

16/08/2004

The Secretary
Senate Select Committee on the
Administration of Indigenous Affairs
Parliament House
Canberra 2600

To whom it may concern,

North Yarra Community Health (NYCH) is a major provider of primary health and welfare services to the communities of Fitzroy, Carlton, Collingwood, Parkville, and Abbotsford. We work extensively with large numbers of people who suffer significant disadvantage including marginalised aboriginal people. We would like to take this opportunity to provide input into this Committee's Inquiry into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 and associated proposal to change the administration of Commonwealth Indigenous affairs.

As a provider of health services NYCH holds a holistic view of health as defined by the world Health Organisation in their declaration of Alma Ata as "a stage of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". We therefore believe that the history of legislation in this country that up until the 1960 – 1970's restricted the freedom of movement and democratic rights of indigenous of people is inextricably linked to their current disadvantage and extremely poor health status.

We are concerned that the proposed changes to the legislation and to the administration of indigenous affairs may further undermine the rights of our indigenous people to self determination, and to make informed choices for themselves, their families and their communities.

We believe that indigenous people have a right to a democratically elected body to provide representation, advocacy and policy advice on their behalf to government. We believe that aboriginal people should be consulted regarding the make up of this body, and that consideration should be given to ensuring that all sectors of the indigenous community have a voice eg elders, women, young people, rural and urban people.

While NYCH believes that mainstream services have an important role in providing services to indigenous people, and that some indigenous people do prefer to access mainstream services, we are however of the view that many mainstream services are not adequately responsive to needs of indigenous people. We therefore strongly support the need for indigenous specific services that are under aboriginal community control as the majority of indigenous people do prefer to use indigenous services.

We would like to thank the Committee for consideration of this submission and urge that you will make decisions on these matters that support and strengthen the democratic rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Yours sincerely,

Vera Boston
Chief Executive Officer.
North Yarra Community Health

