EVIDENCE OF *OPAL* FUEL'S POSITIVE IMPACT

There is substantial anecdotal evidence from community organisations, community councils and government that suggests that the roll-out of *Opal* fuel has significantly reduced the incidence of petrol sniffing in remote areas of Australia, particularly in the Central Desert Zone.

A survey released in October 2006 by Nganampa Health Council on petrol sniffing prevalence in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY Lands) measured an 80 per cent reduction in petrol sniffing since the introduction of *Opal* fuel. To establish the validity of these findings, a follow-up survey was conducted in May 2007. This survey measured a further 50 per cent reduction in the number of petrol sniffers since the October 2006 results. The May 2007 survey found that "the introduction of *Opal* fuel has been a material factor in a major reduction in the prevalence of petrol sniffing on the APY Lands." Tregenza (2007).

The Australian Government funded the collection of data on the prevalence of petrol sniffing in 74 remote Indigenous communities in Australia.⁸ This data has formulated a baseline dataset for monitoring petrol sniffing prevalence in the future. In addition, DoHA provided funding to Tangentyere Council to undertake data collection in the Alice Springs Town Camps. To ensure the consistency and validity of all petrol sniffing data, Tangentyere Council also utilised the same methodology that has been used in previous data collections. The Tangentyere Council report identifies the significant impact *Opal* fuel has had in the time it has been available in Alice Springs.

“The Central Australian Youth Link Up Service has estimated that in October 2006 there were approximately 75 sniffers resident in, and visiting the town camps in Alice Springs. Opal fuel was then introduced in February 2007. This project has identified 29 current sniffers, only four of whom are residents of town camps sniffing at the end of October 2007.”

To evaluate the effectiveness of *Opal* fuel, consultants have been engaged to conduct an impact evaluation of *Opal* fuel which will assess the impact the roll-out of *Opal* fuel has had in contributing to the changes in prevalence of petrol sniffing. The evaluation will collect petrol sniffing prevalence data from a sample of 20 communities where baseline data was collected and will utilise the same methodology to ensure the full impact of *Opal* fuel is measured. The 20 communities selected provide a representative sample of the different manifestations of petrol sniffing across jurisdictions where petrol sniffing is a problem. The evaluation is expected to be completed by October 2008.

CHAPTER 5 THE DELIVERY OF YOUTH SERVICES IN AFFECTED AREAS

Youth services can loosely be defined as any services provided to people between the ages of 12 to 20 (with some flexibility at the margins), that are aimed at supporting young people to engage with positive activities for personal development. They generally include sport and recreation activities, arts and cultural activities, personal life skills programs, educational support activities (e.g. homework centres), programs to assist relationships with family and community, mentoring and leadership activities, programs to prevent and divert young people from adverse contact with the criminal justice system, and programs to assist young people at risk or affected by abuse, poverty, homelessness, and substance misuse. Definitions of youth services generally exclude mainstream health services and school based education.

Alice Springs is the service hub for central Australia. The 2006 ABS Census Data states that there are over 900 people aged between 10 and 19 years in the Alice Springs region (corresponds with the Alice Springs ICC region). This age cohort represents 20 per cent of the total Indigenous population of the region. Indigenous people in extremely remote locations such as central Australia experience the highest levels of disadvantage in Australia. As a result of poverty, illness, poor educational outcomes and high levels of substance misuse in communities there are high levels of need amongst Indigenous young people in the region. Stakeholders in the region clearly state that there are substantial levels of unmet need. This is across the spectrum of what is commonly characterised as “youth services” including sport, recreation and cultural activities, activities to supplement mainstream educational programs and facilities, to health related services including substance misuse programs.

⁸ A summary of this report is located at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/petrol/publishing.nsf/Content/reports>

A number of organisations provide youth services in central Australia. They are funded through a wide range of Commonwealth Government and Northern Territory Government programs, and some also receive funding from philanthropic sources. Some notable organisations providing youth services in central Australia on behalf of the Australian Government are:

YouthTraX Local Community Partnership

YouthTraX provides career development and transition support services for young people in Alice Springs and the central region. Local Community Partnerships facilitate access for young people to better pathways management at the local, service region level through linking with and complementing existing programs and services, including schools, businesses and training organisations. YouthTraX is funded by DEEWR.

Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service (CAYLUS)

The CAYLUS mission is to address substance misuse by young people through supporting community initiatives for young people. CAYLUS is auspiced by Tangentyere Council Inc. The CAYLUS service delivery areas include Alice Springs, Pintubi/Luritja, Walpiri, Arrente and Pitjantjatjara communities.

Through the Youth Wellbeing Program, CAYLUS implements a broad promotion, prevention and early intervention strategy for youth in central Australian Aboriginal communities. Specifically the CAYLUS Youth Wellbeing Program provides services to:

- assist in reducing the incidence of petrol sniffing and other substance misuse in central Australian communities;
- improve the social and emotional wellbeing of young people in central Australian communities;
- increase the capacity of central Australian Aboriginal communities to address petrol sniffing problems at a local community level;
- increase the level of positive activities for young people in central Australian communities;
- develop and maintain a regional approach addressing inhalant substance misuse and provision of youth services in central Australia ;
- improve effectiveness, accountability and range of youth service activities in remote areas; and
- improve sustainability of youth programs in remote areas.

AGD has provided funding to CAYLUS to manage a flexible need-based brokerage fund that is used to assist remote communities with short-term or start-up funding of offender rehabilitation projects. This brokerage service has been useful in providing a mechanism for communities to quickly access funding to support petrol sniffing interventions particularly in the event of an outbreak or during gaps in normal service delivery. It also supports outstation rehabilitation services such as Ilpurla who accommodate young people for periods of time to allow them to address their sniffing issues.

DoHA has provided core funding to CAYLUS under the auspices of Tangentyere Council to administer the Youth Wellbeing Program since 1 July 2004. In addition, DoHA has funded CAYLUS to employ a dedicated caseworker since November 2006 and also to manage school holiday programs in the 2006-07 and 2007-08 Christmas holiday periods.

Following positive comment from an independent evaluation process, DoHA is finalising ongoing funding arrangements for CAYLUS until June 2012. CAYLUS also received funding from

FaHCSIA, AGD, the Aboriginal Benefit Account, Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation, and the Northern Territory Government.

BushMob Inc.

BushMob undertakes community development with a youth and family focus around volatile substance misuse, alcohol and other drugs using outreach, bush adventure therapy (9-30 year olds). It also operates the only gazetted youth volatile substance abuse service in the Northern Territory. This consists of a 5 bed, stabilisation and treatment facility that includes intensive case management around substance misuse issues for 12 to 18 year olds. However, demand for the service is high and since January 2008 there has been an average of up to 10 additional residents using the service and sleeping in swags. BushMob are starting to receive referrals from the APY lands and the Top End. The organisation also facilitates BushMob media and the Strongmob (peers and mentors) Program.

Core funding is provided by the Northern Territory Government which includes a contribution of \$300 000 per annum from DoHA to the Northern Territory Government towards their contract with BushMob through COAG and NTER Budget measures. BushMob has also received funding from the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department and FaHCSIA's 2007/08 NTER Youth Alcohol Diversion measure.

Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation

Waltja is a community-based organisation that works with Aboriginal families in remote central Australia. Waltja Programs are overseen by a Management Committee of traditional Aboriginal women. Waltja activities include young mothers programs, early childhood, living skills and child rearing programs. They also deliver some Reconnect and men's health programs. Waltja is a registered training organisation.

Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi receives funding from various Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government agencies. They also receive philanthropic funding.

Alice Springs Youth Accommodation and Support Services Inc. (ASYASS)

ASYASS provides crisis accommodation for young people aged 15 – 18 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

ASYASS have three main types of youth accommodation.

- A crisis refuge;
- Ampe Akweke, a safe house for young women having babies; and
- A youth housing program which provides semi supported accommodation for 15 – 21 year olds and includes an intense living skills program.

ASYASS also provides other housing related assistance and referrals for young people. ASYASS is funded by both Commonwealth and Northern Territory Governments.

ASYASS also provides the Deadly Treadlies program, a bike rebuilding program for young people. The program provides a positive drug, alcohol and violence free environment where participants will have the opportunity to build a bike for themselves or a family member. This is currently funded by the National Community Crime Prevention Program.

The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC)

NPYWC began in 1980. The push for a separate women's forum came about during the South Australian Pitjantjatjara Land Rights struggle of the late 1970s. During consultations over land rights,

many women felt that their views were ignored, so they established their own organisation. NPYWC receive funding from various Commonwealth and State Government agencies. The NPYWC runs youth programs as part of their overall set of programs that address the needs of women in the NPY Lands.

The Mt Theo Program

The Mt Theo Program based in Yuendumu works on the prevention and cessation of petrol sniffing and other substance misuse throughout the Warlpiri region through a range of integrated programs. The Mt Theo Outstation provides strong cultural treatment and rehabilitation for young Warlpiri engaging in substance misuse. The Yuendumu Youth Program provides young people with community activities including sport, recreation, art, music, culture and excursions, outside school hours and on weekends. The Jaru Pirrjirdi Youth Development Project is an integrated after-care and community development project for young people aged 17-30 in Yuendumu. The Mt Theo Program also runs youth programs in Willowra, and outreach and education projects across the Warlpiri region and to Warlpiri youth throughout central Australia. The Mt Theo Program received support from private donations, DoHA, FaHCSIA, the Indigenous Land Corporation, the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation, the Foundation for Young Australia, NT Department of Health and Community Services, NT Office of Sport and Recreation, and NT Office of Crime Prevention.

The Petrol Sniffing Strategy Integrated Youth Services Project

The primary youth diversion and community development activity in central Australia under the Petrol Sniffing Strategy is the NT Integrated Youth Services Project (the Project) which commenced in April 2007. The project was initiated through a whole of government approach led by FaHCSIA. The Project provides integrated holistic youth services to Finke (Aputula), Docker River (Kaltukatjara), Imanpa and Mutitjulu.

The Project provides a broad range of diversionary activities and includes an element based on Partnership Outreach Education Model (POEM). The model has two youth workers (1 male 1 female), support workers and trainees in each community, along with relief workers and other backup support operating out of Alice Springs. It is supported by recreation hall upgrades/new recreation halls, vehicles, equipment and youth worker accommodation. Youth workers have been in place in all four communities since July 2007.

The range of services delivered through the project includes:

- Youth activities, including sport, cultural, recreational, and other diversionary activities;
- Linking to more specialised case management services to provide support for at-risk individuals at the local level (including assistance to remain connected to family);
- Assistance to remain connected to or engage with education, training and employment; and
- Links to community health and education initiatives.

The project includes \$8 million funding for Mission Australia to provide a broad range of diversionary activities, as well as almost \$4 million in supporting infrastructure such as recreation hall upgrades/construction and youth worker and visitor accommodation.

The service is delivered under a single multi-year funding agreement. FaHCSIA, AGD and DEEWR are contributing funding under a memorandum of understanding. FaHCSIA provide \$9 077 146, AGD provide \$1 505 021, and DEEWR has contributed \$443 812.

FaHCSIA is responsible for visitor and youth worker accommodation, staff costs and capital costs. AGD is responsible for community recreation hall upgrades and construction, management support and recreational equipment plus the construction of 4 container offices. DEEWR contributes to direct staff and operational costs.

Up to 235 young people between the ages of 5 and 20 years in each community participate in diversion activities under this project. Community members are also involved in providing and supervising activities.

Communities receiving youth services

CAPSSU recently undertook a survey of youth services in the central desert region of the Northern Territory (outside Alice Springs). Communities covered in the survey include: Papunya, Kintore, Harts Range, Mt Leibig, Ntaria, Areyonga, Yuelamu, Anmatjere/Ti Tree region (includes Engawala, Nturiya, Laramba, and Pmara Jutunta) , Yuendumu, Titjikala, Santa Teresa; Ikuntji, Urapantja, Ampilawatja, Ilpurla, Apatula/Finke, Mutijulu, Docker River and Imanpa. Program staffing includes the provision of one substance abuse worker, 16 youth workers, 16 casual Anangu trainee youth workers, 3 outreach workers, 2 education officers and 5 sport and recreation workers across the communities. It is worth noting that 8 of the youth workers and Anangu trainee youth workers are employed in a single project – the Petrol Sniffing Strategy Integrated Youth Services Project in Finke, Mutijulu, Docker River and Imanpa.

In addition, the Mt Theo youth rehabilitation program in Yuendumu also employs 10 elders, 14 workers in the youth program, and 75 casual participant/workers.

Funding sources for youth services in the region include FaHCSIA, DEEWR, AGD, the Australian Sports Commission, the Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA), DoHA, the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services (NTDHCS) and Northern Territory Department of Sport and Recreation. In addition, some organisations receive funds from philanthropic sources.

Issues around youth service provision in central Australia

Central Australia is a particularly difficult region in which to provide youth services. Difficulties include:

- The patchwork of programs and providers;
- Difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified and experienced workers;
- Lack of infrastructure; and
- High levels of need in the client group.

Many youth services in central Australia (like services elsewhere) operate under short term funding arrangements. Programs attempt to meet immediate need, build capacity and address underlying causes. However, underlying causes which have evolved over a significant period of time cannot be addressed by projects funded for a 12 month period. This issue has been examined a number of times, including in the 2006 report by Morgan Disney commissioned by FaHCSIA “*A Red Tape Evaluation in Selected Indigenous Communities*”. Consequences of the short term nature of the funding to youth services (including in central Australia) is that organisations and communities have difficulty

planning for continuity of service provision, attracting qualified and experienced staff because they cannot offer long term employment, and that communities experience high turn over of workers.

FaHCSIA commissioned two consultant reports dealing with the administrative burden in each of the Indigenous and mainstream sectors. Action on the implementation of the recommendations of the report 'A Red Tape Evaluation in Selected Indigenous Communities' is being oversighted by the Secretaries Group on Indigenous Affairs and will see a reduction in administrative burden placed on community organisation, while maintaining an appropriate level of accountability. Initiatives being developed and implemented in response to the Morgan Disney report include:

- Developing a plain language agreement;
- Developing a significantly reduced common set of performance indicators, that will assist measurement of project and program performance, while reducing demands on service providers
- Improving the link between funds provided and accountability/reporting requirements;
- Facilitating performance reporting across program types, and across Australian Government Agencies; and
- Greater use of multi-year and multi-agency funding that will enhance the capacity of organisations to plan co-ordinated and longer term services.

These initiatives will ease the administrative burden on service providers and allow greater opportunity for coordinated and consistent service approaches to be implemented in the community.

Lack of coordination across programs and across governments is also an issue. Individual organisations and workers attempt to work together cooperatively, however the structural issues make this difficult. This can lead to gaps and overlaps in service to communities.

The long distances, isolation and language and cultural complexities mean that youth workers can be difficult to attract, and they can burn out very quickly. Communities are often unwilling to engage with workers who do not have appropriate cultural knowledge, and who will not be spending long periods of time with the community. The obvious solutions to the problem are not the most effective. Youth workers in metropolitan areas rarely have experience working with Indigenous communities and in remote locations. Ideally the solution is to train local people as youth workers and this is happening across a number of projects (e.g. the Mt Theo Substance Abuse Program and the Petrol Sniffing Strategy Integrated Youth Services Project), however this is a long term undertaking and will not solve immediate staff shortages.

Communities in central Australia typically have low or non-existent levels of the community infrastructure necessary to run full time youth programs. This can include; housing for permanent youth workers; recreation halls in which to run programs (absolutely necessary in the heat and at night); basic sporting facilities (e.g. basketball courts and ovals in reasonable repair); and training rooms and office accommodation. For this reason the 2006 Budget included funds for the construction of youth worker housing and construction or repair/upgrade of recreation halls. However, construction in central Australia is expensive and can take much longer than similar construction projects in metropolitan or even regional centres. All materials need to be transported long distances; there is a national shortage of construction workers and a large amount of construction work underway or planned for the region.

As stated above, young people in central Australia experience high levels of disadvantage. Preventable diseases are common, levels of literacy and numeracy are low and school attendance is low, the incidence of substance misuse is high, and Indigenous young people have a high rate of contact with the juvenile justice system. There are high levels of young people who can be categorised as at risk of long term disadvantage in all of its manifestations under the framework established by the Productivity Commission in *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*⁹.

Mainstream and Indigenous youth services across Government have a role to play in addressing the needs of young people in central Australia. The challenge is providing coordinated and sustainable youth services in remote Australia that meet the needs of young people in their transition to healthy adulthood. The Integrated Youth Strategy has been developed to do this, with significant youth and community input into its running in each community, support for youth workers in difficult locations, and training elements for local people to work and train as youth workers.

CHAPTER 6

THE EFFECTIVENESS AND ADEQUACY OF RESOURCES PROVIDED TO ADDRESS PETROL SNIFFING AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN CENTRAL AUSTRALIA; (TOR 2D)

The Australian Government provides significant resources to combat petrol sniffing and substance abuse in central Australia. This includes funding under the 2005 Petrol Sniffing Strategy allocations, funding under the 2006 Petrol Sniffing Strategy budget measure, and allocations under a range of other Australian Government programs that have related aims.

The Commonwealth Gasoline Scheme (Comgas Scheme) was established in 1998, administered by the DoHA to subsidise the use of Avgas, as a supply reduction strategy, to communities with known petrol sniffing issues. The Scheme received base funding of \$1 million annually. In 2004, it was determined that an unleaded replacement to Avgas (a leaded fuel) would be required.

Working in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Petroleum and the Australian Government; BP Australia developed *Opal* fuel as a replacement to Avgas for use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities that experience petrol sniffing issues.

In February 2005, *Opal* fuel was introduced into the communities in Australia, who had previously been using Avgas, with positive results. In the 2005-06 Budget, \$9.6 million over four years was allocated to “Combating Petrol Sniffing” and providing funding for the roll-out of *Opal* fuel to 23 new Aboriginal communities in central Australia, funding for the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk, and an allocation of \$3 million from the Aboriginal Benefit Account to support diversionary and rehabilitation programs in the Northern Territory.

While the 2005-06 Budget measure set the framework for the Australian Government’s objectives to reduce petrol sniffing, this initial allocation of funds was principally targeting a single supply reduction strategy using the Comgas Scheme and in particular *Opal* fuel. The Comgas Evaluation Report, while recognising the value of the alternative/substitution approach in achieving some immediate successes, highlighted that there were inherent problems with a single strategy based on limiting supply which was not supported by other effective interventions. This Report became one

⁹ See in particular Chapter 7 Positive Childhood and Transition to Adulthood in SCRGSP (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) 2007, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

of the key drivers in setting up a more sustained approach including a more expansive cross portfolio strategy with greater financial support.

It was recognised that *Opal* fuel would not be the sole solution for reducing petrol sniffing. Like other forms of substance abuse, to successfully reduce petrol sniffing and prevent substitution of substances it is vital that Government policy also addresses the social determinants of health such as structured activities, education and better policing in addition to supply reduction, and treatment and rehabilitation.

In September 2005, the Australian Government, announced the 8 Point Plan (Petrol Sniffing Strategy) as a comprehensive approach to addressing petrol sniffing. With the announcement of the 8 Point Plan, a further \$9.5 million was provided over two years for the Petrol Sniffing Strategy in central Australia.

In the 2006-07 Budget, the Australian Government allocated \$55.1 million over four years to expand the Petrol Sniffing Strategy in two new zones where petrol sniffing is prevalent.

The success of the early Budget measures to address petrol sniffing influenced the allocation of a further \$11.9 million in the 2007-08 Budget for three years to roll-out *Opal* fuel into Alice Springs.

In total, there have been four specific Budget measures and initiatives to fund the Australian Government's Petrol Sniffing Strategy and the roll-out of *Opal* fuel. These are summarised below:

1. 2005-06 "*Addressing Indigenous Needs - Combating Petrol Sniffing*" Budget measure – This measure currently provides \$9.6 million over four years to enable 23 new communities to access *Opal* fuel.
2. September 2005 – Additional Estimates "*Addressing Indigenous Needs - Combating Petrol Sniffing*" - The announcement of the 8 Point Plan (Petrol Sniffing Strategy) provides the Australian Government \$9.5 million to tackle petrol sniffing in central desert Indigenous communities. This included \$6 million over two years to roll-out *Opal* fuel in central Australia, funding for the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk, and an allocation of \$3 million from the Aboriginal Benefit Account.
3. 2006-07 "*Reducing Substance Abuse (Petrol Sniffing)*" Budget measure – The Australian Government allocated \$55.1 million over four years. This funding extends the existing commitment for a comprehensive regional approach in the Central Desert Zone and commits to extending the Petrol Sniffing Strategy in two further zones of Australia. Funding is allocated to four Australian Government agencies:
 - Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) - \$20.1 million over four years to increase the availability of unleaded *Opal* fuel and to scope requirements for rehabilitation services;
 - Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) – \$15 million to strengthen and support communities;
 - Attorney-General's Department (AGD) – \$14.9 million for prevention, diversion, rehabilitation and restorative justice programs for Indigenous communities; and

- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) – \$5.1 million for diversionary intervention education projects.
4. July 2006 – Additional Estimates “*Reducing Substance Abuse (Petrol Sniffing)*” – \$12 million over three years commencing in 2007-08 for the roll-out of *Opal* fuel to Alice Springs.

The roll-out of *Opal* fuel is the only element of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy that is specific to petrol sniffing. All other elements of the Strategy are fundamental to reducing not only petrol sniffing but also broader substance abuse issues. As such, funding and measures committed to combating substance abuse in Indigenous communities complement work being undertaken on the Petrol Sniffing Strategy.

Addressing substance abuse issues in Indigenous communities is recognised by the Australian Government as a key factor to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) Report commissioned by COAG identifies priority areas that need to be addressed in order to reduce Indigenous disadvantage. As outlined in the OID Report (2007), “*Reducing substance misuse can significantly reduce the level of assaults and homicides and the level of disability, while improving the overall health and wellbeing of a population. A reduction in substance use might also increase children’s educational attainment, household and individual income levels, and reduce crime and imprisonment rates*”.

Treatment and Rehabilitation

Substance abuse by young Indigenous people in central Australia is not only addressed through the Petrol Sniffing Strategy. In recognition of the importance of tackling the debilitating effect of substance abuse on Indigenous Australians, COAG has agreed to work to fund and administer complementary measures to address this issue. This includes additional funding for drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services in regional and remote areas. COAG funding for treatment and rehabilitation is summarised below:

- **2006 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) - *Addressing Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities – Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Rehabilitation Services for Indigenous Australians in Remote and Regional Communities***

In July 2006, the Australian Government announced a comprehensive funding package of \$130 million over four years to address issues of violence and abuse in Indigenous communities at the Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) meeting. Funding of \$49.3 million over four years was included for additional drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services in regional and remote Indigenous communities. This is an ongoing measure, with funding in the fifth year of \$14.8 million. State and Territory governments were also required to provide a matching effort.

- **2007 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) - *Closing the Gap - Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Services***

In December 2007, COAG announced a further \$49.3 million over four years in funding for substance and alcohol rehabilitation and treatment services, particularly in remote areas. This is an ongoing measure, with funding in the fifth year of approximately \$12 million. State and Territory governments were required to provide complementary investment.

In addition, the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in DoHA manages the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Substance Use Program. In 2007-08 this Program provided

\$27.6 million to support 93 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander substance abuse services across Australia. The Substance Use Program is an ongoing initiative therefore funding is recurrent.

As the Petrol Sniffing Strategy has not received specific funding through its Budget measures to implement treatment and rehabilitation programs, when allocating funding from the COAG measures to the States and Territories, DoHA has been mindful to ensure adequate funding is provided to facilities that service the Petrol Sniffing Strategy Zones. In some cases funding has been allocated specifically to volatile substance abuse treatment services.

Treatment and Rehabilitation - Central Australia

The following outlines Australian Government funding provided towards treatment and rehabilitation facilities that service central Australia. It should be noted that only the Northern Territory COAG measures have been identified in this section. This is because the bulk of central Australia is serviced by the Northern Territory. South Australia and Western Australia have also allocated smaller portions of their COAG funding to facilities that service the central Australian zone.

COAG 2006

\$15.9 million has been provided to the Northern Territory under the 2006 COAG Measure. This includes funding for a range of activities to enhance the capacity of substance abuse services in the central Australian region including:

- Development of a youth volatile substance abuse treatment service in Alice Springs which will address the significant issue of petrol sniffing in the central Australian region; and
- Establishment of a new non-residential transitional after care service in Alice Springs to assist clients in their transition from residential rehabilitation back to their communities.

COAG 2007

\$8 million will be provided to the Northern Territory under the 2007 COAG Measure. Specific projects are currently being negotiated.

Substance Use Program

Funding is provided to the following organisations for residential and non-residential rehabilitation services that service the Central Australia Zone (this includes the Northern Territory, South Australian and Western Australian areas of central Australia:

- Mt Theo/Yuendumu Substance Misuse Aboriginal Corporation
- Drug and Alcohol Services Association Alice Springs Incorporated
- Nganampa Health Council Incorporated
- Ngkarte Mikwekenhe Community Incorporated
- Ilpurla Aboriginal Corporation
- Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit

Northern Territory Emergency Response

Funding of \$11.4 million for 2007-08 was allocated for the drug and alcohol component of the *Northern Territory Emergency Response – Improving Child and Family Health Measure*. The Measure provided for expanded drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services across the Northern Territory to

support individuals and communities affected by the new alcohol legislation. Activities specific to the central desert region included:

- Additional capacity for the Central Australian Aboriginal Alcohol Programs Unit (CAAPU) residential rehabilitation service;
- Engagement of Alcohol and Other Drug outreach workers and community support workers by the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress; and
- Community education and health promotion activities.

An additional \$2.6 million has been allocated under the *Closing the Gap – NT – Follow Up Care Measure (Drug and Alcohol Component)* to continue treatment and rehabilitation activities funded under the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

Additional Funding

FaHCSIA has provided \$1.1 million for the construction of a rehabilitation facility at Amata in the APY Lands in addition to \$2.2 million in capital funding provided in 2004.

Treatment and Rehabilitation - The Kimberley

Portions of funding from Western Australia's allocation of the COAG measures have been provided to improve treatment and rehabilitation facilities that service the East Kimberley Zone.

COAG 2006

\$8.4 million will be provided to Western Australia under the 2006 COAG measure. Components of the funding aimed at improving services in the Kimberley region include funds to:

- increase the operational capacity of the Community Drug Service Team to provide new services across the Kimberley region, enabling regular visits to remote communities, provision of local support to the Aboriginal community controlled agencies and the building of linkages and referral pathways between local services;
- establish a new position within the Palyalatju Marpanpa Cultural Centre of Balgo;
- increase the capacity at Milli Rumurra Residential Rehabilitation Service; and
- increase the capacity for the Ngnowar Aerwah Residential Rehabilitation Service.

COAG 2007

\$8.0 million will be provided to Western Australia under the 2007 COAG Measure. Projects utilising this funding are still to be confirmed.

Substance Use Program

Funding is provided for the Kimberley region for residential and non-residential rehabilitation services and within Aboriginal Medical Services for the following:

- Ngnowar-Aerwah Aboriginal Corporation;
- Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service Aboriginal Corporation;
- Jungarni-Jutiya Alcohol Action Council Aboriginal Corporation; and
- Milli Rumurra Residential Rehabilitation Service.

Treatment and Rehabilitation - Cape York and Gulf of Carpentaria (Queensland)

Portions of funding from Queensland's allocation of the COAG measures have been provided to improve treatment and rehabilitation facilities that service the Mornington / Doomadgee Zone.

COAG 2006

\$10 million will be provided to Queensland under the 2006 COAG Measure. Funding is being provided in the Cape York and Gulf regions for projects as follows:

- Establishment and construction costs for a residential rehabilitation service in Normanton; and
- As part of the Cape York Reform Project, establishment of new community based wellbeing centre services in Aurukun, Coen, Hopevale and Mossman Gorge.

COAG 2007

\$20 million will be provided to Queensland under the 2007 COAG Measure. Funding is being provided in the Cape York and Gulf regions for projects as follows:

- Drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services for the lower gulf;
- Drop in centre for drug and alcohol education in Yarrabah;
- To continue the establishment of the wellbeing centres in the communities of Hopevale, Mossman Gorge, Aurukun and Coen; and
- Funding for Rowoarr Rehabilitation Service in Pormpuraaw.

Substance Use Program

This Program did not fund services in this region during the 2007-08 period. While there are no funded organisations located in this region, there are a number of treatment and rehabilitation services in Mt Isa and Cairns that service people from this region.

Alternative Activities for Youth - Other Funding Initiatives

A number of projects have been funded in the central Australian zone to provide both alternative activities for youth and community capacity building and development.

Northern Territory

FaHCSIA expended \$1.9 million in the Alice Springs, Macdonnell Shire and central desert regions in 2007/08 under the NTER Youth Alcohol Diversion Measure. These funds provided school holiday programs, music and dance programs, the construction or upgrade of recreational infrastructure such as BMX tracks, basketball courts, football and softball grounds, youth drop in centre fit outs, refurbishment of music studios and purchase of musical equipment.

In the 2008/09 financial year FaHCSIA has allocated \$6.7 million for infrastructure and youth services in the Central Desert Expanded Zone under the NTER Youth Alcohol Diversion Measure.

South Australia

AGD and FaHCSIA have developed and funded a Youth Activities Regional Partnerships Agreement (RPA) that is providing Anangu youth with coordinated and meaningful activities that are conducive to reducing petrol sniffing. Auspiced by the South Australian National Football League, the RPA provides a number of diversionary activities, along with a framework for implementing and sustaining the activities within and between communities.

Spending by AGD on Petrol Sniffing Strategy related projects in the APY Lands of South Australia (from the 2006 budget measure) totals \$717 650 over two years.

Spending by FaHCSIA on Petrol Sniffing Strategy related projects in the APY Lands of South Australia (funded through Indigenous Communities Strategic Investment) totals \$789 000 over four years.

FaHCSIA has provided \$1.1 million for the construction of a rehabilitation facility at Amata in the APY Lands in addition to \$2.2 million in capital funding provided in 2004.

DEEWR has applied lessons learned in the Northern Territory Integrated Youth Services Project to the implementation of projects in the APY lands. DEEWR has consulted with its Australian Government partners at State and National level and entered into a contract with the Department of Premier and Cabinet in South Australia to support better education and training outcomes, particularly for disengaged youth in the region. The lessons learned in this implementation will also inform the introduction of projects in the adjacent central desert area of Western Australia, East Kimberley and the Southern Gulf/Doomadgee region of Queensland.

Western Australia

In the Western Australian portion of the Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy Zone AGD has expended \$811 240 on youth and community justice projects under the 2006 Budget Measure. FaHCSIA has expended \$2462 400 to provide youth worker accommodation in the Ngaanyatjarraku Shire. This was funded under the Strategic Interventions Fund (later renamed the Indigenous Communities Strategic Investment Program).

CHAPTER 7 WHAT MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE TO EFFECTIVELY ADDRESS PETROL SNIFFING?

There have been significant reductions in the incidence and impact of petrol sniffing in the original petrol sniffing strategy zone since the introduction of *Opal* fuel and implementation of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy. However, even in regions with significant reductions, episodic and opportunistic outbreaks continue to occur.

There are outbreaks or occurrences of petrol sniffing in areas outside of central Australia, including in the East Kimberley, in the Central Australian Expanded Zone and in Mornington/Doomadgee and there are continuing calls from stakeholders to continue and even to intensify action under the Strategy.

In addition to the issues addressed in the Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy discussed in Chapter 3, participating agencies have identified the following as areas for development in the ongoing implementation of the Strategy.

In developing the Petrol Sniffing Strategy it was acknowledged that the reduction of petrol sniffing required more than just the removal of intoxicating petrol and its replacement with *Opal* fuel. For this reason the Strategy included actions across the range of health, community and legal frameworks. However, the broader relationships with the law and justice system were not explored.

Those involved in law and justice within the Indigenous sector are beginning to understand the importance of having Aboriginal communities and organisations included in negotiations to find the best solutions to the problem of their over-representation in the criminal justice system; communities

and organisations need to be appropriately resourced to provide adequate non-custodial community-based diversionary alternatives.

Evidence suggests that addressing substance misuse is integral to the effectiveness of most prevention, diversion and rehabilitation strategies. It is understood that prevention and treatment of substance misuse will have a very important effect in reducing crime and improving community safety.

Communities and the justice sector anticipate that the implementation of restorative justice models (and the subsequent employment of Restorative Justice Officers) to address petrol sniffing related behaviour has the potential to reduce the current level of anti-social behaviour associated with petrol sniffing, thereby lowering apprehension rates in Indigenous communities. The intention of these restorative justice initiatives is to employ Restorative Justice Officers to coordinate models for helping local people develop mechanisms for managing anti-social behaviour associated with petrol sniffing, in a manner that meets communities' social and cultural requirements.

Restorative justice processes encourage communities to articulate their values and expectations, and to understand the underlying causes of crime or the unacceptable behaviour. It empowers them to determine what can be done to repair the damage caused. In doing so, restorative justice responses can reduce future harm for communities.

Restorative justice is a developing area of Prevention Diversion Rehabilitation and Restorative Justice Program (PDRR) activity. Consistent with the AGD's supporting role in relation to justice system responses to crime, the Department currently funds a number of restorative justice programs under the PDRR program. Restorative justice responses have the potential to tackle substance misuse, where this is a factor in offending, and therefore the potential to contribute to greater community safety.

State and Territory governments are also beginning to introduce restorative justice within their criminal justice systems.

In addition, petrol sniffing is a problem that affects many communities outside the zones defined by the Petrol Sniffing Strategy, for example, urban areas such as Brisbane's Fortitude Valley. Addressing outbreaks of petrol sniffing in areas outside the declared Petrol Sniffing Strategy zones and in areas that are not as isolated as communities in central Australia is an obvious challenge for the Strategy.

It is also true that the pre-conditions for petrol sniffing and other forms of substance misuse are the same as for many other social problems. Therefore, a more effective way of dealing with such issues would be to focus on the underlying causes of substance misuse such as health, education and housing; implementing fundamental reform of the welfare system; and providing people with opportunities for employment and learning. This is being done across a range of Australian Government programs which aim to 'close the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

DEEWR is seeking to apply lessons learned, particularly in implementation of the Integrated Youth Strategy, to other locations and activities. It has been consulting with other stakeholders, for example, the South Australian Department of Premier and Cabinet, and will apply lessons learned to the expansion of program delivery to the Anangu Pitjantjatjara lands in South Australia the adjacent central desert area of Western Australia, East Kimberley and the Southern Gulf/Doomadgee region

of Queensland. DEEWR is also keen to identify and develop opportunities for education, training and employment activities across the 8 points of the Strategy.

DoHA recognises that the Strategy could do more to address youth specific drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitations services, utilise social health teams in primary health care services, and connect more strongly with mental health policies and programs. In addition, there is considerable work to be done to find alternatives to Premium fuel.

FaHCSIA is committed to work to address issues around funding for non-government organisations, including the reduction of red tape and to simplify funding procedures. It is committed to ongoing work to strengthen coordination of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy across the four Australian Government agencies, four States and 8 points of the Plan, and to achieve strong links between the Petrol Sniffing Strategy and other FaHCSIA programs that address youth substance use issues and community capacity building.

CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

The Australian Government stands by the Petrol Sniffing Strategy as a comprehensive, flexible and holistic approach to tackling petrol sniffing in remote Indigenous communities. The Strategy was developed as a 10 year response to a serious issue, and work across the 8 points is ongoing by the four agencies responsible.

To date all evidence, including the recent Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy has indicated the 8 Point Plan is well conceived and consistent with priority areas identified by the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage headline indicators and COAG Closing the Gap priority areas.

Over time implementation of the strategy will develop in response to evidence regarding success of the Strategy and remaining areas of need, needs expressed by communities and other stakeholders, and to developing Government policy.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Urbis Report: Review of the First Phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy July 2008
2. Guidelines on the Responsible sale of *Premium Unleaded Petrol*
3. Map of Petrol Sniffing Strategy Zones