



FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

To: Senate Inquiry

Fax: 02 6277 5866

From: SANTI REEVES

Re: Administrative arrangements for Aboriginal Health

No. of Pages: 3

Date: 30-07-04

Urgent

Reply ASAP

For Review

PLEASE CALL (08) 8223 5217 IF YOU DO NOT RECEIVE ALL PAGES.

PLEASE NOTE: This message is intended only for the use of the addressee and may contain confidential information. If you are not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any use or dissemination of this communication is strictly prohibited. If you receive this transmission in error, please notify us immediately and post the original message to our address. Thank you.

This is a private submission - not on behalf of Nunkuwarnin Yunti

Santi Reeves

The Secretary
Senate Select Committee on the
Administration of Indigenous Affairs
Parliament House Canberra 2600
Fax: (02) 6277 5866

Dear Sir/Madam,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Committee's Inquiry on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 and proposed related changes to the administration of Commonwealth Indigenous affairs policy.

I have used the option of supporting the following points suggested by ANTaR out of respect for my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues who have a far greater knowledge of issues for their communities.

However, I would also take this opportunity to provide a perspective from the work that I do to endeavour to improve the health status of ATSI people. The program I coordinate is the Aboriginal Primary Health Care Program in the northern metropolitan area of Adelaide. It aims to improve health status by increasing community capacity and individual responsibility for health, provide more primary health care services and reform the mainstream services to improve access and quality of care to the ATSI community.

Health status will not improve without addressing the social determinants of health. A major determinant is a person's ability to control their life and make informed and responsible choices through self-determination and achieving equality in relation to the basic human rights with other Australians.

The abolishment of ATSIC has removed a recognized and generally supported means for Aboriginal people to move towards self-determination and providing a mechanism through which individuals and communities can take greater control of their destiny.

Why has Indigenous health not improved in this country in comparison to the other First nations populations in New Zealand, Canada and the United States of America? A major contributing factor is the degree of control that has been given back to those people through treaties, legislation, involvement in mainstream parliaments and support from the ruling governments.

The abolishment of ATSIC is a huge backward step and is likely to decrease the health status of Indigenous Australians or at least be a major factor which will prevent improved health outcomes.

I wish the Senate Inquiry to also consider the following fundamental issues in their deliberations;

- Australia has an obligation to respect and protect the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to self-determination, human rights, and First Peoples' status and the inherent rights that flow from that status.

- Central to the enjoyment of these rights is the ability of Indigenous people to determine who represents them locally, regionally, nationally and internationally. Indigenous Peoples of Australia alone must have this right, as well as the consequent right to make free and informed choices for themselves, their families and communities.
- The current bill and proposed administrative arrangements will deny these fundamental rights. In reducing Indigenous involvement to an appointed advisory role, the Government will effectively remove the right of Indigenous people to meaningful involvement in decision-making affecting their lives and communities.
- These changes also contradict the Government's own review of ATSIC which endorsed the need for national elected Indigenous representation, and greater control at a regional level.
- The right of representation and to determine their own affairs have also been shown to be critical factors in improving the well-being of Indigenous Australians. Outcomes are significantly better where there is full and effective Indigenous involvement in decision-making, strong Indigenous organisations and governance, and appropriate cultural recognition within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous institutions.
- Indigenous Australians have endorsed the need for a National Indigenous Representative Body which reflects their values and aspirations, and which is open, transparent and accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- This body should have primary roles in representation and advocacy, be the principal source of Indigenous policy advice to government, and have control over the provision of Indigenous-specific services.
- The wholesale return to mainstream-focused service delivery will be a backward step to a failed paternalistic approach to Indigenous affairs. Indigenous people are poorly served by mainstream services and there will remain the need for Indigenous-specific services controlled by Indigenous people themselves
- Mainstream service delivery will continue to have an important role, however, this must be on the basis of being responsive to Indigenous community and cultural needs. Governments, mainstream departments and agencies must be publicly accountable for the provision of services to Indigenous people and such accountability should include rigorous monitoring frameworks and the ability for Indigenous people to exercise such accountability.
- Finally, any replacement for ATSIC must be determined in consultation and negotiation with Indigenous stakeholders, on the basis of their informed consent. The Committee's report should provide strong endorsement of this principle.

Yours sincerely



Santi Reeves
APHCAP Regional Coordinator
Central Northern Adelaide Health Service