

Executive Summary

In this Interim Report, the Committee has identified issues for further consideration in its Final Report. The Final Report will contain the Committee's recommendations. While there are some stand alone issues, many issues for consideration come together into themes that are relevant to all of the identified factors affecting the lifetime expectancy of Aboriginal Australians. These broad themes are: measuring outcomes, coordinating service delivery, partnership in service delivery, funding, employment, mentoring and training of Aboriginal people.

The report examines Indigenous statistics and service delivery, followed by issues raised in evidence on each of the six factors impacting on life expectancy in our terms of reference.

Chapter 1 – Conduct of the inquiry

The Committee has received 74 submissions, conducted ten public hearings and one public forum. In order to hear from a variety of people, the Committee visited Bidwill in Sydney's west, Redfern in the inner city, and the regional areas of Kempsey, Dubbo and Nowra. Evidence received to date, together with additional new evidence, will also be used in preparation of the Committee's Final Report.

Chapter 2 – Statistical overview

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in New South Wales make up 2.2 percent of the total population with 40 percent of the Indigenous population under 15 years of age.

Evidence received by the Committee raised issues relating to the impact of self-identification and the accuracy of Indigenous data. Nonetheless, statistics relating to Indigenous circumstances clearly illustrate the level of disadvantage experienced by Indigenous people across a spectrum of areas. Multiple facets of disadvantage are apparent in Indigenous statistics. Different aspects of disadvantage seem to occur together, for example poor education appears to be linked with poor employment outcomes and both are linked to low levels of income.

This report has drawn from statistics relating to Indigenous circumstances collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the report of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007* and its Overview, as well as the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs *Two Ways Together Report on Indicators 2007*.

Chapter 3 – Service delivery

The way services are provided to Indigenous people has a significant impact on the ability of those services to address Indigenous disadvantage. This chapter examines the method and adequacy of service delivery to Aboriginal people. Services are delivered by the Commonwealth and State governments as well as many non government organisations. Although a large proportion of Aboriginal Australians reside in urban parts of New South Wales, the level of Federal funding does not reflect this. The ability of service providers to provide adequate, high-quality long-term services is therefore restricted.

Indigenous people from a broad spectrum of geographic and social circumstances told the Committee of the need for effective consultation and emphasised the need for Indigenous communities to have a greater input in deciding what services are required and the most effective method of delivery. It is clear

that the needs of individual communities vary greatly and service delivery needs to take this into account. However, there is a lack of clarity in leadership and responsibility for service delivery for Indigenous people. Since the demise of ATSIC there is no national independent representative body to represent Indigenous people.

The Committee has raised the issues of Aboriginal leadership and representation ; funding provision; and the Aboriginal Land Council system as issues for consideration in the Final Report.

Chapter 4 – Environmental health

Environments that promote good public health, including adequacy and quality of drinking water, sewage and waste management and safe, healthy housing are essential elements of modern society. Unlike other communities in Australia, Aboriginal communities are often required to manage their own water and sewage systems, with limited resources.

This chapter focuses on the impact of poor environmental health on the life expectancy of Indigenous Australians and the measures being taken to address these problems. The Committee identified the importance of ongoing funding and a co-ordinated approach to fundamental service delivery as issues for further consideration.

Chapter 5 – Health and wellbeing

The nature of Indigenous culture requires that health and wellbeing be examined in the context of family and community. It is apparent that health for Indigenous people is more than the absence of disease. There is a need to look at the whole person, their social, emotional and cultural wellbeing and that of the community as a whole. In this chapter, the Committee has identified methods of delivering health services as well as the importance of community engagement and consultation as issues for further consideration. The Committee raises issues associated with child sexual abuse and sees the need for further, more detailed examination of the issues.

Evidence indicates that the employing Indigenous health workers, educating and engaging in partnerships with Indigenous people to ensure culturally appropriate health services and strengthened communities are key factors in moving forward and closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous lifetime expectancy. Therefore, in the Final Report, the Committee will examine reporting and accountability processes for community organisations; the role of men's and women's groups; the relationship of government and non government services; and the adequacy of training and scholarships.

Chapter 6 – Education

The Committee heard that engaging Indigenous people in education provides necessary knowledge, skills and experiences to fully participate in society.

Evidence shows that education is closely linked to employment opportunities and income levels, which in turn impacts on housing and living standards. Initiatives such as mentoring and VET in school programs have had an impact in some schools and communities but the number of students meeting the national standards in literacy and numeracy remain below that of non-Indigenous students. There has also been an increase in the number of Indigenous people gaining post-school qualifications but the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous education levels remains unacceptably large. The

Committee identified the need for long-term funding and culturally appropriate delivery of education to all students as issues for further examination.

Chapter 7 – Employment

Employment can lead to improved financial positions for families and communities, better health, improved educational outcomes and raised self-esteem. In this time of economic prosperity there has been some increase in Aboriginal employment levels but this does not approach the same level of non-Indigenous employment.

This chapter considers barriers to Indigenous employment, including low education levels, the need for vocational training, transport to the workplace, long-term unemployment, high incarceration rates and the availability of employment within or near the community. The Committee identified the importance of providing mentoring programs, skill provision and community engagement as catalysts to overcoming these barriers and increasing retention rates.

The Committee will consider in more detail appropriate employment service delivery models; funding for programs; the CDEP scheme; mentoring and the role of elders in service delivery.

Chapter 8 – Housing

The quality of housing is seen as a major determinant of health and wellbeing. One third of the Aboriginal population lives in public housing, one third in the private rental sector and one third own their own home. The Committee identified issues relating to the appropriateness and affordability of housing for Indigenous people. Overcrowding and homelessness is a fundamental problem within the Indigenous community often as the result of lack of affordability and/or appropriateness of the housing provided.

This chapter focuses on the housing options available for Indigenous people with particular reference to Federal funding provision, and the need for community engagement by housing providers to ensure appropriate, affordable and well maintained housing. The Committee highlights the equitable distribution of housing between urban, regional and rural areas; regulatory requirements for housing providers; overcrowding and housing affordability as issues for further consideration.

Chapter 9 – Incarceration and the criminal justice system

High levels of incarceration and contact with the criminal justice system impact on the physical health as well as the social and economic wellbeing of offenders and their families. Indigenous Australians are over-represented within the prison system.

The Committee identified a lack of appropriate and ongoing support mechanisms for Indigenous people who come in contact with the criminal justice system. The Committee will consider the lack of specific Aboriginal criminal justice priorities in the State Plan, as well as the provision of support services aimed at reducing recidivism and alternatives to incarceration, such as circle sentencing and diversionary procedures, will be issues for consideration in the Final Report.

Chapter 10 – Issues for consideration

The final chapter of this Report contains a summary of the issues for further consideration identified in the preceding chapters. The forty issues earmarked for further consideration can be grouped into six broad categories.

First, are those issues that relate to the measurement of outcomes. The need for monitoring and evaluation of services to determine success or otherwise is seen as a necessary element of effective services delivery.

Second, are issues relating to the coordination of service delivery. To prevent overlap and gaps in the provision of long-term services it is necessary to coordinate services delivered by various agencies for a variety of purposes. Indigenous people are often beset by multiple disadvantages and require coordinated services to ensure their multiple needs are addressed.

Third, the Committee heard repeatedly of the need for Indigenous people to feel ownership of both their problems and the resolution of these problems. Communities working in partnership with service providers is seen as a way forward and a way to promote long-term independence and ensure effective delivery of culturally appropriate services.

Fourth, funding of long-term services was an issue that was relevant to all of the factors examined. The Committee heard of the need for long-term funding rather than short-term pilot programs. Time and resources are constantly expended in the pursuit of short-term funding for programs.

Fifth, employment of Indigenous people in service delivery areas and as mentors for their communities was identified as means of providing culturally appropriate services and improving Indigenous circumstances. Included in this is the issue of training Indigenous people, providing them with the skills to take into their communities and become role models.

Finally, there are many specific strategies that could be strengthened. These are listed in Chapter 10 and will be examined further in the Final Report.

Final Report

The Final Report will examine the issues for further consideration identified in the Interim Report. Through this examination the Committee will make recommendations for a way forward.

The Final Report will also address the remaining terms of reference. The Committee intends to conduct further hearings and site visits, engaging with Indigenous communities and will also use evidence already gathered to further inform its recommendations.