

ABORIGINAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COUNCIL

2010/7706

Committee Secretary
Senate Community Affairs References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary

The Western Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Council (WAAETC) hereby submit comments to the Inquiry into planning options and services for people ageing with a disability.

We thank the Senate for the opportunity to provide comment and specifically to draw their attention to the issues pertinent to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We are confident that the Senate gives due consideration to our thoughtful advice and comment. The WAAETC is optimistic that the Senate will ensure culturally sensitive services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people ageing with a disability are provided and appropriate strategies are applied.

Attached are the comments made by the WAAETC for your consideration and we thank you for your emailed agreement to extend the date of this submission.

Yours sincerely

CAROL GARLETT
CHAIRPERSON WAAETC

1st June 2010

Attach.

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SUBMISSION TO THE INQUIRY INTO PLANNING OPTIONS AND SERVICES FOR PEOPLE AGEING WITH A DISABILITY

The Western Australian Aboriginal Education and Training Council's (WAAETC) primary source of advice to Government on emerging issues in Aboriginal Education and Training is the 'grassroots' participation of its ten (10) Aboriginal members from rural, remote and metropolitan regions across Western Australia. In addition a core group providing expertise on education and training matters forms the Ex Officio membership that comprises the heads of each of the education and training provider system or sector. The Council meets 4 – 6 times per year.

A significant role played by the WAAETC is the development and monitoring of the quadrennial Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Education and Training in Western Australia. A monitoring report is produced annually.

WAAETC is a Ministerial Council which was established in 1995 in response to Recommendation 139 of the *Report of the Western Australian State Government Task Force on Aboriginal Social Justice* to provide independent, grassroots advice on Aboriginal education and training to both State and Federal Ministers for Education.

The Terms of Reference of the WAAETC are:

- Provide policy advice on all issues concerning Aboriginal education and training in Western Australia;
- Co-ordinate the development of a Strategic Plan for Aboriginal education and training in Western Australia;
- Provide a forum for Aboriginal community members to contribute to determining Aboriginal education and training outcomes and policy direction;
- Ensure that effective consultation occurs with Aboriginal people and communities on matters concerning Aboriginal education and training;
- Ensure that appropriate monitoring and reporting occurs concerning the operational plans of the State's education and training providers; *and*
- Consult with State and Commonwealth agencies concerning programs, the Strategic Plan and financial arrangements relating to Aboriginal education and training.

The role of the WAAETC is to facilitate the delivery of more effective educational and training services to Aboriginal people in Western Australia through:

- Advising the relevant Western Australian Government Ministers on policies relating to education and training and to coordinate the development and monitoring of an Aboriginal Education and Training Strategic Plan in Western Australia;
- Ensuring that the Government has access to independent Aboriginal advice by developing effective consultative and advisory mechanisms, which will provide a better opportunity for Aboriginal people to work at the highest level in setting policy for education and training of Aboriginal people; *and*
- Establishing funding agreements with the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR] that enable the Council to undertake projects relevant to its terms of reference.

All State education authorities (systems and sectors) are represented at the highest level possible on WAAETC.

Key points that the WAAETC submits to this Inquiry include:

1. Aboriginal people undergoing treatment in Rehabilitation Centres are often marginalized by the services provided by education and training providers. There needs to be improvement in the promotion of the education and training services available in these centres and the provision of education and training that meets the need of the clients if those programs are not available. Many Aboriginal people who are undergoing long term treatment could be accessing education and training in the centres but are not always aware of the services and therefore don't access them. There should be Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal employed in these centres with responsibility to liaise with Aboriginal people about their specific health, education and training needs;
2. There is a need to clarify what policies the Education and Training providers have that specifically cater for people with disabilities. These policies should be promoted in such a way that clients, students, families and community members are clear about the services provided and the processes involved should processes apply. Many people don't access services available to them because they are not aware that that service exists. Many people are often disempowered and have a sense of hopelessness because they have not been informed and don't know their rights. Again people and more specifically Aboriginal people should be employed to promote the services available to people with disabilities and empower them and their families with the information they need so that they access the services available to them. The clients should also be well informed about their right to complain and know the complaints mechanism should they require it.
3. There are Aboriginal people who are blind/visually impaired but do not have the resources to own and take care of a guide dog. In many Aboriginal communities, family members usually lead the blind person around as this is accepted as the cultural responsibility of family members. This cultural responsibility can become quite burdensome for many families because they are consumed by a level of guilt if they were seen to abrogate these responsibilities. This responsibility brings about a number of health risks due to the pressure of such responsibility however families and individuals will pursue this responsibility with little or no respite. The WAAETC believes the answer to this issue lies in specifically promoting in a culturally appropriate and sensitive way the disabilities' services that are available. The promotion of the services must be done at the local community level and in partnership with key community members that can assist in the promotion and dissemination of the information. Furthermore the Aboriginal people in rural and remote communities should be consulted about the services provided and be part of the solutions to address the issues presented.
4. Many Aboriginal people who are visually impaired do not use canes and other support mechanisms that act as their "eyes". Far too often the services and support is not accessible because people aren't aware of the service or because the services are only available in cities and large regional towns. Some thought needs to go into providing the services required in the local community where it is needed or providing transport services to regional towns for clients. When the services are only available in the cities and large regional towns, a number of barriers immediately prevent Aboriginal people from accessing the services they require.

A significant barrier is language as Aboriginal people coming from remote areas struggle to understand some of the medical dialogue and as second language learners may not understand standard Australian English. Equally important and therefore a barrier is the fact that staff administering the services do not have the cultural understandings or the cultural competencies to work with Aboriginal people. The staff then do not communicate effectively with their Aboriginal clients and are therefore not providing an appropriate service for Aboriginal clients. Treatment in city and town centres further isolate many Aboriginal people from their families and local communities thus resulting in degrees of isolation and loneliness which further impacts on their health outcomes; The WAAETC believes that there needs to be a greater range of activities available to people to address and overcome the boredom, isolation and loneliness that many experience. Further more all staff working in the field of disabilities services should undergo ongoing Aboriginal cultural training so that they develop cultural competencies that enable them to work more effectively with Aboriginal people. Obviously too, there must be more Aboriginal people trained and employed in a range of disability services.

5. Facilities need to be user friendly for people with disabilities and take into consideration the needs of the carers as well as the person with the disability. Many Aboriginal people need their carers with them when doing general business whether it be to transport them to places or translate information which are just two reasons, there are many more.
6. Visiting services are required for those who are unable to leave their homes. These services need to be promoted where they exist already so that Aboriginal are included in the services and not marginalized by being left out.
7. The WAAETC notes that many young Aboriginal people with disabilities do not have access to facilities to assist them with their health and fitness. Furthermore where the services are available, further work needs to be done by the service providers to enable access by young Aboriginal people. Service providers need to find out why young people are not accessing the services that are available to them and address their issues;
8. Provision must also be made for Aboriginal children and young people who live with people with a disability. It must be noted that quite often Aboriginal children and young people are the ones who look after older family members with disabilities. It is a cultural responsibility. This role as carers will obviously impact on the individual's ability to gain good education and good training. Education and training providers need to be cognisant of the education and training needs of these young family members and tailor education and training to address their specific needs.