

AASW SUBMISSION SUMMARY FOR THE SENATE SELECT COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL AND REMOTE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The Australian Association of Social Workers (AASW) is the key professional body representing professional social workers in Australia, many of whom work in a range of administrative and community development roles on Indigenous communities.

The AASW submission to the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities provides examples of the current situation as reported by numerous research reports into a range of issues impacting on Indigenous people living in regional and remote communities. Analysis of these reports indicates there is a huge disadvantage between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and that government policies and program models have not to date been effective in curbing these gaps.

The AASW submission points to the need for new approaches to policy development and service implementation on Indigenous communities and provides options for the way forward for Government to address Indigenous disadvantage in partnership with Indigenous communities.

The submission addresses the impacts of government policies specific to the Northern Territory and across Australia. The submission recommends all levels of Government utilise a range of approaches to address disadvantage such as:

1. Flexible models of service delivery to adapt to the cultural dynamics of individual Indigenous communities;
2. Take into account the environmental conditions, such as housing, infrastructure, availability of clean water and fresh healthy options for food and hygiene need to be addressed as a precursor to improvements in the overall health status of indigenous communities;
3. Amalgamate indigenous health, housing, education, child care, employment, environment and economic development programs rather than address these issues in separate silos;
4. Adopt a longer-term needs-based funding approach;
5. Collect good baseline data, on-going monitoring and evaluation of government policies, initiatives and programs;
6. Adopt a partnership approach to consult with Indigenous communities rather than a top-down, bureaucratic approach that often instills fear and distrust in Indigenous people based on previous interventionist approaches.

The AASW is also interested in discussing with the Committee the following issues:

- What particular and broader strategies does the Committee consider *will be effective and why* in improving the lives of Indigenous Australians living in regional and remote Communities across Australia?
- How will the work of this Committee coordinate with the work of the yet to be formed National Indigenous representative body and the work under the umbrella of the Northern Territory Intervention in remote NT communities?

We hope this inquiry results in much needed changes in approach by all levels of Government to working with regional and remote Indigenous communities in order to see long-term positive outcomes for Indigenous people living on these communities.