

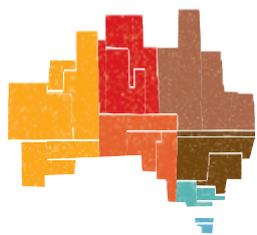
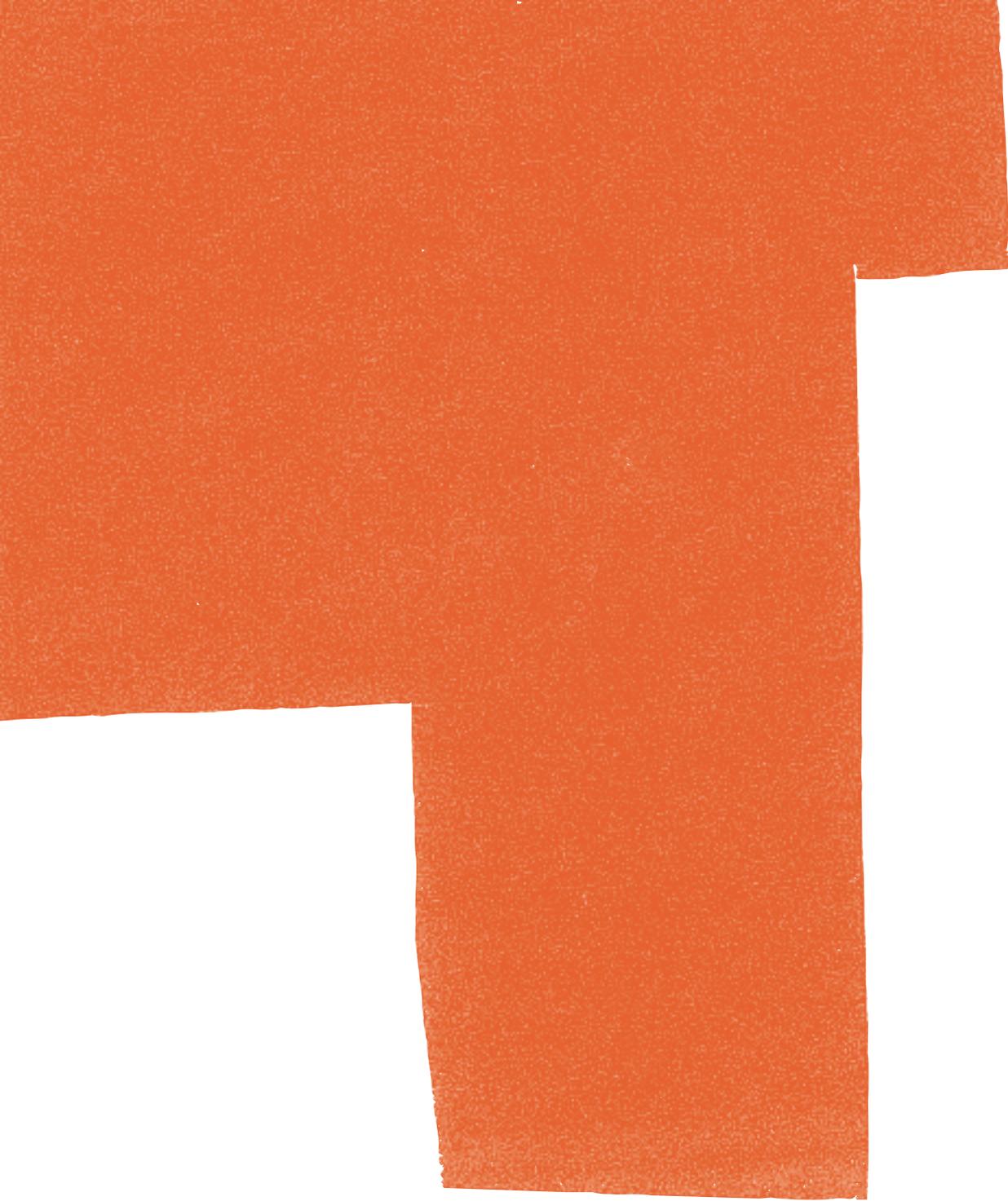


Australian Government



Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2012





About the design

The cut paper shapes depicted throughout this report are derived from a map of Australia and use the seven Closing the Gap brand colours to reference the seven States and Territories of Australia and the seven Council of Australian Governments (COAG) building blocks.

Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2012



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The Commonwealth has obtained consent from individuals or their parents/carers and Indigenous organisations for the use of their images in the document. Any queries in relation to photographs should be addressed to the photo source recorded in each caption. A key to acronyms used to record photo sources is provided below:

ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics

AEC – Australian Electoral Commission

DEEWR – Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

DoHA – Department of Health and Ageing (all photographs taken during Healthy Community Day activities, part of the 'Live Longer' campaign, apart from the photograph on page 72)

DSEWPaC – Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities

FaHCSIA – Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

IBA – Indigenous Business Australia

ILC – Indigenous Land Corporation

NAQS – Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy

OFTA – Office of the Arts, Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport

ORIC – Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations

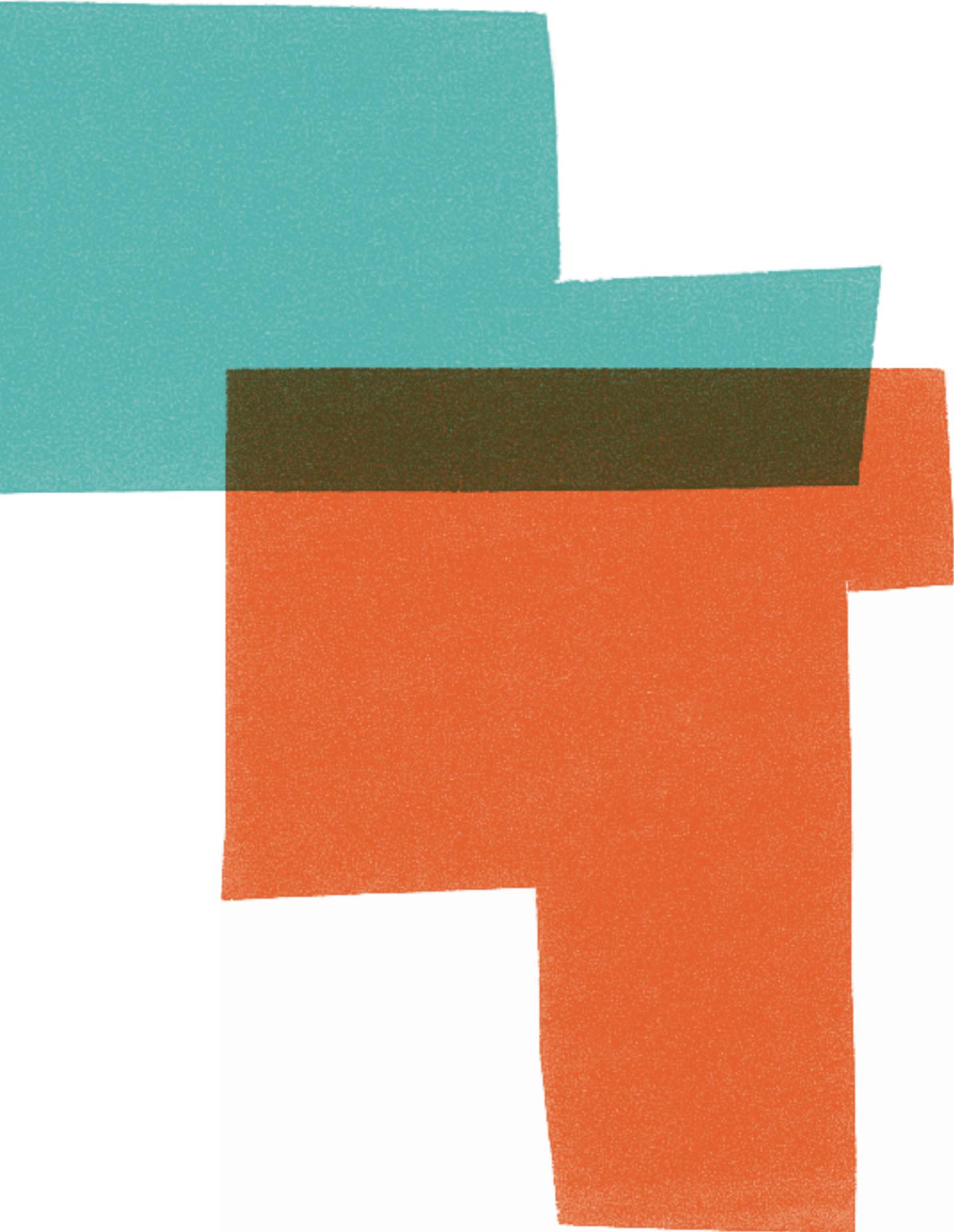
TSRA – Torres Strait Regional Authority

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Chapter 1

The framework for change

Closing the Gap is a framework for action on one of our nation's most important challenges. Work on reducing Indigenous disadvantage is a shared responsibility, requiring intense and collaborative effort from all governments, Indigenous people, the private sector, non-government organisations and the wider community.

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement, endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2008, commits all governments to six ambitious Closing the Gap targets relating to life expectancy, infant mortality, education and employment. The Agreement identifies seven inter-related areas for investment and change – the 'building blocks' for better lives. It is supported by historic investment through a series of Indigenous-specific and mainstream National Partnership Agreements.

Closing the Gap ends the *ad hoc* arrangements of previous approaches to Indigenous policy which contributed to the unacceptable levels of disadvantage faced by too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Closing the Gap reflects a renewed determination arising from the goodwill brought about by the National Apology to Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and in particular to the Stolen Generations. The Apology was a formal acknowledgement of the injustice of past government practices and it provided an important foundation for a new relationship between Indigenous and other Australians based on mutual respect and responsibility.

Over the last year the Australian Government has been sponsoring a national conversation about recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia's Constitution. In December 2010, an Expert Panel was established to provide advice about how constitutional recognition might be achieved. The panel presented their final report to the Prime Minister on 19 January 2012 at a ceremony at the National Gallery of Australia. The Government believes that constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians will help in achieving a more united and reconciled future, and is committed to building the momentum for this change.

Closing the Gap targets

In 2008 COAG agreed to:

- close the life expectancy gap within a generation (by 2031)
- halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five by 2018
- ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities by 2013
- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children by 2018
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020
- halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and other Australians by 2018.

2 | This Closing the Gap report shows that the foundations for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage are now in place. It demonstrates how governments are delivering investments that will make a significant difference over the long term. It shows that Indigenous people are actively engaging with government and taking responsibility for making changes in their lives.

The Closing the Gap targets are deliberately ambitious. All governments recognise that concerted and sustained effort is needed, and that monitoring and accountability are important for reaching our targets. These annual reports, along with the annual reports through COAG, are part of a framework that requires monitoring of policies and programs to ensure they are properly targeted and effective in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.

Closing the Gap is a national effort at every level; it is well-planned, well-funded and has a clear long-term objective.



Closing the Gap building blocks

Governments are focusing their efforts on seven inter-linked areas:

- Early Childhood
- Schooling
- Health
- Healthy Homes
- Economic Participation
- Safe Communities
- Governance and Leadership.

At the launch of the report of the Expert Panel on Indigenous Constitutional Recognition: Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, with the Expert Panel co-chairs, Patrick Dodson (right) and Mark Leibler. Photo: Red Bean/FaHCSIA.

New ways of working

Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage not only requires a new framework and new investment; it requires a new way of working together to achieve change.

Engagement and mutual respect

The Australian Government is ensuring Indigenous people are central to policy development and implementation. The Government is listening to their views – for example, in last year's Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory consultations. The Government is promoting the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as Australia's first peoples, most notably through advancing constitutional recognition. It is engaging on a day-to-day basis through an extensive on-the-ground network and ensuring that government-funded service providers are sensitive and responsive to Indigenous people's needs.

Government efforts to rebuild relationships with Indigenous people, from the local to the national level, are highlighted in the third chapter of this report.

Responsibility, collaboration and partnership

The Closing the Gap framework ensures that all governments are held to account. Tasks and accountabilities are defined. Governments have committed to ensure programs and services are prioritised to meet the Closing the Gap targets, are sustainable in the longer term, and are physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people wherever they live.

Indigenous-specific National Partnership Agreements

The Australian Government has made Indigenous-specific National Partnership Agreements with State and Territory Governments.

Remote Indigenous Housing (December 2008): \$5.5 billion over ten years

- Building 4200 new houses
- Refurbishing 4800 houses
- Providing Indigenous jobs
- Making sure houses last
- Reforming tenancy arrangements

Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes (December 2008): \$1.57 billion over four years

- Tackling chronic disease and its causes, including smoking
- Expanding health services for Indigenous people
- Strengthening the Indigenous health workforce

Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory (July 2009): \$890.5 million over three years

- Making communities safer
- Helping children and families
- Improving health services and education
- Building Indigenous capacity

Indigenous Early Childhood Development (July 2009): \$564.4 million over six years

- Supporting early learning
- Helping Indigenous families
- Improving the health of mothers, babies and young children

Indigenous Economic Participation (December 2008): \$228.9 million over five years

- Creating jobs in government service delivery
- Helping Indigenous people into jobs
- Helping Indigenous businesses

Remote Service Delivery (December 2008): \$291.2 million over six years

- Working with 29 priority locations
- Coordinating services across government
- Building on Indigenous aspirations
- Monitoring progress through the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services

Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access (July 2009): \$7 million over four years

- Connecting people in remote areas with telecommunications and the internet



Brieanna Milera (right) with Jerome Mocketarinja at Yipirinya School, Alice Springs, NT. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Government support for Indigenous aspirations and initiatives is not sufficient on its own to drive positive change. Indigenous people need to work with government and others to take responsibility for their lives and the lives and wellbeing of their children, families and communities.

Closing the Gap is a collaborative process. The framework provides a clear set of shared goals. Governments at all levels – Commonwealth, State/ Territory and local – are working together, coordinating their activities. Formal coordination arrangements are in place through the National Partnership Agreements and collaboration is also occurring through place-based initiatives in response to urgent need.

Closing the Gap also depends on the wider community. Individuals, organisations and companies are being asked to help and support a fair go for Indigenous people. Collaboration and sharing underpin the development of trust and respect between Indigenous and other Australians.

Transparency and accountability

Progress against the six targets is being constantly monitored, and regularly reported, in this report and elsewhere.

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement provided for improved statistical collections relating to Indigenous people so there is a better evidence base against which to measure progress and test what is working. Governments are drawing on mainstream data sources, for example in health and education, to build this evidence base; however, the lack of historical data collection makes trend analysis in some areas difficult. This will be rectified as current data builds a complete picture over time. Data issues are further discussed in the second chapter of this report.

The COAG Reform Council reports to COAG each year on progress against the six targets. Its second report, for 2009-10, was published in April 2011. It identified improvements in Indigenous child mortality and wider mortality, and some narrowing of the gaps in education.

Ongoing reporting processes have been integrated into the Closing the Gap framework. Every two years the Productivity Commission produces the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report, with the long-term aim of informing Australian governments about whether policy, programs and interventions are achieving good results for Indigenous people.

The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, a COAG initiative managed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, provides online access to information on what works to combat Indigenous disadvantage. The clearinghouse brings together reports, research, evaluations and other documents, as well as producing its own publications that summarise evidence or identify gaps in research. Through the clearinghouse, policy makers and service providers have access to a growing and authoritative evidence base.

CASE STUDY

Indigenous Constitutional Recognition

The Australian Constitution is more than 100 years old, and has provided a durable framework for the government of the nation. However, it reflects the time and interests of the men who drafted it, and since the 1967 referendum makes no reference to Indigenous people.

A lively discussion was held in Coffs Harbour in New South Wales on 6 September 2011 on options for recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Constitution.

The meeting was facilitated by Alison Page, a member of the Expert Panel on Indigenous Constitutional Recognition appointed by the Prime Minister in December 2010. Ms Page is an Indigenous designer, cultural planner and currently manager of the Saltwater Freshwater Alliance of the mid-north coast of New South Wales which holds the annual Saltwater Freshwater Festival.

She led the discussion with around 40 people who attended the meeting at the Coffs Harbour showgrounds, including local Aboriginal elders, representatives of Indigenous organisations, local mayor Keith Rhoades and a visiting Canadian professor of Indigenous politics and governance.

It was generally agreed that constitutional change was overdue: "We do need to make changes in the Constitution – there is some unfinished business."

People saw that many positives could flow from recognition: "People will be prouder of their heritage."

The Coffs Harbour meeting was one of over 200 meetings held by Expert Panel members between May and October 2011. These included open public consultations, one-on-one consultations, and meetings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders and leaders, business and community organisations and faith-based groups. With very few exceptions, people who attended the consultations supported the recognition of Indigenous people in the Constitution.

Notes from this and other consultations can be found at www.youmeunity.org.au together with copies of all submissions lodged with the Expert Panel and the Panel's final report.



Left to right: Participants at the Coffs Harbour meeting; Alison Page speaking to the meeting, supported by Indigenous leader Jackie Huggins. Photos: FaHCSIA.

Indigenous Affairs Minister, Jenny Macklin, with Minerals Council of Australia chair, Peter Johnston (left), and Australian Indigenous Chamber of Commerce director Warren Mundine (right) at the launch of the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy, Sydney, NSW. Photo: Alex Wisser/FaHCSIA.



The Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services reports regularly on how governments are meeting the commitments made under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery.

Individual National Partnership Agreements have inbuilt monitoring and accountability arrangements. Individual programs and measures are also regularly evaluated – most notably in this last year, the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

Adaptability

Closing the Gap is a complex task; the directions set may have to change. Governments are prepared to adapt to what the evidence is telling us. Ambitious targets are needed to focus effort, drive improvements and challenge governments to do better. The Australian Government is determined to stay the course over the long term. If the Government needs to adjust its course, it will do so.

Highlights of 2011

The events of the past year show how the Closing the Gap strategy is making progress and at the same time building new and better relationships. These significant milestones are evidence that the framework is providing clarity and direction and leading to real achievement.

Indigenous constitutional recognition

The Government is carefully considering the report of the Expert Panel on Indigenous Constitutional Recognition, delivered in January 2012. The panel was asked to lead a consultation and engagement process across the Australian community and present options for change that have the best chance of success at a national referendum.

Constitutional recognition would be a significant step towards building an Australia based on strong relationships and mutual respect between Indigenous and other Australians. It would give real impetus to the practical reforms being advanced through

Closing the Gap by acknowledging Indigenous people in our nation's founding document. It would be a further step along the journey begun with the National Apology.

Progress in education

A good education is the key to wider participation in Australian society and the economy. The recently released results from the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy – or NAPLAN – are cause for optimism. Since 2008 the gap between Indigenous and other students has decreased in seven out of the eight measurement points with the only exception being Year 7 Numeracy. Some falls in the gaps have been quite large, as discussed in chapter two of this report.

The Australian Government's Education Revolution is a comprehensive strategy to raise educational outcomes across the community, with a particular focus on disadvantaged students. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan was launched in June 2011, to focus government action on areas that will have the most impact in closing the education gaps.

Indigenous Economic Development Strategy

Economic independence and security are necessary foundations for good health, functional families and successful communities. In October 2011, another important piece of the Closing the Gap framework was put in place when the Australian Government launched the *Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-18*. The strategy is the product of extensive consultations with Indigenous Australians, all levels of government and the private and not-for-profit sectors. It provides a blueprint for the Australian Government to work with all of these stakeholders to generate jobs and economic activity for Indigenous people to help close the employment gap.

Indigenous Chronic Disease Package

Full implementation of this package, part of the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes, is delivering much needed health checks and preventative health measures to Indigenous Australians, while providing better treatment for those already living with a chronic disease. Thousands of people are benefiting from this comprehensive intervention to treat and tackle the causes of the chronic conditions that contribute so much to the health gap between Indigenous and other Australians.

Remote housing

The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing is generating real momentum in housing construction and refurbishment combating a legacy of poor housing and chronic overcrowding in remote communities. The increased

building targets agreed to by the States and Territories were exceeded in the year to June 2011, with 490 new houses built and 2288 rebuilds and refurbishments completed. Overall the ten-year National Partnership is providing \$5.5 billion to build up to 4200 new houses and rebuild or refurbish another 4800 houses. The houses are being supported by improved property and tenancy management arrangements that will progressively increase the life cycle of remote Indigenous housing.

The renewed sense of urgency follows the Australian Government's initiative to renegotiate the agreement with the States and Territories, so that they have stronger incentives to meet their housing construction targets. Under the revised arrangements up to 25 per cent of a jurisdiction's capital works funding allocation can be reallocated if agreed targets are not met.

There is a long way to go, but major progress in building new and refurbished homes is now being made. Proper housing is needed to achieve all the Closing the Gap targets.

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory

The Northern Territory is a major focus of the Australian Government's work on Closing the Gap. The *Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation Report 2011*, released in November 2011, found that people in remote Territory communities now feel safer and that their lives are better than four years ago. Nevertheless, many challenges remain.

In mid-2011 the Australian Government continued its conversation with Aboriginal people in the Northern

Territory about directions for future work after the Northern Territory Emergency Response ends in mid-2012. Around 470 separate discussions, from large community meetings to one-on-one conversations, were held. The views of Aboriginal people expressed during these discussions shaped the legislative package that was introduced into Parliament in November 2011 and is currently being reviewed by a Senate committee.

The Australian Government's legislation will act on problems that are urgent and a real concern to Aboriginal Territorians. It will put in place an improved and expanded measure to make sure children go to school as well as help to tackle the harm from alcohol abuse. A jobs package was announced with the legislation as many of the Aboriginal Territorians who talked to the Australian Government were worried about the lack of jobs and economic opportunities in remote communities.

Alice Springs Transformation Plan

The Alice Springs Transformation Plan has made remarkable progress since the Australian and Northern Territory Governments began this \$150 million joint project in December 2009. Within two years 85 new houses and 196 housing rebuilds and refurbishments have been completed on the town camps in and around Alice Springs under the National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing. The Transformation Plan is integrating the town camps into the wider town with quality infrastructure and municipal services. Options for visitor accommodation have expanded and new social services are helping vulnerable people.

8 | CASE STUDY

Alice Springs Transformation Plan: 'A new day'

The Prime Minister, the Hon Julia Gillard MP, visited Alice Springs on 7 June 2011 to see firsthand the progress being made by the \$150 million Alice Springs Transformation Plan. The plan, a joint project with the Northern Territory Government and the local community, is helping to improve conditions and services for town-camp residents, homeless Indigenous Australians in Alice Springs, and people visiting Alice Springs from remote communities.

The Prime Minister visited the Hidden Valley town camp, the largest in Alice Springs, and officially opened the Aherlkeme Transitional Accommodation Village, a new \$7.86 million facility that provides supported accommodation to help homeless people move into public housing. Aherlkeme means 'a new light for a new day', a name chosen by the traditional owners of Alice Springs.

Aherlkeme is operated by Mission Australia. Their Life Skills Program covers rent and money management, as well as home care and property maintenance. It helps people to gain the skills to make a successful transition to public housing. Each resident finishing the program receives a Certificate of Achievement, and a report to Territory Housing to support an application for public housing.

A graduate of the program, a young mother of three, says: "It has been a good place for me and my kids. The most important help I received was about accessing services to support my kids, and how to get help to save and buy whitegoods like a washing machine, fridge and beds for my kids. I am looking forward to the next chapter of my life." She wants to study and get back into work, taking advantage of expanded child-care facilities in Alice Springs.

The town camps are being upgraded to a standard similar to other Alice Spring suburbs, with new housing and housing refurbishments. A number of short-term accommodation options have been established or expanded, including Aherlkeme. The new Alyerre Hostel and Apmere Mwerre Visitor Park, both operated by Aboriginal Hostels Limited, are giving remote Indigenous visitors a place to stay while visiting town or undergoing medical treatment. The visitor park, opened in February 2011, can accommodate up to 150 visitors to Alice Springs.



Wayne Clarke.



Dion Forrester.

Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, with Indigenous Affairs Minister, Jenny Macklin, and a local family in Alice Springs, June 2011.

Anna Rice.

For many local people and organisations, working on the Transformation Plan has been rewarding and inspiring.

Wayne Clarke is an Aboriginal community worker with the Targeted Family Support Service run by the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, one of the many services that are helping Aboriginal children and families in Alice Springs.

"If you can make one mum smile and feel good about being a mum, if you can make a dad feel like he's actually part of a family and taking his place and doing a dad's role in the family, that's just wonderful. But if you can make a baby or a young person smile and feel good, that just outweighs all the negative stuff, so it's really promising," Wayne says.

Dion Forrester is a town camp resident and carpentry apprentice with local firm Ingkerreke. He was part of a team of local people who helped with the building. Some 89 Aboriginal people have been employed since the beginning of the construction phase.

"There's a lot of Indigenous tradies starting to come through and it's good for a lot of Indigenous people to work on town camps and it's good for people who look at that; they feel really good about seeing Indigenous people work on their houses, on town camps," Dion says.



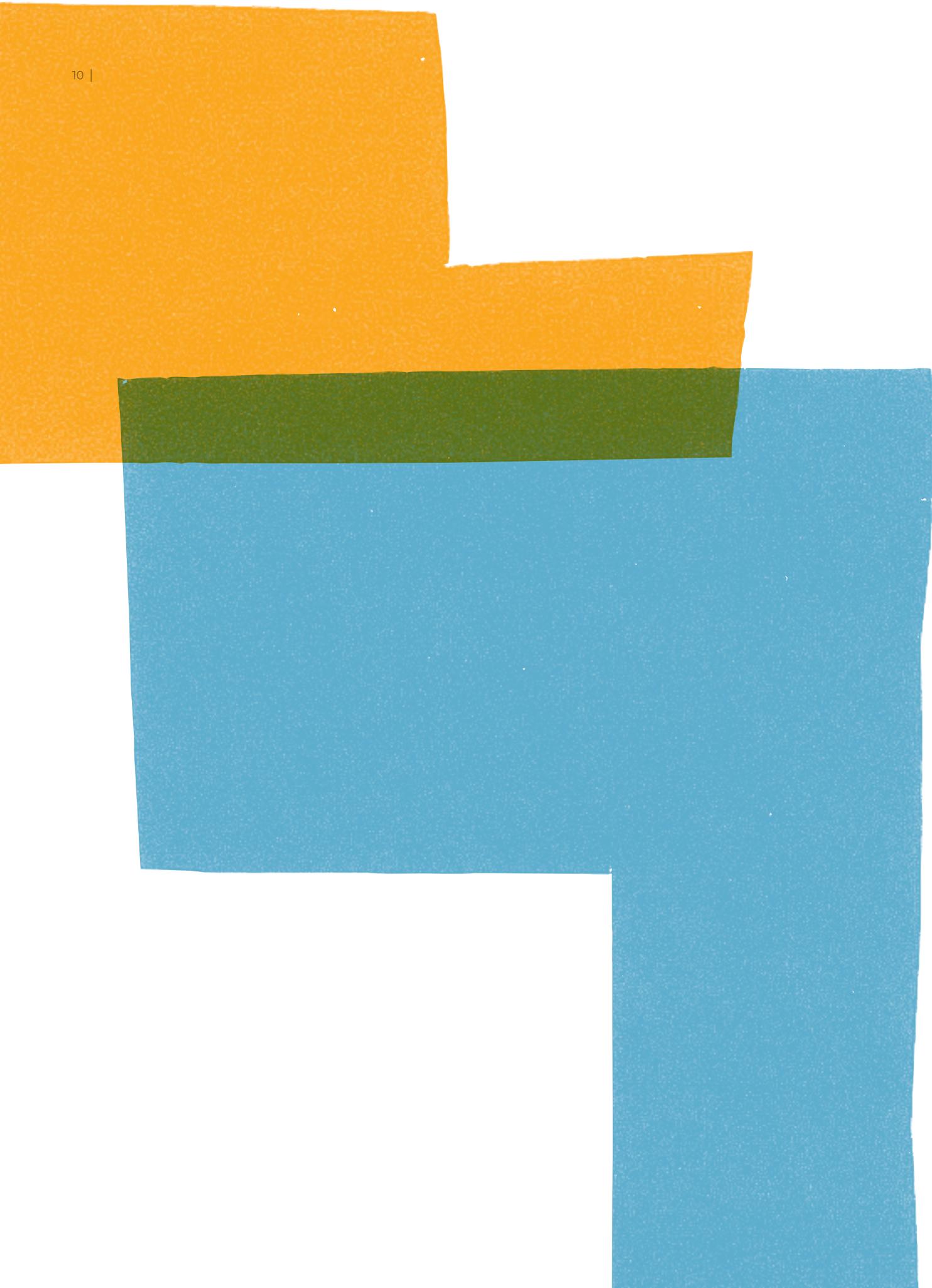
The preschool-readiness program is helping to prepare children for their journey through the education system. Local mother Anna Rice is happy with the progress her daughter Chantella has made already.

"She's learning new things and comes back home and tells me stories too, what she does at child care. I'm proud of her. She's doing this herself now. She'll be happy to go to big school now — to preschool, on a bus."



Photos: FaHCSIA.

Purina Anderson outside her new home in Hidden Valley town camp.



Chapter 2

Progress against the targets

This chapter provides an overview of the six Closing the Gap targets including progress to date and, where possible, gives an account of longer term trends.

The chapter starts with a summary of recent data improvements that will assist in monitoring progress. This is followed by a short overview of recent demographic trends, including an outline of Australian Bureau of Statistics population projections and their implications. Understanding the characteristics of the Indigenous population is critical to ensuring government efforts are well directed and effective.

The COAG Reform Council provides a comprehensive report each year on progress against the targets. The next report will be released in mid-2012. Some initial results from the 2011 Census will also be released in 2012. This will include updated information on the gap in current employment outcomes and the Year 12 or equivalent attainment target.



Census officer William Parmbuk was employed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics to help explain the 2011 Census forms to Indigenous people in Wadeye community, NT. Photo: ABS.



Tasmanian elder
Aunty Phyllis Pitchford.
Photo: FaHCSIA.

Data improvements

Improving the quality and availability of reliable data remains a priority for all governments and is critical for reliable assessment of progress on Closing the Gap.

The 2009-10 Budget provided an additional \$46.4 million over four years to address key data gaps and issues with \$20.1 million provided to obtain a better Census count of Indigenous Australians in 2011. In the 2006 Census the undercount of Indigenous Australians in Western Australia, for example, was estimated to have been as high as 24 per cent. Although the Australian Bureau of Statistics develops estimates of the residential population, detailed information cannot be collected for those who are not included in the Census. Addressing this problem will improve our confidence in population estimates and assist in monitoring progress against the Closing the Gap targets at a national, state and local level.

To improve the accuracy of the Census count in 2011, the Australian Bureau of Statistics provided closer management and support to Census field staff and provided more help for Indigenous people who need assistance in completing their Census form. Fourteen Local Engagement Managers and 66 flying squads (2-4 people each) were employed in high priority areas in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory to establish an early rapport with Indigenous communities and to deal with situations where standard Census methods were less successful.

While it is too early to judge if these steps have led to an improvement in 2011 Census data, early feedback from Indigenous communities has been positive. 2011 Census data will become progressively available from mid-2012.

Other significant data improvements are enabling nationally consistent reporting of progress against performance indicators under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. These improvements include the addition of nationally consistent data items on smoking during pregnancy and the gestational age at the first antenatal visit in the Perinatal National Minimum Data Set from 1 July 2009 and 1 July 2010, respectively.

A set of 24 national Key Performance Indicators has been developed by the Department of Health and Ageing in partnership with State and Territory health departments and in collaboration

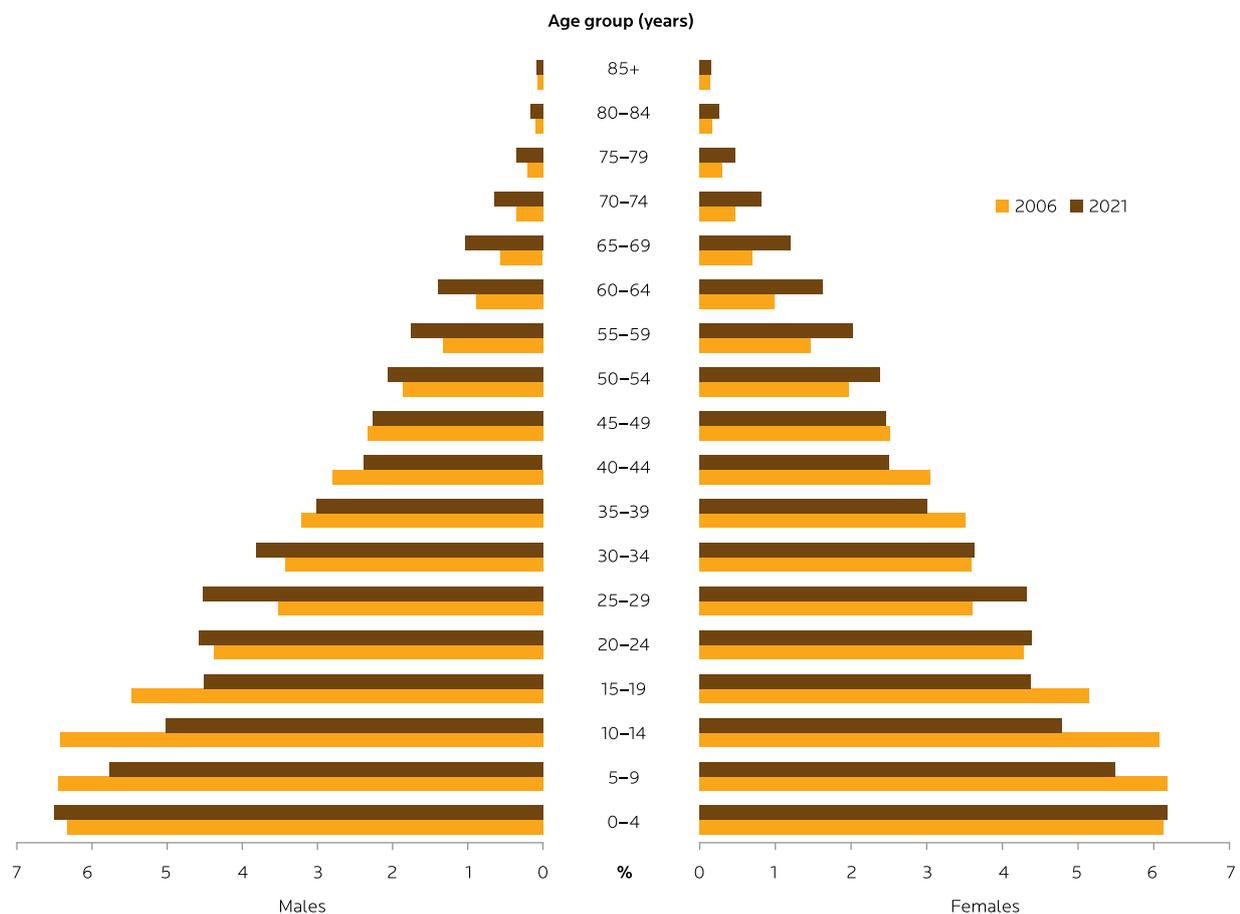
with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and technical experts. These were approved by the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council in June 2011, for phased implementation over the next three years. Data will be collected from Indigenous-specific primary health care services.

The launch of the MySchool Website in 2010 has also significantly enhanced transparency. Data on the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is available for all Australian schools including remote Indigenous schools, where minimum reporting thresholds are met.

Data on average school attendance rates are also available each year for all Australian schools through MySchool.

The National Early Childhood Education and Care Data Collection represents a significant step towards improving early-childhood education data in Australia and will result in more comparable data being available for reporting in 2012. More information is provided under the early childhood education target below.

FIGURE 1: Indigenous age profile, 2006 and 2021



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Experimental estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2006, ABS Cat. 3238.0.55.001

Indigenous population of Australia

The profile of the Indigenous population is very different to the non-Indigenous population.

The Indigenous population is young and growing but gradually ageing

Australia's Indigenous population is growing rapidly. Indigenous Australians make up 2.5 per cent of the population. Between 1991 and 2006, the Indigenous population grew by more than twice the rate of the total Australian population. The current estimate places the number of Indigenous Australians at 517,000 in 2006, with this number projected to increase to 721,000 by 2021 – an increase of 39 per cent. Over the same period, the total Australian population is projected to increase by 24 per cent.

While Australia's Indigenous population is relatively young, it will gradually age over the next few decades. The number of Indigenous Australians aged 25-54 is projected to grow by 43 per cent from 2006 to 2021. This strong growth in the Indigenous working age population highlights the importance of the Closing the Gap employment target.

The number of Indigenous Australians aged 50 and above is projected to almost double from 2006 to 2021. This will lead to an increased demand for a range of government services.

The population pyramid on the previous page shows the age structure of the Indigenous population in 2006 and the projected age structure in 2021. The chart shows some important changes. For example, the share of the Indigenous population aged 20-34 is projected to be higher in 2021 than it was in 2006, as will the share of people aged 50 and above. On the other hand, the share of the Indigenous population aged 5-19 is projected to decline from 2006 to 2021.

The Indigenous population is increasingly concentrated in urban areas

Almost one-third (32 per cent) of the Indigenous population live in major cities; 43 per cent live in regional areas and some 25 per cent in remote Australia. In contrast, of non-Indigenous Australians, 69 per cent lived in major cities and less than 2 per cent in remote and very remote Australia in 2006.

More than half of Indigenous Australians live in either New South Wales (30 per cent) or Queensland (28 per cent). Approximately 14 per cent reside in Western Australia and 12 per cent in the Northern Territory.

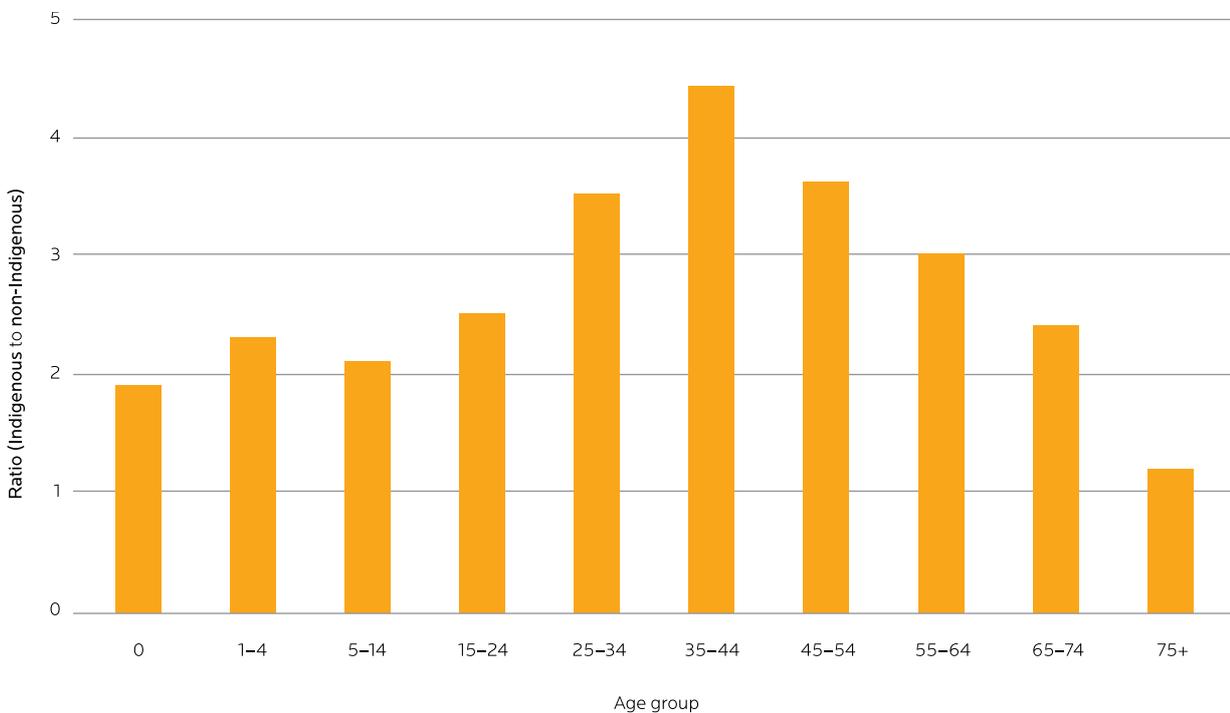
Australia's Indigenous population has become much more urbanised in the last 30-40 years. In 1966 just over 27 per cent of the Indigenous population lived in a population centre of 1000 or more people. By 1971 this had risen to 44 per cent and by 2006 more than three-quarters of all Indigenous Australians lived in population centres of 1000 or more people.

Although the share of Indigenous Australians in remote or very remote areas is falling, this reflects the expansion of the Indigenous population living in urban areas.

Closing the Gap requires that policies and programs are suitable for the varied locations where Indigenous Australians live. While levels of disadvantage are high in remote areas, the majority of Indigenous Australians live in major cities and regional areas.



FIGURE 2: The ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous mortality rates by specific age groups, 2006–2010



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics: unpublished data

Closing the Gap targets

Target: Close the life expectancy gap within a generation

Life expectancy is a widely used measure of population health. It is affected by socioeconomic factors including education, employment, community functioning and housing. To meet this target requires sustained effort across all the Closing the Gap building blocks. The current gap in life expectancy is estimated at 11.5 years for males and 9.7 years for females.

Official life-expectancy estimates are available only every five years; however, mortality rates can be tracked on an annual basis. Mortality rates represent deaths as a proportion of the population. Comparing average mortality rates across Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians requires adjustments to be made for the different age structures across the two groups, given the much younger age profile of the Indigenous population.

The evidence clearly suggests that Indigenous mortality rates have declined while Indigenous life expectancy has increased over the last 30–40 years. A detailed study has shown that in the Northern Territory from 1967 to 2004 life expectancy at birth increased by 8.0 years for Indigenous men and by 14.2 years for Indigenous women¹.

After adjusting for the different age profile of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, the mortality rate for Indigenous Australians living in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory combined (the jurisdictions with adequate data for long-term analysis) declined by 36 per cent between 1991 and 2010. There was also a statistically significant narrowing of the gap in mortality rates with other Australians over this period². Indigenous mortality rates declined by 26 per cent for circulatory disease from 1998 to 2009. There were small improvements in smoking rates for Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over (declining from 52 per cent in 1994 to 47 per cent in 2008).

¹ Wilson T, J Condon, T Barnes, 'Northern Territory Indigenous life expectancy improvements, 1967–2004', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 31, No.2, 2007

² For long-term trends (1991 to 2010), the mortality gap is the difference in mortality rates between Indigenous and other Australians (which included those for whom Indigenous status was 'not stated').

16 | While care is required in analysing short-term trends, it is clear that Indigenous mortality rates are generally declining. An investigation undertaken by the Western Australian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages and the Australian Bureau of Statistics has confirmed that Indigenous mortality data for Western Australia was overstated for 2007, 2008 and to a lesser extent 2009, with work underway to identify the best options to address this issue. The overstatement for Western Australia affects the accuracy of Indigenous mortality trends at the national level. Data for these years were excluded from the long-term trend analysis above.

The combined age-standardised Indigenous mortality rate for New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory (the jurisdictions for which data can be analysed over this period) has declined by 13 per cent between 1998 and 2010 with a significant narrowing of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous mortality rates of 11 per cent³. Western Australia was not included in this comparison (1998–2010) due to the overstatement of Indigenous mortality identified by the Western Australian Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Meeting the life-expectancy target will be challenging as, among other things, non-Indigenous life expectancy is expected to rise over coming years. This means, for example, that Indigenous male life expectancy will probably have to increase by almost 21 years by 2031 to close the gap. To achieve the life-expectancy target in 25 years, average Indigenous life-expectancy gains of between 0.6 and 0.8 years per year are needed.

Health outcomes at a population level generally do not significantly improve within short or medium timeframes. There is a time lag between interventions and improvements in outcomes, such as mortality.

Two-thirds of the gap in health outcomes for Indigenous Australians is due to chronic diseases that tend to have common lifestyle-related risk factors such as smoking, poor nutrition, obesity and low levels of physical activity. The interplay between these risk behaviours and other social determinants of health is complex and it is therefore important to address the broader determinants of health as well as focusing efforts on prevention and better management of chronic diseases.

The leading causes of Indigenous mortality over 2005–09 were:

- circulatory disease (26 per cent)
- cancer (19 per cent)
- injury, particularly suicide and transport accidents (15 per cent)
- endocrine, metabolic and nutritional disorders, including diabetes (9 per cent)
- respiratory disease (8 per cent).

Age-specific mortality rates show considerable difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Figure 2 shows the ratio of Indigenous to non-Indigenous mortality rates by specific age groups for the period 2006–10. The chart shows that the largest differences in mortality rates are not for infants or children but for people aged 25–54. For example, the chart shows that Indigenous Australians are more than four times as likely to die as non-Indigenous Australians when they are 35–44. If the life-expectancy gap is to be closed there has to be a strong focus on the chronic diseases that have a big impact on Indigenous Australians in the 25–54 age bracket. The Indigenous Chronic Disease Package, reported under the Health building block, is designed to address this issue.

³ For more recent trends (1998 to 2010), the mortality gap is the difference in the mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, as those for whom Indigenous status was 'not stated' can be separated from 1998 onwards.

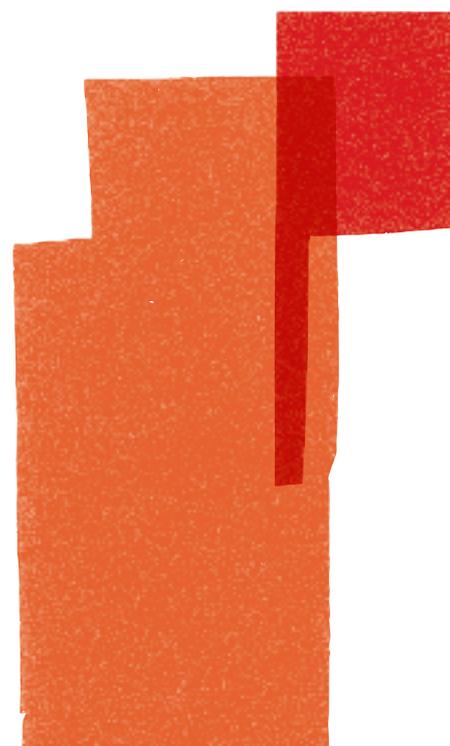
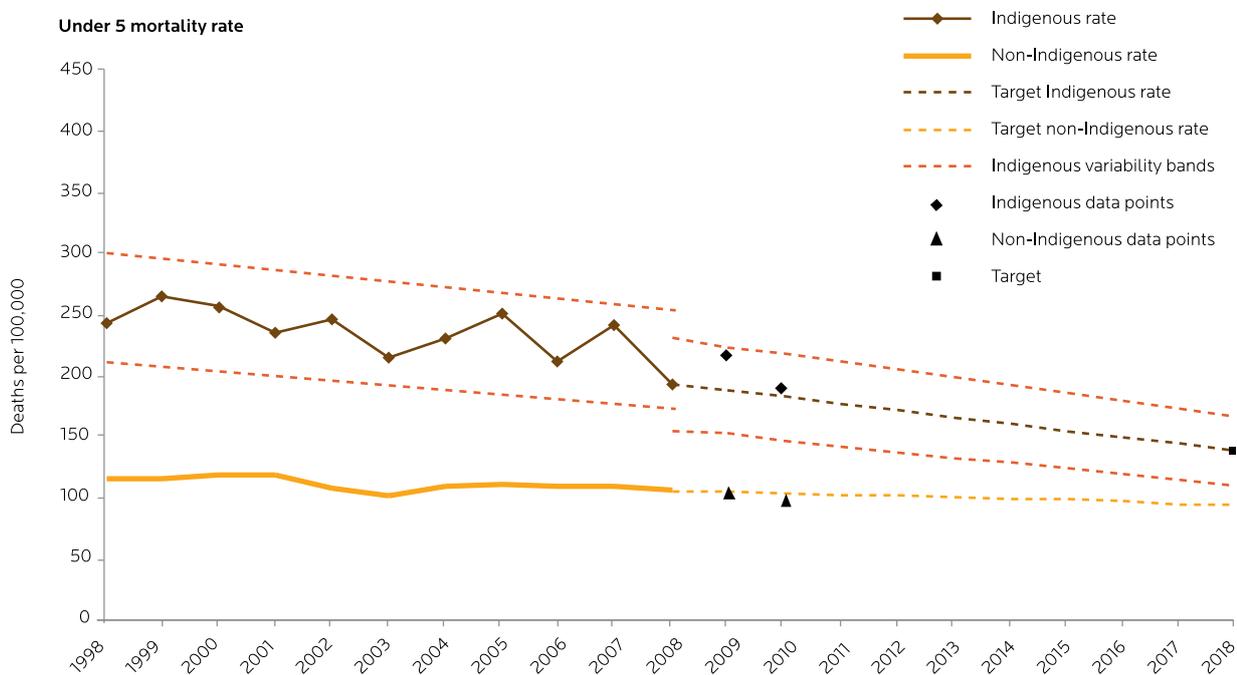


FIGURE 3: Indigenous and non-Indigenous under-five mortality rates, 1998–2018⁴

Target: Halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade (2018)

Mortality rates for children under five years are an important measure of child health and the overall health of a population, as well as the physical and social environment. Currently Indigenous children are twice as likely to die before their fifth birthday as non-Indigenous children.

There have been significant improvements in Indigenous child mortality in the last 30–40 years. While reliable data are not available in most jurisdictions for this period, a study has shown that the under-five mortality rate for Indigenous children in the

Northern Territory declined by 85 per cent from 1967 to 2000⁵.

There have been significant reductions in child mortality in recent decades, including a 48 per cent combined reduction between 1991 and 2010 in the three jurisdictions (Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory) in which long-term comparisons are possible. There has also been a significant narrowing of the gap over this period.

The gap in mortality rates has been closing and under-five mortality continues to decline for Indigenous children. This is due to improvements in antenatal care, sanitation and public health conditions, better neonatal intensive care and the development of immunisation programs.

In 2008, 97 per cent of Indigenous mothers attended at least one antenatal care session during their pregnancy. Over the period 1998–2008, there was a significant increase in Indigenous mothers attending at least one antenatal care session. However, Indigenous mothers are accessing antenatal care later in their pregnancy and less frequently than other Australian mothers. Available data indicate that in 2008 Indigenous mothers were less likely than non-Indigenous mothers to attend during the critical first trimester (65 per cent compared to 82 per cent) or attend five or more antenatal care sessions during their pregnancy (77 per cent

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare analysis (unpublished) of the National Mortality Database from jurisdictions with the best quality Indigenous identification over this time (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Northern Territory) combined.

⁵ Condon J, T Barnes, J Cunningham, L Smith, 'Improvements in Indigenous mortality in the Northern Territory over four decades', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 28, No. 5, 2004.

18 | compared to 93 per cent)⁶. The New Directions Mothers and Babies Services Program, reported under the Early Childhood building block, is extending access to antenatal care.

Improving health outcomes, including maternal and child health, is dependent on a range of interrelated determinants including socioeconomic factors (e.g. education, employment, income), environmental factors (e.g. housing, sanitation), historical factors and health-system performance.

Figure 3 shows that child-mortality rates are within the range required to meet the target. The child-mortality rates are volatile due to small numbers (approximately 100 deaths per year). Approximately nine less deaths in the target year of 2018 would result in this target being achieved.

Maintaining this positive trend requires the continued expansion of preventive care and child and maternal health services, in particular antenatal care, as well as continued efforts to address broader social factors such as socioeconomic status, education, smoking and other behavioural risk factors.

Target: Ensuring all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years

Quality early-childhood education is critical to ensuring young children have opportunities for early learning, development and socialisation. All Australian jurisdictions are committed to providing access to early-childhood education for all Australian children in the year before full-time school by 2013.

The Closing the Gap target is 95 per cent enrolment (and attendance, where it is possible to measure) for Indigenous four-year-old children in remote communities by 2013⁷. While current data are limited, the best available data source, the National Preschool Census, suggests that a high proportion of Indigenous children living in remote communities were enrolled in a preschool program in the year before full-time schooling in 2010 and that this proportion rose from 87 per cent in 2009 to 90 per cent in 2010. It is estimated that in 2010 there were around 300 eligible Indigenous children in remote areas who were not enrolled in preschool. This is a relatively small number, but there are still considerable challenges in providing preschool access in small remote communities with mobile populations.

While there is still work to be done, it is anticipated that more improvements will occur in 2011-12 and 2012-13 when the majority of funding from the Commonwealth under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education will be delivered (see the Early Childhood building block).

Achieving the early-childhood education target is not sufficient on its own to ensure Indigenous children living in remote communities have the best start in life. Children need to attend regularly and families need to be engaged to achieve maximum benefits. It is critical to continue work in early-childhood development that looks beyond the target to improve school readiness and success.

Obtaining robust and comparable early-childhood data is critical to understanding the trends in attendance and engagement for Indigenous children. Historically data on early-childhood education lacked national comparability particularly for Indigenous children, which presents significant challenges for measurement and reporting. To address this lack of national consistency, the National Information Agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care was signed by relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory authorities in 2010.

A key outcome of this agreement was the development of a National Early Childhood Education and Care Data Collection to support monitoring and reporting arrangements of the COAG reforms in early childhood, including the Closing the Gap agenda for Indigenous children. Commencing in 2010, the inaugural data is regarded as experimental because of limitations in data quality related to comparability and comprehensiveness. In particular, it was not possible to provide Commonwealth data on early-childhood education in child-care settings. It is anticipated that future collections (commencing with data collected in 2011 for reporting in 2012) will be significantly improved and address most of these issues.

6 All of the figures cited in this paragraph are derived from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (unpublished) National Perinatal Data Collection. Only data for the jurisdictions for which data were available and of sufficient quality to publish are used. These figures cited should not be generalised to the national (Australia) level. Work is underway to improve the consistency of reporting of data on antenatal care within the National Perinatal Data Collection. Figures for at least one antenatal care session are based on data for New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia combined; the proportion visiting in the first trimester are age-standardised data for New South Wales, South Australia and the Northern Territory combined; and the proportions attending for five or more sessions are age-standardised data for Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory combined.

7 The target of 95 per cent, rather than 100 per cent, enrolment reflects the fact that early childhood education is not compulsory.



'Two way' education at the community-run Yipirinya School, Alice Springs, NT. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Target: Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade

This target is measured using outcomes of the annual National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The gap is measured as the difference between the proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students at or above National Minimum Standard in Reading, Writing and Numeracy at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The annual outcomes of these 12 separate assessments provide a snapshot of the extent of the gap and contribute to a picture of trends toward Closing the Gap after four years of NAPLAN testing.

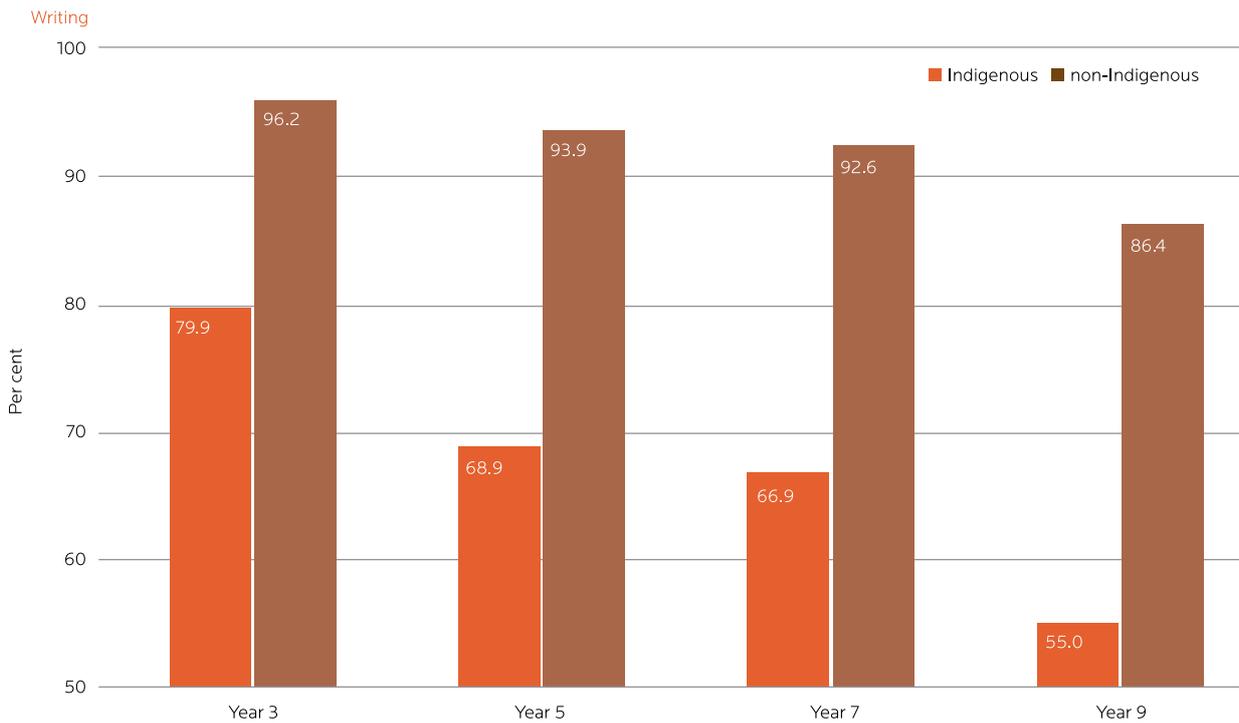
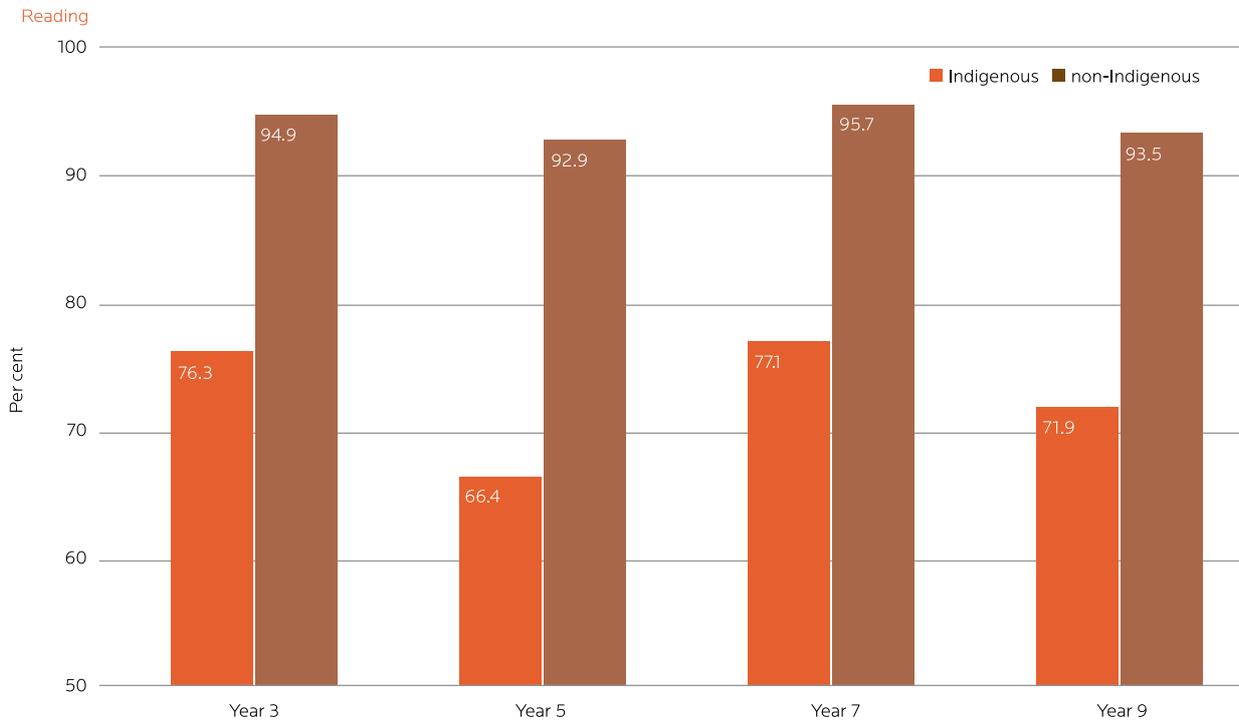
In 2011 the Writing domain for all year levels was altered from an assessment of Narrative Writing to Persuasive Writing. This has created a break in the data series over time. Writing results for 2011 should not be directly compared to the writing results from previous years.

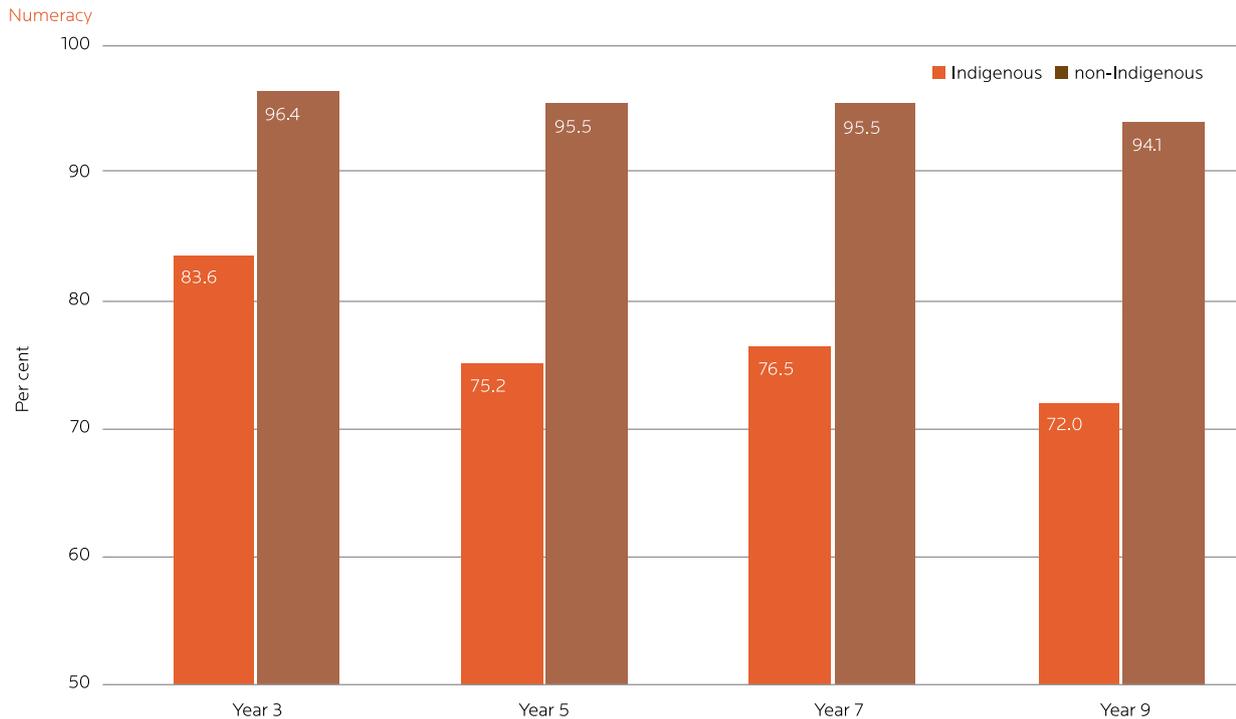
At the national level there are eight gaps (four year levels across reading and numeracy) against which progress can be assessed. Since 2008 the gap has decreased in seven out of the eight instances with the only exception being Year 7 Numeracy. Some falls in the gap have been quite large: Year 3 Reading (6.6 percentage points), Year 3 Numeracy (4.6 percentage points), Year 5 Numeracy (4.5 percentage points), and Year 7 Reading (4.9 percentage points). However, some changes have been quite small: Year 9 Numeracy (0.2 percentage points) and Year 9 Reading (1.9 percentage points).

To assess progress each year agreed trajectories are used. These trajectories allow an assessment to be made of whether efforts are on track to reach the targets. For the Reading and Numeracy domains, most (six out of eight) of the progress points in 2011 at the national level were either above the points or very close to the agreed trajectory points for 2011⁸. Care is required as there are only three years of progress since 2008; however, the data suggests that, in most domains, progress is consistent with meeting the target in the agreed timeframes.

⁸ The exceptions were Year 7 and Year 9 Numeracy. The 2011 result for Year 9 Reading was only 0.6 percentage points below the trajectory – this small difference is not statistically significant. In all other cases the 2011 results are above the trajectory points.

FIGURE 4: Percentage of students at or above National Minimum Standards for Reading, Writing and Numeracy, 2011





Source: Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, NAPLAN National Report, 2011

2011 NAPLAN results

Nationally, in 2011 across Reading and Numeracy, the proportion of Indigenous students who are at or above National Minimum Standards ranged from 66.4 per cent for Year 5 Reading to 83.6 per cent for Year 3 Numeracy.

The greatest improvements over the 2010 results in the percentage of Indigenous students at or above the National Minimum Standards were in Year 3 Numeracy (up by 7.0 percentage points) and Year 9 Reading (up by 7.7 percentage points). Both outcomes were statistically significant improvements and resulted in large reductions in those gaps of 5.9 and 6.4 percentage points respectively. The gap narrowed in all other year levels for Reading and Numeracy from 2010 to 2011 with the exception of Year 5 Reading where there was no change in the gap.

Outcomes by geo-location

Generally, for all Australian students the proportion achieving the National Minimum Standard decreases as remoteness increases. These differences are more pronounced for Indigenous students whose achievement declines sharply as remoteness increases. Only 26.4 per cent of Indigenous Year 5 students in very remote areas achieved at or above the National Minimum Standard in Reading compared to 76.7 per cent in metropolitan areas in 2011. The range was much narrower in Year 5 Reading for non-Indigenous students, from 86.6 per cent (very remote areas) to 93.4 per cent (metropolitan areas).

In 2011 in all four geo-locations (remote, very remote, provincial and metropolitan), outcomes for Year 9 Reading increased compared to 2010. Similarly, for Years 3 and 5 Numeracy all

geo-location outcomes were better than those of 2010, with the very remote gaps decreasing by 15.8 and 9.6 percentage points respectively. While Indigenous student outcomes are inconsistent from year to year, the 2011 results give room for cautious optimism.



22 | **Target: Halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020**

Research shows that completing Year 12 (or its equivalent) improves transitions into further study or employment, as well as broader life opportunities.

Educational attainment among Indigenous Australians has expanded rapidly over the last 30–40 years. In 1971 only 3 per cent of Indigenous Australians aged 20–64 held a post-school qualification; by 2006 this proportion had risen to 25 per cent. The proportion of Indigenous adults who have continued in school beyond Year 10 has also risen sharply. In 1976 less than 5 per cent of all Indigenous adults aged 20–64 had left school at 17 or older (leaving school at 17 or older is equivalent to leaving school in either Year 11 or Year 12). By 2006, 35 per cent of Indigenous adults aged 20–64 had completed either Year 11 or Year 12.

In 2006, according to the Census, 47.4 per cent of Indigenous Australians aged between 20 and 24 achieved Year 12 or equivalent qualification, compared to 83.8 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians in the same age group.

There is reason for optimism that progress is being made, based on existing trends in apparent retention rates of Indigenous students. While not directly comparable to Year 12 attainment, apparent retention rates give an indication of the proportion of young people who stay enrolled in school until Year 12. The Year 7/8 to Year 12 apparent retention rate for Indigenous students has increased from 30.7 per cent in 1995 to 47.2 per cent in 2010; in contrast, the non-Indigenous retention rate rose from 73.2 per cent to 79.4 per cent over the same period. The gap in apparent retention rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians has fallen from 42.5 percentage points in 1995 to 32.2 percentage points in 2010.

Meeting the target requires a 21.6 percentage point increase in Indigenous attainment from its baseline rate of 47.4 per cent in 2006 to 69.0 per cent in 2020. Data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey shows that 45.4 per cent of Indigenous 20–24 year olds held Year 12 or equivalent qualification in 2008. However, due to the level of sampling error in these data, they cannot be used to assess progress from 2006 to 2008. Data from the 2011 Census to be released late in 2012 will allow progress to be assessed from 2006 to 2011.

While significant improvements have been made, further progress is needed to ensure the national target for Indigenous Year 12 or equivalent attainment in 2020 can be reached. The Australian Government is committed to making such progress and has made significant investment in a range of initiatives that are working towards achieving greater Year 12 or equivalent attainment. For example, the Youth Attainment and Transitions National Partnership (\$723 million) supports all young people to make successful transitions from schooling into further education, training and employment. Further information is provided under the Schooling and Economic Participation building blocks.

Jessica Healy, pictured at the Rio Tinto Iron Ore Dampier Rail Operations, is currently a human resources (HR) advisor at the company's Paraburdoo Operations in Western Australia. She is completing a graduate program and accepting an HR role with Rio Tinto Coal in Queensland. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Target: Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade

Secure employment is important to achieving a good standard of living and wellbeing. It benefits families and communities as well as the individual. In 2008, 53.8 per cent of Indigenous Australians aged 15–64 were employed compared to 75 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians in the same age group.

Indigenous employment levels have grown very strongly from 1994. In 1994 only 37.6 per cent of Indigenous Australians aged 15–64 were employed. By 2008 this proportion had risen to 53.8 per cent. In interpreting these data it is important to understand that the Australian Bureau of Statistics has traditionally counted Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) participants as being employed. It is therefore important to focus on trends in both CDEP and non-CDEP employment. The proportion of Indigenous Australians aged 15–64 who are employed in a non-CDEP job has risen sharply from 28.5 per cent in 1994 to 48.2 per cent in 2008.

There has been a large improvement in employment prospects for Indigenous Australians in urban areas. In 1994 only 36.4 per cent of Indigenous Australians of workforce age who lived in regional areas or the major cities were employed. In 2008 this proportion had risen to 54.3 per cent. In 2008 over 62.7 per



cent of all Indigenous males of workforce age in the major cities and regional areas were employed. Outside remote Australia very few Indigenous Australians are engaged in CDEP.

Mainstream employment (rather than unemployment, participation in CDEP or being outside the labour force) is now the norm for Indigenous Australians outside remote areas. Most Indigenous Australians of workforce age in urban areas are employed and almost all of them are employed in mainstream (non-CDEP) jobs. In urban areas in 1994 only 32.9 per cent of all Indigenous Australians aged 15–64 held a non-CDEP job. By 2008 this proportion had risen to 53.1 per cent. In remote areas, too, the proportion of working age Indigenous Australians employed in a non-CDEP job rose sharply from 11.4 per cent in 1994 to 33 per cent in 2008. This is a major turnaround from the

situation in 1994 and an important improvement that is not widely recognised. Further research is needed to fully explain the factors driving the long-term improvement in employment outcomes⁹.

⁹ See M. Gray and B. Hunter, *Changes in Labour Force Status: Establishing Employment as a Social Norm?*, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Topical Issue no.7/2011 for more detail on the improvement in Indigenous employment that occurred from 1994 to 2008.

24 | The strong improvements in Indigenous employment since 1994 owe a lot to the fact that Australia has experienced an almost uninterrupted period of economic growth. Australia, unlike many other OECD countries, has not experienced an economic recession over this period. In addition, recent experience shows that Indigenous and non-Indigenous indicators are tracking broadly in agreement with each other over the business cycle. Continued economic growth will be very important in generating strong growth in Indigenous employment to assist in achieving the employment target.

Continued increases in educational attainment and improvements in numeracy and literacy skills for Indigenous people will also be essential to meet the employment target.

While the challenge is considerable there are positive recent developments. Job Services Australia delivers employment services to the majority of Indigenous job seekers. Since the program commenced on 1 July 2009, the employment and education outcomes for Indigenous job seekers have continued to increase. In 2011, Job Services Australia achieved greater employment and education outcomes for Indigenous job seekers when compared to all job seekers.

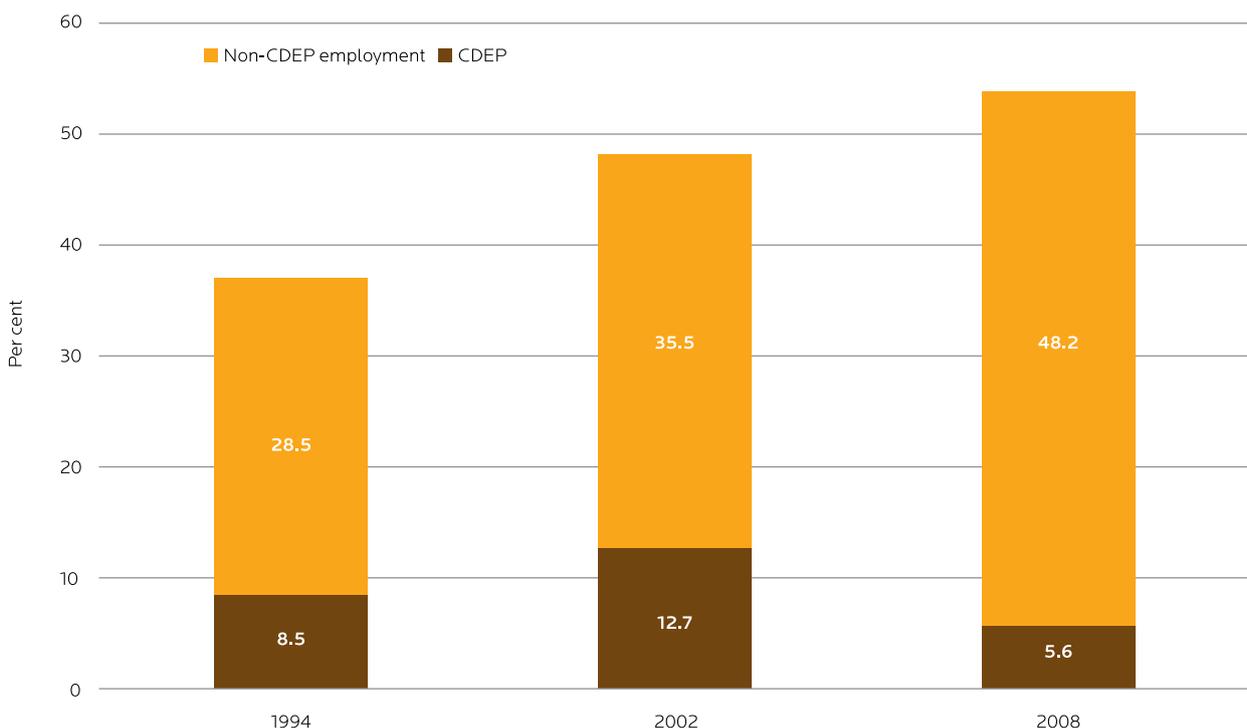
In 2011 Job Services Australia achieved 46,486 job placements for Indigenous job seekers. This achievement is a 12 per cent increase from 2010 when 41,369 job placements were achieved. The increase in Indigenous job placements compares to a 3 per cent increase in job placements for the total job-seeker population over the same period.

In 2011, Job Services Australia achieved 21,807 total education and employment outcomes for Indigenous job seekers. This is a 16 per cent increase from the 18,758 total outcomes achieved in 2010 and compares to an 11 per cent increase in outcomes for the total job-seeker population.

Post-program monitoring surveys show that the proportion of Indigenous job seekers in a job and/or education and training around three months after a period of assistance in Job Services Australia has increased from 43.8 per cent (12 months to September 2010) to 44.7 per cent (12 months to September 2011).

New data to measure the gap in employment outcomes will become available with the release of results from the 2011 Census of Population and Housing in late 2012.

FIGURE 5: Percentage of Indigenous Australians aged 15-64 employed in CDEP and non-CDEP jobs



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey, 2008

Chapter 3

Rebuilding relationships

Relationships built on mutual respect are central to ensuring that policies, programs and services are effective and able to engage with the people they are designed to benefit.

Rebuilding relationships requires not only day-to-day engagement with Indigenous Australians but also work to ensure Australia's national institutions support inclusion. Over the course of the past 13 months, the Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians has undertaken extensive consultations across 73 cities and towns across Australia, involving around 4000 Australians.

Indigenous sports star Anthony Mundine at the Indigenous constitutional recognition stall at the Murri League Carnival on the Gold Coast, Qld. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Constitutional change is not easy. Of the 44 referendum questions put since 1901, Australians have agreed to only eight changes. The most positive national consensus was reached in 1967 when Australians were asked to change the Constitution so the Commonwealth could make laws for Indigenous Australians. Almost 91 per cent of Australians said 'yes'. More broadly, the 1967 referendum gave voice to a strong national will to address the injustices of the past.

As was the case with the 1967 referendum there must be broad support, across the political spectrum and from the majority of Australians, for constitutional change to recognise Indigenous people in the Constitution. The Australian Government will continue to work to build the support needed to achieve this change.



Engagement on the ground

The Australian Government is working more closely with Indigenous people than ever before.

Across the Closing the Gap building blocks, all major initiatives have been informed by wide discussion with Indigenous people and other stakeholders, including last year's Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory consultations, the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan. Australian Government ministers have been personally involved in these consultations and have led conversations with Indigenous people and communities.

Government staff in urban, regional and remote locations are engaging with their local Indigenous communities, identifying issues and helping to bring together packages of government support from both Indigenous-specific and mainstream programs. Government Business Managers – or their equivalent – are working in many remote locations coordinating government business in the community. Indigenous Engagement Officers are assisting Government Business Managers in more than 30 communities.

Indigenous Engagement Officers are recruited from local communities and understand their dynamics and protocols and, importantly, they speak local languages. These locally based Indigenous staff are creating stronger, more responsive links between their community and government.

Reconciliation Week 2011 saw the launch of a resource kit to help government staff integrate better engagement into their everyday work. *Engaging Today, Building Tomorrow: A Framework for Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* provides guidance on building staff capacity and increasing the capacity of non-government organisations and communities.

Place-based initiatives

Many Closing the Gap initiatives are place-based. Government resources are being matched to needs in particular communities or regions, in partnership with local Indigenous people. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery is working in 29 priority locations across Australia. Innovative initiatives are also being advanced in response to need or at the request of local communities in many other regions across Australia.

On Cape York the communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale, and Mossman Gorge and associated outstations have been working with government to trial new approaches to the provision of welfare. Cape York Welfare Reform is a partnership involving the four communities, the Australian Government, the Queensland Government, the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership and Cape York Partnerships.

The reforms are helping people and communities to engage in the economy and restore positive social norms. At least 15 significant projects are being implemented under four major 'capability' streams: social responsibility, economic opportunity, education and housing. The Family Responsibilities Commission has been operating for three years, working with people to help



them change their behaviour and deciding on required actions. Respected elders have been appointed to positions of responsibility on the commission, helping to rebuild local authority and involve local people in decision making. Student Education Trusts for nearly 500 children have been set up with parents and carers saving close to \$1 million for education expenses. The results of this trial are being evaluated this financial year.

Regional Partnership Agreements are operating across Australia, for example in the Illawarra, Northern Rivers, New England and Murdi Paaki (western) regions of New South Wales. Regional Partnership Agreements are negotiated between local Indigenous representatives and all levels of government. They set out agreed approaches to identified problems including projects for joint action.

On Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island in the Northern Territory, a Regional Partnership Agreement has been in place since 2008. The agreement was initiated by traditional owners through the Anindilyakwa Land Council and is already providing measurable benefits to the communities, including establishment of a local construction company, Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island Enterprises, that is playing a key role in government housing projects and employing local people.

Left to right: Dominic, Dylan and Millie Paddy in Amata community, a Remote Service Delivery location in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, SA. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

CASE STUDY

Groote Eylandt Regional Partnership Agreement: Education a priority

28 |

The members of the Ngakwurra Langwa College Advisory Board have no illusions about the big task ahead of them. Schools in the Groote Eylandt archipelago, off the coast of the Northern Territory, have some of the lowest attendance rates in the country, but board member Elaine Mamarika says there is a determination to turn things around.

“We’re putting our heads together, the community and especially the advisory group. I think there is more hope now that we can make things change.”

There has been a lot of change on Groote Eylandt over the past four years, spearheaded by a Regional Partnership Agreement between the local Anindilyakwa Land Council, the Australian and Northern Territory governments, Groote Eylandt Mining Company (GEMCO) and the East Arnhem Shire Council.

Education is a key priority in the agreement, first signed in May 2008. Since then a comprehensive review of the region’s education system has led to the establishment of the Anindilyakwa Education and Training Board which is supported by the Ngakwurra Langwa College Advisory Board. Ngakwurra Langwa means ‘our way’ in the local Anindilyakwa language.

Today there is better coordination of resources, recruitment and professional development between Groote Eylandt’s four schools, now known collectively as Ngakwurra Langwa College. Each has a school council that engages parents in decision making and works towards the overarching aim of *Ngarrurakawuruma Akumamurikajeyiniyada* which means ‘Sharing as one family — helping each other to become one’.

Infrastructure is also being boosted with a commitment from GEMCO to build an early childhood training centre at Alyangula, a \$350,000 Australian Government commitment to a Children and Family Centre at Umbakumba under the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Development, plus the current construction of eight new teacher houses in the community.

There are new Indigenous traineeships, an early childhood language and literacy course, children’s playgroups and parenting support services.

“Parents need to be more involved and learning too,” says Elaine Mamarika, who is also an Indigenous Engagement Officer employed by the Australian Government.

“We talk and we take messages out to community. Parents need understanding of sending their kids to school. There are more kids going to school now, but we need the older ones to go back to school and we want to find a way to improve school and kids attending.”

Community development is a new focus for the schools and courses in construction, carpentry and industry-based literacy and numeracy are being offered after classroom hours. There are classes aimed at young mothers and reengaging older students.

It is these reforms in education and the hard work of Warnindilyakwa people to make a better future for their children in partnership with government, industry and the broader community that were acknowledged in late 2011 when the Ngakwurra Langwa College Advisory Board received a Northern Territory Government Smart Schools Award for ‘excellence in partnering’.

Elaine Mamarika thinks it is well deserved recognition: “We are all working hard. We are working better together.”



Ngakwurra Langwa College Advisory Board: (left to right) Lois Wurramarrba, Michelle McColm, Jackie Amagula, Louise Amagula, Mildred Mamarika, Lucina Jaragba, Mark Monaghan, Elaine Mamarika, Helen Mamarika, Ilona Wilson, Alexander Mamarika, Leonard Amagula. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands

The Australian Government has been working closely with the South Australian Government, the APY Executive, APY Lands Community Councils and regional service providers to help ensure that essential services to support families and create safe communities for children are delivered in a coordinated, effective and timely way. A draft Regional Partnership Agreement is being prepared between the parties to lay the basis for cooperative work to improve governance and service delivery. Development began in late 2011 and the agreement is expected to be signed in mid-2012, after further engagement and consultation.

This agreement will build on existing Australian and South Australian Government investments and commitments in the APY Lands, including new or upgraded police stations in three communities, new housing for police and child-protection workers, 71 new community houses and 99 housing refurbishments under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing (with additional construction to be completed by June 2012), and an agreement with the South Australian Government to develop three Family Wellbeing Centres with Commonwealth funding. Extra Centrelink and money-management services were deployed in 2011 to help families budget to meet their needs. Work is also proceeding with the South Australian Government to strengthen community stores, ensure they stock healthy affordable food and tackle unscrupulous credit practices.

Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory

In the Northern Territory the Australian Government is putting the views and needs of Indigenous people at the centre of its work.

Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory has always been a significant part of the Australian Government's Closing the Gap reforms. Indigenous citizens comprise more than 30 per cent of the Territory's population and a lot of people live in remote areas where the challenge of Closing the Gap is greatest.

The Northern Territory Emergency Response and the three-year Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement (2009-12) have been delivering substantial benefits for Indigenous people, including expanded services, more teachers and improved safety through extra police and night patrols. The Government is also making an unprecedented investment in housing for Aboriginal people in remote areas, as part of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing in the Northern Territory. The Alice Springs Transformation Plan is a comprehensive place-based initiative to upgrade the town camps, tackle homelessness and deal with social issues. Fifteen of the 29 remote locations prioritised for special work through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery are in the Northern Territory.





Angela Ninnal (right) and interpreters Mark Ninnal and May Melpi talk with government officer Richard Aspinall following the Stronger Futures community meeting held at Wadeye, NT, in July 2011. The assistance of Aboriginal interpreters was crucial to the success and effectiveness of the Stronger Futures consultations. Aboriginal people appreciated the opportunity to talk directly with government and the ability to do so in their own language. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory

As most Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation and funding ends in the middle of 2012, the Australian Government wanted to talk to Indigenous people before any decisions were made about how to go on building stronger people and communities. The discussion paper *Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory* was released on 22 June 2011, to help guide these discussions. Between late June and August 2011 more than 100 community or public meetings were held, as well as hundreds of smaller meetings with individuals, families or groups. Meetings were also held with key stakeholder and representative groups. Feedback from all these meetings was carefully recorded and analysed.

The meetings were part of a longer term conversation between the Australian Government and Indigenous Territorians. Over the past four years the Australian Government has worked to consult Aboriginal people about the way the Northern Territory Emergency Response operated, while maintaining the vital focus on the safety and wellbeing of children. The Australian Government recognises that the original implementation of the Emergency Response happened without consultation, and Indigenous Territorians were hurt and angered by this.

In 2008, the Australian Government commissioned an independent review of the Northern Territory Emergency Response and accepted the review's three overarching recommendations. These were, in summary, to continue the extra effort and investment because of the ongoing level of need in the Territory; to rebuild the relationship with Indigenous people; and to make the measures consistent with the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*. Extensive community consultations in 2009 led to major changes, including a non-discriminatory system of income management and the reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act.

In 2011 the Stronger Futures consultations were structured around eight areas where there are still critical needs. Three urgent priorities have emerged from the Australian Government's discussions with Indigenous people:

- school attendance – the Territory has the largest gap in educational achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and significantly lower rates of school attendance for Indigenous students
- jobs – more than one third of Indigenous people of working age are not in the labour force, compared to one in ten non-Indigenous Territorians¹⁰
- tackling alcohol abuse – in Northern Territory remote communities, alcohol contributes to almost 30 per cent of domestic violence incidents. Across the Northern Territory, consumption of alcohol is 1.5 times the national level and alcohol-related harm is four times the national level.

The consultations were an open discussion. People could speak on whatever subject they liked. The basic questions asked were simple: what works, what doesn't, what needs to be fixed. People embraced engagement and put their views strongly. Respondents expressed clear priorities, affirming the vital importance of education – and the responsibility of parents to send their children to school; the need for jobs in communities; and the need to limit the harm from alcohol. They wanted more effective services from all levels of government, and to work better with government – to talk and be listened to.

¹⁰ Indigenous employment rates for 15–64 years olds fall to one third when participation in Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) is not counted as employment.



32 | **Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory legislation**

The legislative package announced in November 2011 reflects the outcomes of the consultations and responds to the priorities identified clearly by local people. It is also designed to integrate the Australian Government's work with Northern Territory Government initiatives, including the *Every Child Every Day* education reforms and the *Enough Is Enough* alcohol reforms.

There was a great deal of discussion about education during the consultations. Aboriginal people were clear that they wanted children to attend school regularly. They also said that parents have a responsibility to make this happen. The proposed legislation would put in place a clear and consistent set of processes and consequences to encourage school attendance by expanding and improving the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure (SEAM), integrating it with the Northern Territory Government's *Every Child Every Day* strategy. SEAM is already in place in a number of areas of the Northern Territory and Queensland, but will be extended to all Remote Service Delivery communities in the Territory as well as other locations where school attendance is a problem. It will apply to all families, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in receipt of a schooling-requirement income-support payment living in these areas. Parents' income-support benefits may be suspended if their children are not enrolled in and attending school regularly, but only as a last resort. The new SEAM will help to ensure greater engagement between schools and families and link families with the support they need to help their children attend school every day. Parents and families whose

children regularly attend school will not be affected, but those not meeting their responsibilities will be offered support to do so.

People in the Northern Territory talked about the harm caused by alcohol including violence, accidents and deaths. There was a strong call for communities to keep their 'dry' status. The legislation continues the current wide alcohol restrictions in the Northern Territory and strengthens penalties for grog running. At the same time it seeks to move beyond restrictions by providing a legislative basis and minimum standards for community-generated Alcohol Management Plans, so communities can help to find local solutions to this problem in the longer term. The Government wants these plans to ensure that women and children are protected from harm. The legislation also enables liquor outlets linked to harm to be investigated, and provides for a review of all alcohol laws in the Northern Territory within three years of the commencement of the legislation. Northern Territory authorities will be able to refer people with serious alcohol and/or drug problems for income management (see pages 54-5).

Certain legislated Northern Territory Emergency Response measures relating to community safety are being retained, including the prohibition on sexually explicit and very violent material.

The licensing arrangements for community stores, in place to provide better quality food for remote residents, will be expanded and fine-tuned. All stores outside of major centres that are an important source of food for remote Aboriginal communities will be in the scope of licensing. The legislation sets out clearly the licensing procedures, conditions under which licences are granted, business registration requirements, and arrangements for stores to be assessed. In the Stronger Futures consultations people commented positively on the changes brought by the current licensing system, and were generally happy with their stores. Food security is further reported under the Health building block.

The legislation also repeals the provisions under which the Commonwealth compulsorily acquired five-year leases over 64 townships on Aboriginal land. The Australian Government is working with the Northern Territory Government to negotiate voluntary long-term leases and to set new building standards in remote areas to underpin its comprehensive program of housing and land-tenure reform in the Northern Territory (see the Healthy Homes building block).

Indigenous people and other interested parties are able to continue to talk to the Government about the proposed legislation. The legislation is being reviewed by a parliamentary committee which is accepting submissions from people and organisations.





Local researchers at Pirlangimpi community, NT. Local people were employed to survey community members as part of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation. Here the three researchers show their work to identify community problems and solutions. Photo: N-Carda/FaHCSIA.

Jobs package and other measures

A strong call during the consultations was for more employment in communities. When the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory legislative measures were introduced into the Parliament, the Government also announced a \$19.1 million jobs package to give Aboriginal people in remote communities in the Northern Territory more employment and economic opportunities. The jobs package will deliver 50 new Working on Country ranger positions, in addition to the 280 existing ranger positions in the Northern Territory. It also includes up to 100 traineeship positions with mentoring support to help get local people into local jobs. The

Australian Government will support the Northern Territory Government's job guarantee for remote Indigenous students from Territory Growth Towns who complete Year 12 and extend the Indigenous Communities in Business project to two new locations.

The Government will consider further action to assist Indigenous people in the Northern Territory and to put Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory on a long-term sustainable basis.

34 | **Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation**

The *Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation Report 2011*, released in November, builds on a series of evaluations of individual Northern Territory Emergency Response measures, as well as providing significant new data and analysis. Each of the eight chapters was prepared by an expert author including prominent research agencies such as the Australian Council for Education Research and the Australian Institute of Criminology. An independent advisory group commented on each of the draft chapters as they were being prepared.

The innovative Community Safety and Wellbeing Research Study was largely undertaken by local Aboriginal people who were trained in research techniques. The study provides information based on the lived experience of 1300 individuals from 16 communities. Almost three out of four people surveyed reported that they feel safer than they did three years ago. More than half of survey respondents reported that their lives were 'on the way up' for a variety of reasons: having a job, living in better housing, having more money.

There is also strong evidence that service provision at the community level – a key feature of the Emergency Response – has improved. Overall the evaluation highlights significant improvements in health and safety. However, school attendance has not improved, and while there have been some improvements in literacy and numeracy, the majority of children in Northern Territory Emergency Response communities do not meet National Minimum Standards.

The report adds a critical body of evidence to complement the many views expressed by Aboriginal people during the Stronger Futures consultations and throughout the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

Remote Service Delivery communities



Note: The locations marked with a triangle are the cross-government Regional Operations Centres serving groups of Remote Service Delivery communities.

Remote Service Delivery

The Remote Service Delivery National Partnership Agreement is testing a new model of working in 29 priority locations. The agreement involves cooperation between and across multiple government agencies and six jurisdictions, all sharing a common vision. Central to Remote Service Delivery is the coordination of Australian Government and State/Territory resources and effort.

The National Partnership Agreement is seeking a number of outcomes: stronger engagement; improved services; stronger and more capable communities; and rigorous oversight and evaluation to capture and use the lessons learned.

Local Implementation Plans have been developed in all 29 locations, with all but five of the plans formally signed off. These are living documents, to be reviewed annually. The collaborative planning process has enabled a positive forward-looking dialogue between communities and government. The plans include clear commitments to action on the part of governments and communities, making them an important accountability mechanism. They are harnessing the resources being provided through other National Partnership Agreements and other programs across government. A Remote Service Delivery Flexible Funding Pool is also available to fund projects identified in the plans, with 54 projects approved in 2010-11

Overall, the plans have 3103 action items, of which:

- 31 per cent relate to new capital works, services or programs
- 51 per cent are process deliverables e.g. developing a plan, testing the viability of a service
- 10 per cent relate to ongoing programs or services in the community
- 8 per cent relate to values, aspirations and behavioural change.

Government staff working on this strategy have received cultural-awareness training while governance and capacity building training has been rolled out in communities (further reported under the Governance and Leadership building block).

This National Partnership Agreement has an unprecedented commitment to accountability. The position of Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services was established by legislation in 2009. The Coordinator General's functions include monitoring, assessing and advising on implementation of the agreement. So far the Coordinator General has provided four statutory reports to government, the latest in September 2011. Beyond his reporting role, the Coordinator General is working behind the scenes to bring together stakeholders or assist agencies to clear blockages. The agreement also commits jurisdictions to an annual evaluation process and a final review.

CASE STUDY

Remote Service Delivery: Governance a priority for the Bardi Jawi people

The Bardi Jawi people are working hard on governance to promote better relations between local groups and ensure there is good planning and clear decision making to build a prosperous future.

Bardi Jawi is a Remote Service Delivery site 250 kilometres north of Broome in Western Australia, taking in three communities at the top end of the Dampier Peninsula: Ardyaloon, Djarindjin and Lombadina. The communities have negotiated a set of agreed actions in their Local Implementation Plan. Building capacity in governance and leadership is a major priority in the plan. The Bardi Jawi people are determined to exercise their rights and responsibilities as citizens and ensure their views are reflected in good consultation and governance processes.

Each community has its own council. In addition, the Bardi and Jawi Niimidiman Aboriginal Corporation has emerged as a significant decision-making body since native title was determined in favour of the Bardi Jawi claimant group in August 2010. This corporation is the registered holder of native title — or Prescribed Body Corporate.

Feedback from residents was that more clarity was required about the relationship between the corporation and the community councils — in particular which group makes decisions about which matters. They also wanted more collaboration, joint planning and clear communication.

The year-long Bardi Jawi governance project was set up in response to these needs, managed by the Kimberley Land Council.



To get the project started, council members and members of the Prescribed Body Corporate came together in late May 2011 in a successful two-day workshop facilitated by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

The workshop identified shared issues and the need for a cooperative approach. It became obvious that a series of workshops on the three major topics of land, governance and culture would be needed rather than one single meeting.

It was decided that elders' meetings should lay the foundation of discussions about land and governance. These were very well attended by senior men and women from the three communities and the Prescribed Body Corporate. There was an emphasis on language and culture and, in particular, transferring strong culture and language to the young people. The group wanted to ensure elders were involved in decision making and that they worked together with young people. They were concerned that the right people talk for the right country.

It was agreed that the basis for good governance everywhere in Bardi Jawi country is culture, so they set themselves the task of adapting cultural governance to deal with the 'outside world' of government and business.

Future workshops will be held on land use, corporate governance and land tenure, with the aim of reaching mutual agreement across the councils and Prescribed Body Corporate for smooth working relationships to the benefit of the Bardi Jawi.

Bardi Jawi governance project: the break-out women's group at the elders' meeting. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Interpreters

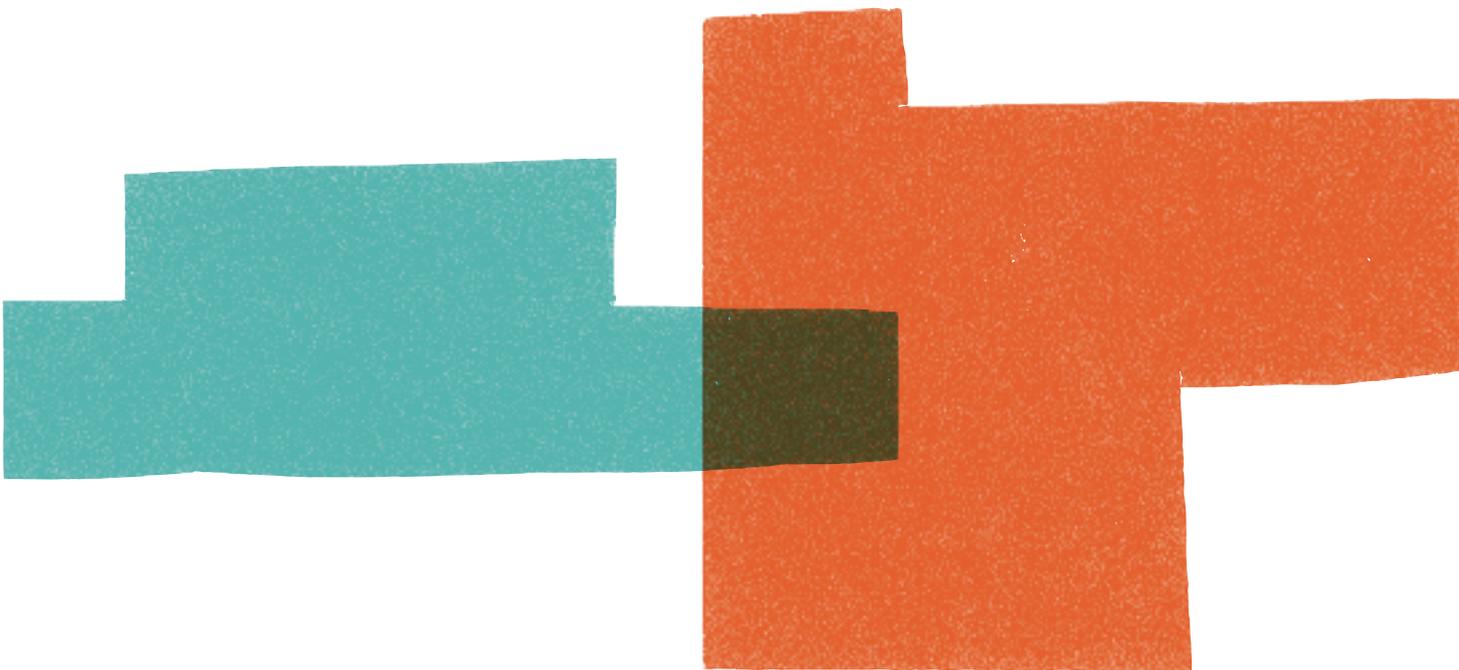
The Australian Government is encouraging the use of interpreters in delivering services to Indigenous people, in particular those living in remote areas whose first language is not English. Since 2007 the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service has received extra funds to expand its services, to recruit and train interpreters and to employ community liaison officers to promote interpreting as a career path for local Indigenous people. The accessibility and quality of this service has increased markedly and requests for interpreters have almost doubled – from 3947 in 2007-08 to 7080 in 2010-11. Interpreters were used widely in the Stronger Futures consultations, as well as for community meetings on Indigenous constitutional recognition.

Urban and Regional Strategy

Through the National Urban and Regional Service Delivery Strategy for Indigenous Australians governments are addressing the disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous Australians living in urban and regional areas. The Commonwealth is working in partnership with State and Territory Governments to prioritise investment in services and programs and, where appropriate, in specific locations that will have the greatest impact on Closing the Gap. Actions under the strategy include working with local organisations to identify the best location for implementation of new initiatives and applying research to improve service delivery so organisations can achieve good results for individuals. It is underpinned by the contributions of Indigenous-specific and mainstream National Partnership Agreements in areas such as health, housing, early childhood, education and economic participation. Progress under the strategy is reported annually to COAG.

Community Support Service

Across urban and regional Australia a network of providers is working to facilitate Indigenous people's access to government-funded services. Indigenous people and their families are linked to a range of mainstream and Indigenous-specific services in areas such as welfare and social support, employment, family violence, health (including drug and alcohol services), legal aid, child care and housing. Individual services in a particular area are encouraged to develop relationships to promote access and pathways for Indigenous people. The Community Support Service currently operates through 63 non-government organisations in 87 locations.



Another Indigenous Marathon Project participant, Victorian runner Caine Schofield, at the Perth City to Surf half-marathon, August 2011. Photo: Indigenous Marathon Project. To find out more, go to www.themarathonproject.com.au



CASE STUDY

Community Support Service: Daniel's experience

Nineteen-year-old Daniel [name changed for privacy reasons] came to Kaata-Koorliny Employment and Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation (KEEDAC), the Community Support Service provider in Northam, Western Australia, asking for advice on his career and life options, as he was feeling unsupported and lacking in direction.

The Community Support Service coordinator assessed Daniel's needs and strengths and talked about his personal goals. Daniel said he had a passion for sport and loved to run and play football. He was excited about the idea of a job in sport and recreation, particularly working with young people as a leader and mentor.

The coordinator discussed the Indigenous Marathon Project with Daniel. Led by Robert De Castella with support from the Australian Government, this is a 12-month program designed to produce an Indigenous distance running champion, to have an Indigenous Australian on the 2016 Olympic marathon running team and to make running, walking and physical activity a natural and regular part of Indigenous life. A group of young Indigenous men and women from all States and Territories are selected annually to train, compete at all major Australian marathons and then fly to New York to participate in the 42-kilometre New York City Marathon. The project participants also complete leadership programs and a Certificate 3 in Community Recreation – Indigenous Healthy Living.

Daniel registered for the project with the help of the coordinator and was invited by Robert De Castella to the Western Australian try outs where he won a spot in the national squad of 12 men and eight women. Daniel attended the three training camps — one in Canberra at the Australian Institute of Sport, the second at the Gold Coast where he ran the 12.5 kilometre half marathon and the third in Perth where the squad ran the City to Surf half-marathon.

The service also referred him to the Indigenous Employment Program (see page 90) which put him in touch with one of the local shires to work in their recreation programs, while at the same time fulfilling his Marathon Project commitments.

Daniel has already been advised that he will be a candidate to try out for the 2016 Australian Olympic track or marathon teams. He pays tribute to the Community Support Service for putting him on a 'life altering' path.

Engagement at the national level

Representation: National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

Since 2008 the Australian Government has been supporting the formation of a new national representative body for Indigenous Australians. The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples held its first national forum in June 2011 and established its first fully elected board, under co-chairs Jody Broun and Les Malezer.

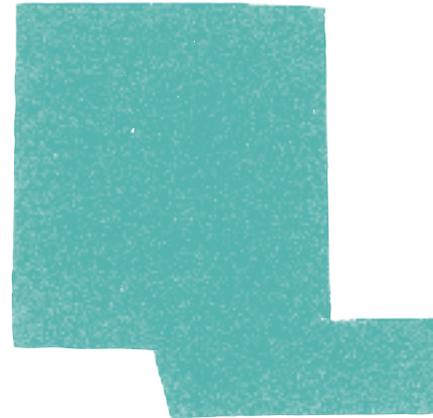
The National Congress is providing national leadership in advocating for the status and rights of Indigenous peoples. It is also a means to build new relationships with governments, industry and others for the cultural, economic and social advancement of Indigenous people.

Reconciliation

The Australian Government passed legislation to establish a Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation in 1990 and helped to establish Reconciliation Australia as a non-government organisation when the council ended its statutory term in 2000. The Government continues to contribute to Reconciliation Australia, providing \$10.8 million over three years from 1 July 2010 to advance its work across the Australian community.

A major initiative involves working with government agencies, non-government organisations and the private sector, including many high-profile companies, to formalise their contribution to Closing the Gap through Reconciliation Action Plans. In just over five years, the Reconciliation Action Plan community has grown to 280 organisations across the country. The plans are harnessing goodwill and turning it into actions that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Organisations with Reconciliation Action Plans have committed to employing more than 21,000 Indigenous people. At 30 September 2011 13,397 positions had been filled and nearly 1000 Indigenous apprenticeship and trainee positions had been provided. The organisations involved had provided more than \$9 million to support Indigenous scholarships; given more than \$2 million worth of *pro bono* services to Indigenous organisations and communities; and purchased goods and services worth \$26 million from Indigenous businesses certified by the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council (see page 93).

Over the last year Reconciliation Australia has also been working with the Reconciliation Action Plan community and young people to educate and engage Australians about the need for constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians. Many organisations have hosted events to facilitate discussion of constitutional recognition among their staff and the general community. Information kits developed by Reconciliation Australia have been disseminated to 85 corporate and not-for-profit organisations, as well as all Australian universities, 16 National Rugby League clubs, 17 Australian Football League clubs and all State Reconciliation Councils.



40 | **Identity, culture
and country**

Indigenous Australians are bearers of the oldest living culture in the world and major contributors to Australia's contemporary culture. Recognising the strength of Indigenous identity and its importance in building lasting change, the Australian Government is working to support Indigenous culture and arts, protect Indigenous heritage, and help Indigenous people to look after their land. In doing so, it is not only supporting Indigenous Australians but also protecting and developing important national assets.

Culture

This year the Australian Government will be launching a new National Cultural Policy. A discussion paper was released in August 2011, as a basis for consultation. The discussion paper outlined goals for the new policy including the need to 'protect and support Indigenous culture'.

Ongoing programs such as Indigenous Culture Support help to maintain and extend culture at the community level, encouraging participation and developing skills. New and imaginative forms of cultural expression are encouraged, together with cultural exchange among different communities and between Indigenous and other Australians.

Indigenous Languages Support is addressing the erosion and loss of many of Australia's estimated 250 Indigenous languages. Community projects support the maintenance, transmission and revival of languages under the National Indigenous Languages Policy, released in August 2009. In 2010-11, 79 activities were supported.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies is the leading research, collecting and publishing institution in the field of Australian Indigenous studies. The institute holds the world's most extensive collection of printed, audio and visual materials on Indigenous culture, history and societies. It works with Indigenous Australians to raise awareness of the richness and diversity of Indigenous achievement.

Culture and the arts are also important means to economic development for Indigenous people, and are further reported under the Economic Participation building block.



CASE STUDY

Art and culture: Saima Torres Strait Islander Corporation

Saima Torres Strait Islander Corporation is a cultural organisation located in Rockhampton, Queensland. The Australian Government provides funding through Indigenous Culture Support and Indigenous Languages Support for its work in maintaining, transmitting and raising awareness of Torres Strait Islander culture.

In Central Queensland Saima keeps island traditions alive by hosting the annual celebrations on Mabo Day (2 June, marking the High Court's decision on native title in 1992) and the Coming of the Light (1 July, marking the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in the Torres Strait in 1871).

The Coming of the Light reflects the now profound Christian faith of the islanders. As well as a church service, the 2011 activities in Rockhampton covered art workshops, including painting, weaving and jewellery making, a cultural workshop, the *ailan sepsegur* dance class and the *kapmauri zulai netat* traditional feast with entertainment.



Saima is active throughout the year in organising art and cultural workshops covering both traditional and contemporary Torres Strait Islander artforms. It facilitates workshops and language classes to revive Torres Strait languages and dialects, including Kala Lagua Ya, Meriam Mir, Kala Kawaw Ya and East and West Torres Strait Kriol (Ailan Tok). Languages are both an expression of culture and a vehicle through which culture is kept alive. The organisation's weekly three-hour radio program on local Indigenous Radio 4US 100.7FM features Torres Strait Islander music, languages, cultural ceremonies and history.

The cultural practices, knowledge systems and cultural expressions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are a source of strength, resilience and pride. Cultural identity is fundamental to Indigenous health and social and emotional wellbeing.

Saima sees their cultural programs as contributing strongly to Closing the Gap. It reports increased school attendance and less contact with the law among young people involved in its programs.



A ceremony is performed at the Coming of the Light celebrations held on 1 July to mark the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in the Torres Strait. Photos: Saima Torres Strait Islander Corporation/OFTA.



Annette Victor at Ardyaloon, WA.
Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

Indigenous media

The Australian Government supports an extensive network of Indigenous broadcasters, including licensed community radio stations, remote Indigenous broadcasting services, community television, Imparja Television and various support organisations. A National Indigenous Television Service (NITV) was launched in July 2007 to commission, produce and aggregate Indigenous television content.

In 2010-11 the Government conducted an independent review of its investment in this sector. An expert panel consulted widely and examined in particular whether resources were being used effectively for the benefit of Indigenous people and the impact on the sector of digital technologies and media convergence. The review report was released in April 2011, and made 39 recommendations. The main finding was that the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector is a powerful tool in helping to meet the Government's objectives for Closing the Gap. The review also recommended a change of portfolio for the sector – it has now transferred to Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy – and a significant restructure of NITV. The Government's longer term aim is to see more original Indigenous content on free-to-air television.

Other government strategies are working to ensure that people and communities have access to communications infrastructure and are digitally literate. New technologies have great potential in Indigenous environments. They can assist in preserving and transmitting culture, and allow Indigenous people to have conversations with the wider world.

Repatriation

The return of ancestral remains and secret-sacred objects held in museums and research institutions in Australia and overseas is a long-standing Indigenous aspiration. Bringing these items home promotes healing and Reconciliation for Indigenous people.

The Government is working collaboratively with a range of stakeholders to assist the delicate process of repatriation, under a new Indigenous Repatriation Policy released in August 2011. Partners include Indigenous communities, Australian Government agencies, Australian museums, State, Territory and local governments, collecting institutions and overseas governments and institutions. More than 1400 remains and more than 1400 sacred objects have been returned from Australian collections and more than 1200 remains returned from overseas collections since formal repatriation activities began around 1990.

Bringing Them Home

The Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families was tabled in Parliament in May 1996. The report brought to light a long and distressing chapter in our national history. The National Apology made by this Government in 2008 was the delayed fulfilment of one of the report's principal recommendations.

Since the National Apology, the Australian Government has increased support to Link Up organisations working to reconnect Indigenous people affected by past removal policies with their families, communities and culture. The number of people asking for help from these services has increased dramatically; more than 1200 new clients sought assistance and more than 250 reunions were achieved in 2010-11. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies provides training and assistance in family history tracing to Link Up workers.

The Bringing Them Home and Link Up measure announced in the 2011 Budget continues funding for social and emotional wellbeing services in Indigenous communities. A new Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program consolidates existing counselling, family tracing and reunion initiatives, supplemented by national coordination projects and workforce support.

The Government also provides a range of cultural retrieval and healing programs. A Stolen Generations Working Partnership is reaching out to members of the Stolen Generations and their supporters so that all parties can work together on the immediate and long-term needs of those suffering the trauma of past separation including its intergenerational effects.

In 2009 the Australian Government set up the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation as an Indigenous-controlled organisation to promote and support community-based healing initiatives. In 2010-11 the foundation funded 21 projects that directly benefited around 2700 Indigenous people.



CASE STUDY

Healing Foundation: Healing through reconnection to culture

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation was set up in February 2009, one year after the National Apology, with \$26.6 million over four years from the Australian Government. In November 2010 the Healing Foundation announced funding of \$2 million for 21 community-based projects.

This first round of projects included funding for the Wake Up Time group of women artists in Casino on the far north coast of New South Wales. The group started as a collaboration between local Indigenous women in Casino and The Buttery at Bangalow which runs a drug and alcohol outreach program that assists people to find their way out of addiction by discovering their self-worth, strength and place in society. The women are given a safe and supportive space to express their concerns through art and have been meeting weekly for more than eight years.

Early in 2011 the local Indigenous Arts Development Officer invited them to participate with two other local women's groups in an artisan textile project that became part of the successful 'Fabric of our Culture' exhibition at Boomalli Aboriginal Arts Gallery in Sydney in July 2011. The women enthusiastically took up the offer and immediately started preparing both individual and group pieces. The whole project involved five months of preparations.

The group work built a sense of cohesion. It improved communication, decision making and conflict-resolution skills. The women were drawn into the negotiations with Northern Rivers Arts and took part in the organisation of the joint exhibition.

They went out bush to collect the plant materials used in the woven and dyed art pieces, reconnecting with their country. The woven sculptural group pieces especially reflect their growing confidence and connection to their Bundjalung culture.

The Wake Up Time women were flown to Sydney to attend the opening of the exhibition by the Governor of New South Wales, Marie Bashir. Most of the individual works were sold and money from the sales will help to buy more materials.

They produced impressive works of art, but the process of collaboration and reconnection to country in the lead up to the exhibition and the sense of self-worth generated were equally if not more important.

A mini-documentary on the project was made through ABC Open.

For more information on the Healing Foundation, go to www.healingfoundation.org.au



The Wake Up Time women.
Photo: The Buttery.

Country

Land is central to Indigenous people's identity and culture.

Special Indigenous places are protected under heritage and environmental legislation and Indigenous environmental knowledge is highly valued. Indigenous people are part of advisory forums for critical areas such as the Great Barrier Reef and the Murray-Darling Basin. Across Australia there are 40 Indigenous Protected Areas, comprising more than 24 per cent of Australia's National Reserve System, where Indigenous owners are working with the Australian Government to protect biodiversity and cultural resources. Around 680 Indigenous rangers are employed in Caring for Country projects. These projects provide real jobs for Indigenous people on land that is rich in cultural meaning and help to protect some of Australia's most significant natural assets.

Indigenous people own an estimated 20 per cent of Australia's land under various forms of title. Commonwealth land rights legislation has returned almost one half of the Northern Territory to Aboriginal ownership under inalienable freehold title, as well as much smaller parcels of lands in the Jervis Bay Territory and western Victoria. A number of State Acts have also recognised traditional land rights and returned land to its traditional owners.

From 1992 the High Court's Mabo judgment recognised Indigenous interests in land at common law. The *Native Title Act 1993* sets up a regime to manage native title rights, including determining where it exists and providing a right to negotiate over future developments on land subject to native title. Native title holders and claimants are able to negotiate Indigenous Land Use Agreements



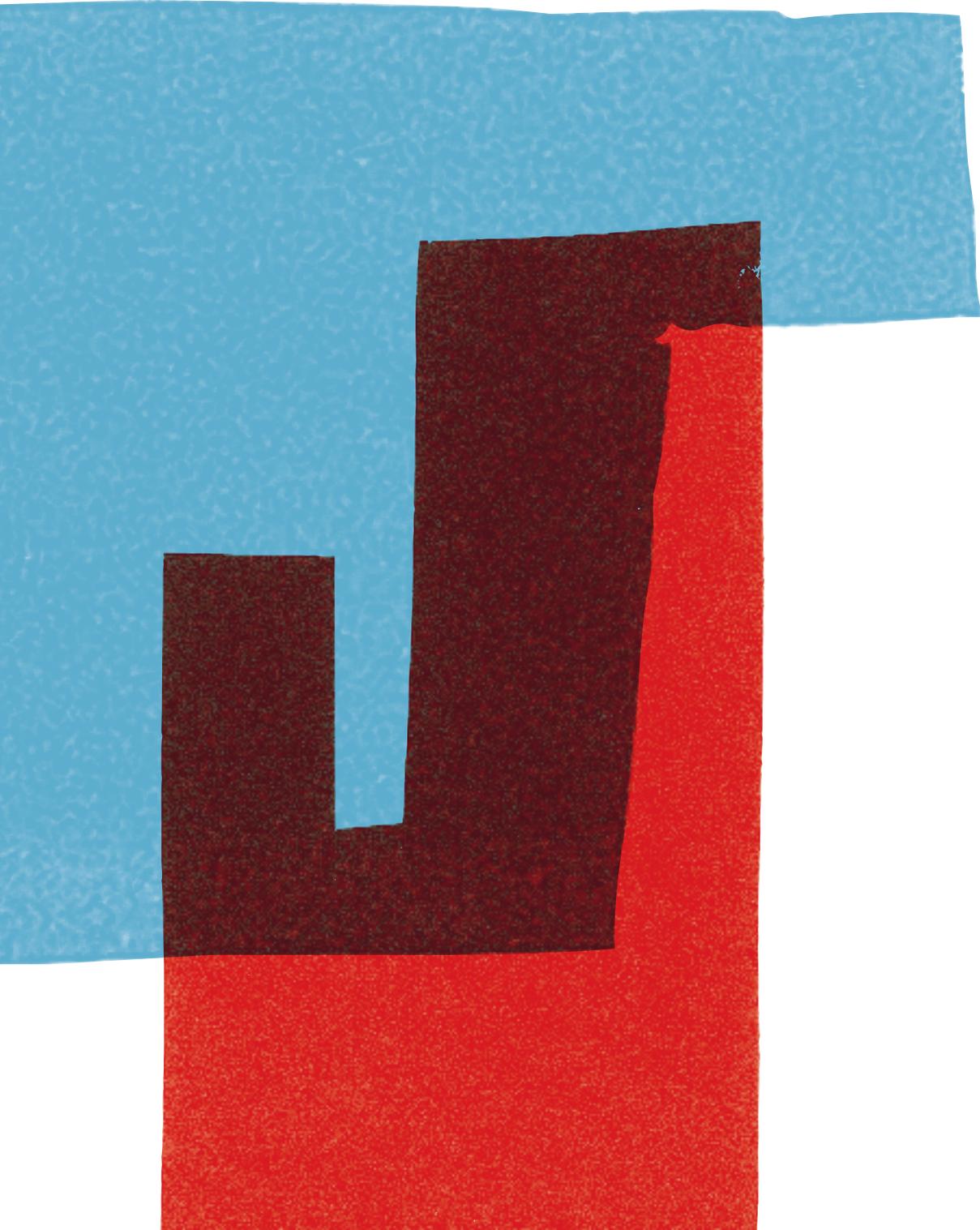
about the management of land and water which may bring substantial packages of benefits.

Native title plays an important part in Closing the Gap between Indigenous and other Australians.

Recognition of native title promotes Reconciliation and forges new relationships for Indigenous people with governments, industry and the wider community. Native title gives Indigenous groups a stake in many important resource and other developments.

Through the Indigenous Land Corporation, the Australian Government helps Indigenous people to acquire land and manage it as a base for economic development and cultural renewal.

Ranger Chris Green undertaking prescribed burning on the Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust, NT (see case study on page 100). Photo: Waanyi Garawa and Garawa Rangers/DSEWPac.



Chapter 4

The building blocks

Chantella Rice is undertaking a preschool-readiness program that is part of the expanded services provided by the Alice Springs Transformation Plan, NT (see pages 8–9). Photo: FaHCSIA.



The building blocks are the focus of targeted investment and initiatives under COAG's Closing the Gap strategy. The building blocks are interdependent. Progress in one often relies on progress across other building blocks.

Early childhood

The health of babies before and after birth follows them through life. Early exposure to learning through crèches and preschool puts children on the path to achievement at school. Nurturing families and communities teach positive values and behaviours. Good houses connected to essential services provide safe and healthy places for children to grow.

Mainstream initiatives, such as the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, our commitment to universal access to quality pre-school and improved standards through the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care, are playing a major

role in this building block. The new Family Support Program is assisting vulnerable and at-risk families across Australia.

Supplementing mainstream initiatives, the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development is setting up a network of 38 Children and Family Centres that will provide integrated early childhood and parenting services. It is also expanding child and maternal health services.

Other building blocks – such as Health, Healthy Homes and Safe Communities – intersect with this one as they also put in place the conditions necessary for a good start in life. This building block lays the foundation for successful schooling.

48 | **Progress against the plan**

Important elements of the Closing the Gap strategy are aimed directly at continuing the positive trends in reducing the child-mortality gap.

Maternal and child health

The National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development has two health-related elements that are expanding access to child and maternal health care within the primary health care system, providing health education and helping to engage Indigenous communities in providing better antenatal and postnatal care.

The New Directions Mothers and Babies Services Program is now ongoing. At January 2012, 80 services had been approved for funding to provide child and maternal health services. The funding is for additional services including better access to antenatal care; information and advice about baby care, child nutrition and parenting; monitoring of children's developmental milestones; checking immunisation status; and providing health checks for children before starting school.

The States and Territories are also developing and delivering a wide range of services, including health promotion and education

for teenagers in schools, more access to testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, expanded community midwife services and increased community capacity to care for pregnant women and young families, including developing 'grandmother' roles in antenatal and postnatal care.

The Strong Fathers, Strong Families initiative is helping to involve male family members in antenatal and early childhood services. This program is receiving \$6 million over three years from 2010-11.

CASE STUDY

Strong Fathers, Strong Families: *Taingiwilta Yarlitarna*

Adelaide organisation Nunkuwarrin Yunti of South Australia Inc. has developed an innovative education program to strengthen the role of Aboriginal men in nurturing and parenting.

The *Taingiwilta Yarlitarna* (Stronger Fathers) program, funded under the Australian Government's Strong Fathers, Strong Families initiative, recognises that responsibility for fathering in Aboriginal culture extends to grandfathers, uncles, partners and other male relatives who have contact with children and act as role models. The education sessions are built on the wisdom and knowledge of the local Aboriginal men who helped shape the program.

"A lot of those participating did not have stable role models as children, or suffer from the direct or intergenerational

effects of past institutionalisation," says Vicki Holmes, chief executive officer of Nunkuwarrin Yunti.

Each session has a child and fathering focus. Learning takes place through 'talking circles' to provide opportunities for sharing and support. Activities teach the men how to handle personal emotions around children and how to help children with their emotional, physical, social and cultural development. The importance of healthy relationships within the broader family unit is also emphasised.

Men participating in the program can also get one-on-one support and referral to other services to assist with issues such as grief and loss, alcohol and other drug problems, legal issues, homelessness and access to their children.

The program is also helping Aboriginal fathers to provide a positive environment during and after pregnancy. This means working with the Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Care program which assists the Women's and Children's Hospital in its efforts to ensure Aboriginal infants are born healthy and well cared for after birth. The State-funded Stronger Families Safer Children Program provides early intervention where there are concerns about children's welfare, to build family strengths and reduce the disproportionate rates at which Aboriginal children are taken into State care.

"The men say the *Taingiwilta Yarlitarna* program has exceeded their expectations. They have gained understanding and the confidence to be positive male role models within their families and communities," Vicki says.

CASE STUDY

West Belconnen Children and Family Centre

The first of 38 new Children and Family Centres around Australia opened in West Belconnen in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) in April 2011. The centres are being provided under the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development to meet the needs of families with young children and help set children on the path to lifelong success.

The West Belconnen Children and Family Centre was developed collaboratively by the Australian Government, the ACT Government and the local community. Prior to construction there were extensive consultations with local Indigenous people, including children who took part in discussions on the design of the building. Aboriginal organisations were consulted about service-delivery needs, staffing and likely uses for the centre. ACT elders and representative groups were also involved. The local community advised on artwork for the building as well as the establishment of an Aboriginal garden.

The centre now offers a range of services to families to support their child's health, learning and development. Trained professionals provide access to early learning activities, playgroups and parental courses, as well as maternal and child health and allied health services. The centre facilitates access to child-care services in the area. It also works closely with local primary schools to provide a range of outreach services to tackle early issues that may affect children's learning.



The centre is making a real difference to the lives of Indigenous children and their families, as evidenced by very positive community feedback.

"The support from the staff has helped my family enormously. We have been through very hard times," says one mother. "For me, the Strong Women's group has given me the help and strength to deal with things. I am very grateful and can't thank them enough."

Another father says that the centre has "brought some people together who otherwise would be a bit isolated".

Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, Peter Garrett, with a young family at the new Children and Family Centre in West Belconnen, ACT. Photo: DEEWR.

50 | The delivery of new and expanded services for maternal and child health has resulted in the employment of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and other health professionals.

The Indigenous Mothers Accommodation Fund provided \$10 million in capital funding over three years to 2010-11 for projects that will help Indigenous women from remote areas who have to travel for ante- and postnatal care. It has already provided a small extension and refurbishment of the Aboriginal Hostels Limited facility in Katherine in the Northern Territory, along with a new 24-bed facility for the Mookai Rosie Bi-Bayan maternity-care service in Cairns. This facility caters for women across the Gulf, Cape York and Torres Strait regions of Queensland. A new 16-bed facility being built at Darwin Hospital is due to open in early 2012 and will be operated by Aboriginal Hostels Limited. The facility will make more culturally appropriate and safe accommodation available for mothers from remote communities in the Northern Territory.

Wider improvements in the health system are also playing a part in achieving the child-mortality target. The National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes is tackling chronic disease and its causes, including smoking and other behavioural risk factors that impact on the health of mothers, babies and young children. Overall the Closing the Gap strategy is addressing the wider socioeconomic factors that underlie the child-mortality gap.

Access to preschool

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring that every Australian child has access to a quality early-childhood education program, delivered by properly qualified staff, in the year before formal schooling.

This commitment is being delivered through the \$970 million National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, funded over five financial years to June 2013. The agreement is being implemented in cooperation with the States and Territories, with a special focus on groups such as Indigenous children who may have special needs. The States and Territories have developed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy, and are on track to achieve the target of universal access to early-childhood education for Indigenous children in remote areas by 2013.

Better early-childhood services

Quality services are necessary at all stages of a child's early life. The 38 Children and Family Centres being set up under the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development will deliver integrated early childhood services including child care, early learning and support for parents and families. The centres will also link to other services for children and families at risk, providing support tailored to families.

So far 32 sites have been identified and agreed with communities. The centres in the Australian Capital Territory and Halls Creek, Western Australia, are open, and construction has begun at seven other sites. While there have been delays in site selection and construction, the States and Territories have indicated a commitment to provide interim services which are now operational in 13 locations. All the centres are on track to be in place by the end of the National Partnership in 2014. Around 40 staff have been employed across 19 of the locations



On 1 January this year, the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care was introduced to apply to most long day care, family day care, preschool (or kindergarten) and outside-school-hours care services. The framework aims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement and consistency in education and care services by providing a national legislative framework, a National Quality Standard and a national quality rating and assessment process. A new national body, the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority, will oversee the framework. Key requirements for service providers will be phased in over time.

Supplementing these universal initiatives, the Australian Government is working to strengthen around 140 government-funded child-care services, most of which have an Indigenous focus, to help them meet the National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care. Dedicated funding of \$59.4 million is available over four years from 2010-11 to upgrade buildings and facilities, improve governance and administration, and raise the qualifications of staff.

CASE STUDY

Child-care upgrades: Nola's Place, Hope Vale

An upgraded child-care centre in the remote Queensland community of Hope Vale is improving services as well as providing jobs for local people. It is the first child-care centre to complete major improvements under the Australian Government's initiative to help Indigenous centres to meet the new National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care.

Located on Cape York, Hope Vale is participating in the Cape York Welfare Reform trial as well as being a Remote Service Delivery location.

The local child-care centre, Nola's Place, was set up seven years ago by the community and the Queensland Government. It provides care and helps children to become school ready. It was named for Nola Michael who worked tirelessly to increase opportunities for children in Hope Vale.

In 2010 Nola's Place received \$628,000 for a substantial upgrade, managed by the Hope Vale Aboriginal Shire Council using local labour wherever possible.

The council and community are very proud of their achievement. Nola's Place is now a modern functional facility that provides 29 child-care places, a playgroup, additional family areas and more shade protection for children playing and learning outdoors.

The upgraded centre is a hub for other children's and family services. The PaCE (Parent and Community Engagement) coordinator is now operating from the centre and, in a partnership with the Queensland Police, parents can borrow baby capsules and booster seats to improve road safety for children.



Nola's Place: new outdoor play equipment and shade and the upgraded kitchen. Photos: DEEWR.



In the first year of funding, assessment and planning work was undertaken in consultation with the services as well as with families and communities to ensure the planned improvements reflect community need and are sustainable. Over the first two years priority is being given to services in the Northern Territory and Remote Service Delivery locations and to services that are the only provider in their locations. The state of existing infrastructure has been assessed in 63 out of the 66 priority services, and contracts and funding agreements are in place in 22 locations across the Northern Territory and Queensland. Training brokers are being engaged to work with the services, and the first training projects will begin this year.

Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory is extending early childhood education and care programs in remote communities, including in nine locations that had lacked services. Eight new crèches are now up and running in Milikapiti, Timber Creek, Peppimenarti, Robinson River, Areyonga, Docker River, Papunya and Yarralin. Construction of a ninth new crèche is due to start in Lajamanu this year subject to settlement of land-tenure arrangements. Thirteen existing crèches have been upgraded.

Eight playgroups, including three new groups in Remote Service Delivery locations, are serving Indigenous families in the Northern Territory. Four special projects are being funded to extend existing child and family-support services in the Northern Territory. They relate to child nutrition; alcohol and family health issues; behavioural problems among children at preschools; and information for teenagers about pregnancy, birth and parenting.

A playgroup in Alice Springs, NT. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Family Support Program

The Family Support Program funds non-government organisations that provide support services for families and children. In July 2011, the Australian Government introduced changes to the Family Support Program designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged families in the community and in particular Indigenous Australians.

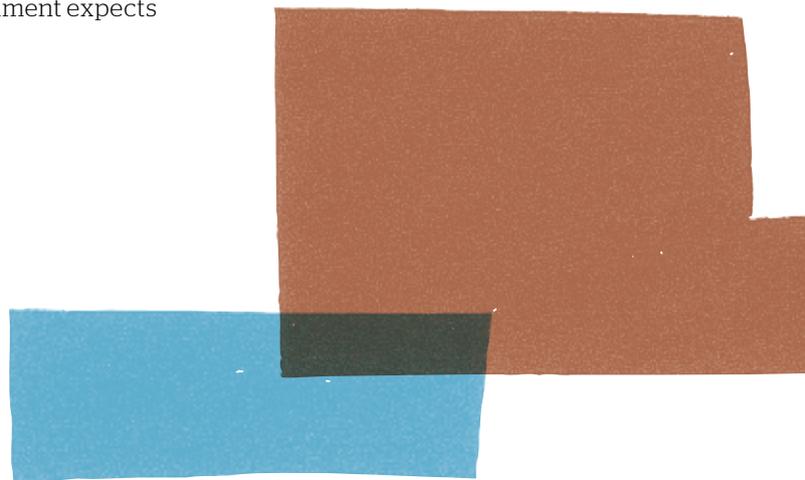
The new arrangements require that funded organisations are accountable for their contributions to Closing the Gap. They must demonstrate they have an understanding of the barriers faced by many Indigenous families in accessing non-Indigenous services and take practical steps to address these. All new service providers, with only a few exceptions, are now required under their funding agreement to document and implement these steps in their Indigenous Access Plans. They must also commit to a target for increasing their Indigenous client numbers and report on their progress at the end of each financial year. This means that, for the first time, all non-government organisations that provide family-support services, including family-law services, are accountable for ensuring their services are appropriate and accessible to Indigenous families in the communities where they work. Family Support Service providers have embraced this strengthened focus on Indigenous Australians.

The Family Support Program funds a wide range of Communities for Children services that aim to give children the best possible start in life. The 91 Communities for Children – Indigenous Parenting Support providers, operating in 280 outlets across Australia, are working to break down barriers to effective parenting, particularly among families with very young children. There are 52 Communities for Children Facilitating Partner Activities sites around Australia that are addressing the risk factors for child abuse and neglect before they escalate. In February 2011 a site opened in Alice Springs that is now playing an important role in the Alice Springs Transformation Plan.

In the Northern Territory the new Intensive Family Support Service was established in 2010-11 as part of a package of measures announced by the Australian Government in response to the report of the Board of Inquiry into the Child Protection System in the Northern Territory, *Growing Them Strong, Together*. The \$25 million new service provides intensive parenting support and education for clients referred by Northern Territory child-protection workers. It is being rolled out over four years in urban, regional and remote areas with the first five services already established at Darwin, Palmerston, Wadeye, Katherine and Mataranka. Through its partnership with the Parenting Research Centre, the Australian Government expects

this investment to help build a trained family-services workforce in the Northern Territory with job opportunities for local people. It will also contribute to an evidence base on what works best, so these practices can be applied as more sites are established.

The new Intensive Family Support Service builds on existing Northern Territory initiatives providing more children's services and making communities safer places for young children and their families (see the Safe Communities building block).



Family Support Program: A rewarding partnership

The Australian Government's Family Support Program funds Relationships Australia to help individuals, families and communities to achieve positive and respectful relationships.

Twelve years ago the New South Wales branch of Relationships Australia began forming links with Mudgin-gal Aboriginal Corporation, based in inner-city Sydney. The organisation provides services and a safe haven for women, girls and their young families. Mudgin-gal offers a range of dedicated programs in areas such as in-home family support, expert referral for accommodation, legal and medical support, court support and post-release services.

The relationship began with a conversation between workers and has grown into a solid partnership, particularly through the development of the award winning 'Healthy Family Circle' program, a life education and skills program for young girls and women.

"We realised we had a lot to offer each other in achieving our respective goals," says Anita Vosper, manager of the North Region of Relationships Australia NSW. "We now have a formal memorandum of understanding that is regularly reviewed."

There is a clear willingness to learn from each other and share experience and expertise. Together they develop ways to respond to the needs of the local Aboriginal community while ensuring that Mudgin-gal maintains ownership of its programs and its own way of working.

Relationships Australia is able to build its cultural competence and extend and improve its services for Aboriginal people through referrals from Mudgin-gal. Mudgin-gal has access to advice and mentoring from Relationships Australia staff and assistance with the reporting required by government-funded programs. The women who visit Mudgin-gal can access services that the organisation does not provide.

"There are benefits both ways," says Yatungka Gordon, group leader at Mudgin-gal.

According to Dixie Link-Gordon, office manager of Mudgin-gal, it has been a "long and rewarding partnership" that promises to continue.

Welfare reform

The Australian Government's agenda for welfare reform is contributing to the wellbeing of children. It helps to ensure that many of children's essential needs are met.

Income management – where a percentage of a person's income-support benefits is reserved for expenditure on life's essentials such as food, rent and clothing – is a non-discriminatory scheme currently operating in selected areas of Australia, including the Northern Territory. There will be further site-specific trials this year.

The 2009 redesign of the Northern Territory Emergency Response resulted in the transition from August 2010 of 17,755 people who had been subject to compulsory income management under the original Emergency Response. All had joined the new model of income management or left income management by the end of June 2011.

At 30 June 2011, 18,583 people, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, were being income managed across the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Cape York, Queensland. On Cape York, 152 people are being income managed across the four communities involved in the Cape York Welfare Reform Trial as a result of the operations of the Family Responsibilities Commission (see pages 26-7).

People are able to volunteer to participate in income management as a means to manage their money and better provide for their families. In Western Australia, 754 people had volunteered for income management at 30 June 2011, along with 4392 people in the Northern Territory. Those volunteering for income management receive an incentive payment for every 26 weeks



Young children's toothbrushes lined up at Amata, SA. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

they stay on voluntary income management. People on both voluntary and compulsory income management can also participate in a Matched Saving payment that rewards those who save from their discretionary funds. Eligible people can receive \$1 for every \$1 they save, up to a maximum of \$500.

Under the Child Protection Measure, child-protection workers can refer parents for compulsory income management when children are being neglected or at risk of neglect. This measure, trialed in metropolitan Perth and the Kimberley region in

Western Australia from 2008, was extended to the whole of the Northern Territory in 2010 in response to the *Growing Them Stronger, Together* report.

A number of consultations and evaluations support the value of income management. During the 2009 consultations in the Northern Territory people said that income management was delivering benefits for children, women, families and older people. *The Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation Report* found that people in communities were generally supportive of income management.

A 2010 evaluation of the income-management trials in Western Australia showed that income management generally had positive impacts. The majority of participants would recommend income management to others and most thought it had made their children's lives better. People were better able to buy essential items, and the ability to save on a regular basis persisted even when clients were no longer on income management.

Schooling

Schooling lays the foundation for longer term success in life. It imparts the skills not just for employment but for wider participation in society. The level of education achieved is an important determinant of health.

Working through COAG the Australian Government has made major investments in schooling across Australia so that our education system meets the highest international standards. The Government is committed to ensuring Indigenous Australians benefit from these reforms and have equitable access to a quality education, wherever they live, and all the opportunities that flow from it.

To help close the education gap, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-14, endorsed by all State and Territory Governments, is bringing together these mainstream reforms with a range of new and existing actions specific to Indigenous people.

At school in Ngukurr,
NT. Photo: FaHCSIA.



Progress against the plan

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan was launched by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs in June 2011. The plan was developed through extensive consultation and focuses on the areas that will have the greatest impact in closing the education gap. It brings together funding provided under the overarching National Education Agreement and a range of other National Partnership Agreements, as well as providing for supplementary initiatives in key areas.

The States and Territories have identified 900 Focus Schools under the Action Plan. Together these schools are responsible for around 40,000 Indigenous primary-school students and 10,000 secondary students. These are schools with high proportions of Indigenous students with the greatest need and where actions under the plan will make the greatest difference in achieving the Closing the Gap education targets. The strong accountability and reporting framework in the Action Plan will enable governments, Indigenous people, communities and schools to assess progress.

Supplementary initiatives under the Action Plan include:

- Teach Remote, which is supporting and rewarding teachers working in remote Indigenous schools across the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland
- More Indigenous Teachers, which is seeking to boost the number and retention of Indigenous teachers in Australian school systems
- the Improving Teaching Project, which is developing best-practice guidelines in teaching Indigenous students through the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership.

The Focus School Next Steps initiative is assisting selected schools to achieve the Closing the Gap education targets. More than 9000 Indigenous students will benefit in 101 Focus Schools that will put in place strategies known to improve attendance, classroom engagement and academic achievement. The Stronger Smarter Institute within the Queensland University of Technology has been contracted to facilitate this initiative nationally.

As part of its commitment to closing the education gap, the Australian Government has recently appointed 12 Indigenous people to the First Peoples Education Advisory Group. This group will provide expert advice on Closing the Gap in schooling. The group has cross-sectoral membership from academia and the preschool and school sectors, as well as community representation; it had its initial meeting on 5 December 2011.

Literacy and numeracy

The Australian Government has committed \$44.3 million over the three years to June 2012 under the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement for education providers to improve student literacy and numeracy outcomes and upskill local Indigenous Education Workers in targeted remote communities. This builds on the \$25.2 million investment for the implementation of quality teaching and enhancing literacy measures over two years under the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

The Australian Government's Closing the Gap – Expansion of Intensive Literacy and Numeracy Programs and Personalised Learning Plans initiative is receiving \$51.5 million over four years from 2008-09 to 2011-12, along with \$4.9 million to support teachers to prepare and maintain Personalised Learning Plans for Indigenous students. A total of 35 projects have been funded under the intensive literacy and numeracy initiative across Australia over 2009-12, engaging more than 20,000 Indigenous students in more than 670 schools and communities. At the national level these projects will identify innovation, evaluate the impact of strategies and support expansion of the evidence base on high-impact literacy and numeracy strategies and programs. The Focus Schools under the Education Action Plan are a particular target for this initiative.



CASE STUDY

Indigenous Coordination Centres: The Lachlan Shire speech pathology project

Indigenous Coordination Centres — or ICCs — are an important part of the Australian Government's network on the ground. In 2009 the Indigenous Coordination Centre at Wagga Wagga, NSW, became aware of a lack of speech pathology services for children in the Lachlan Shire towns of Condobolin, Lake Cargelligo and Murrin Bridge. Schools and preschools were concerned that significant numbers of Indigenous preschool and K-3 students in these communities were requiring assessment and therapy, adding to the potential education gap between Indigenous and other students.

The Indigenous Coordination Centre approached Charles Sturt University with a proposal for speech pathology students to visit the communities and perform block assessments as part of their practical degree course. As the collaborative project developed, alliances were formed with Charles Sturt, Latrobe and Deakin Universities and the Andrew Dean Fildes Foundation, a non-government organisation that is working to ensure all Australian children have the opportunity to overcome speech and learning disabilities.

The project began in 2009 with ten Charles Sturt University students undertaking two one-week placements supported by two fully qualified and experienced clinical supervisors. One hundred and twenty Condobolin students were screened and assessed; 30 per cent of the children failed the hearing screening, and 33 per cent failed the speech assessment.

In 2010 the project was extended to provide two one-week and one four-week block focusing on screening and assessment together with follow-up treatment at four primary schools in the Lachlan Shire. Twenty-seven undergraduates, ten masters students and ten fully qualified and experienced clinical supervisors were utilised during these placements. Ninety-four lower primary-aged students underwent an intensive therapy program across the four schools, and an additional 75 children were screened at preschools in Condobolin, Lake Cargelligo and Murrin Bridge. The speech pathology students saw each child requiring therapy between three and five times a week in the two- and four-week therapy blocks. Treatment was offered during school hours and reports were sent to the schools and families. These reports provided data charts showing progress and provided suggestions for the school and family to use with each child.

A local school principal says the project "offered services that are traditionally difficult to access in rural areas".

"This has allowed us to support our children to our fullest ability and to have access to services, support and experienced professionals and build a great support base."

Over the course of the project, 195 preschool and primary-school-age students were screened and assessed; 18 school-age students were seen for a two-week intensive therapy program; and 76 school-age students received a four-week program of intensive therapy.

The project included training for teachers to assist children with communication problems. A regional community of learners has evolved to build capacity in supporting children's communication into the future.

Following the success of the initial project, Charles Sturt University is now applying the model to other specialties and communities. The Specialist Integrated Community Engagement model (SpICE) will be rolled out in the New South Wales mid-west towns of Griffith, Parkes and Forbes to meet gaps in service delivery in areas including speech pathology, occupational therapy, nutrition, oral health, nursing and early childhood teaching. Undergraduate placements are expected to commence from mid-2012.

Josie Alec was born in Roebourne, WA, and raised by a non-Indigenous foster family in Perth. She is back in the north-west of the State, teaching and being a role model for her people. After raising four children, Josie went back to study and graduated from Curtin University's Centre for Aboriginal Studies after starting out as an Aboriginal Education Worker at the school she attended in Perth. Photo: FaHCSIA.



Mainstream measures: the Education Revolution

The three Smarter Schools National Partnership Agreements are also focusing on the special needs of disadvantaged students and in particular Indigenous students and investing \$2.5 billion in the wider education system.

The Improving Teacher Quality National Partnership is delivering system-wide reforms over five years from 2008-09 to 2012-13. A range of Indigenous-focused initiatives are under way in all States and Territories to improve Indigenous teacher retention and professional development: the More Indigenous Teachers initiative in the Northern Territory; the Remote Area Teacher Education Program in Queensland; the Aboriginal Leadership Program in Western Australia; and the Indigenous Education Workers Career Enhancement Program in Victoria.

More than one-quarter of Australian schools – 2656 – are being assisted under the National Partnership Agreements on Literacy and Numeracy and Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities. Each State and Territory has identified reform activities to support the educational needs and wellbeing of Indigenous students.

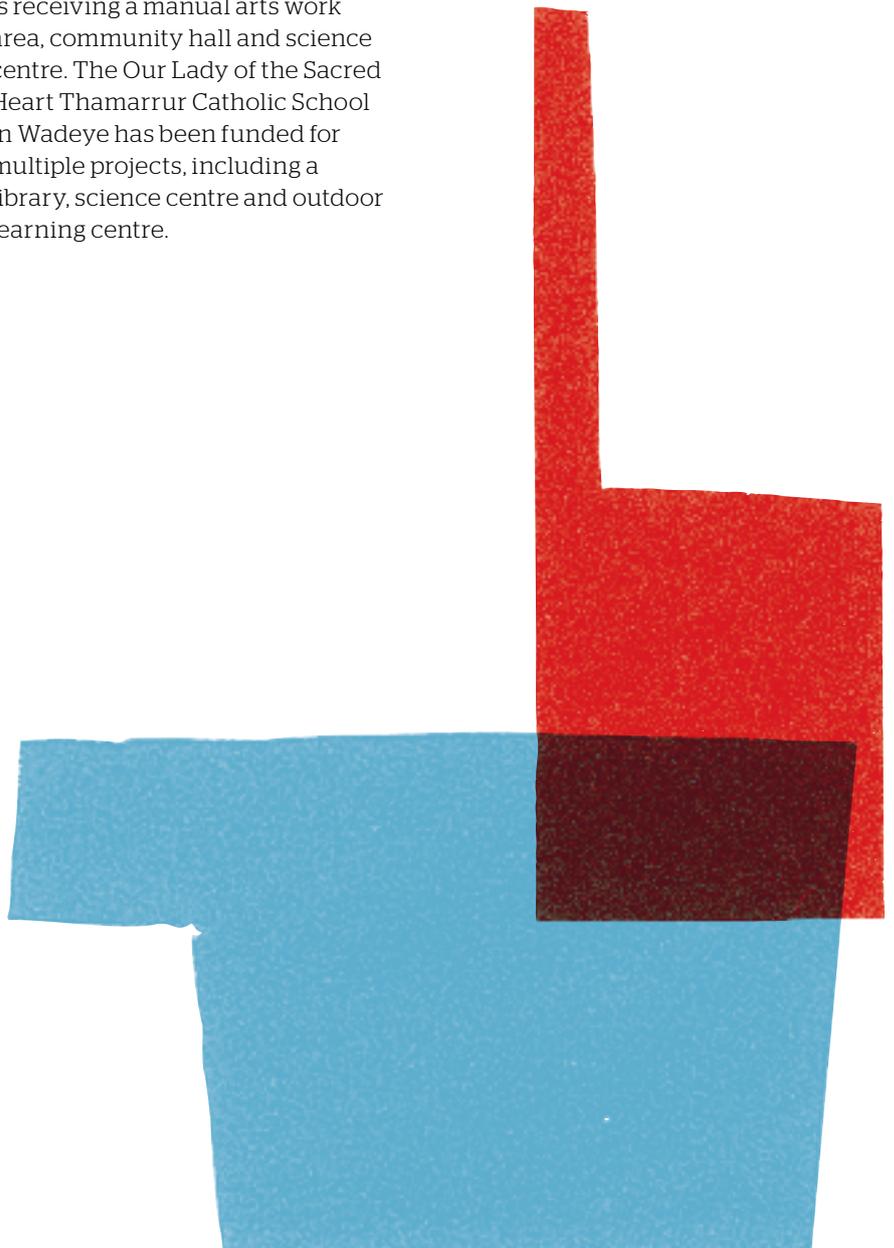
The latest progress reports from the States and Territories, released in January 2012, show that targets and milestones are being reached or good progress is being made, resulting in extra funding of more than \$260 million from the Australian Government.

60 | Achievements reported include improved attendance (from 52 per cent in 2008 to 82 per cent in 2011) at St Therese's Community College in Wilcannia, New South Wales. The school has introduced a wellbeing scheme for its students, including access to child and mental-health specialists and development of a Paakantji language and cultural program. Balga Senior High School in the northern suburbs of Perth has improved attendance among Aboriginal students by 15 per cent. At Nhulunbuy Primary School in the Northern Territory ten literacy tutors and a numeracy program have been introduced, resulting in significant improvements in NAPLAN results. Richardson Primary School in the ACT has used its funding to appoint a speech therapist for early intervention for 27 students enrolled in the Koori preschool.

Trade Training Centres in Schools is a ten-year program to 2017 to enable secondary students to access vocational education. It is a key part of the Australian Government's Education Revolution. A priority is to support secondary-school communities with Indigenous students, and students from remote, regional and other disadvantaged communities. Trade training centres are being located in all schools supporting the 29 Remote Service Delivery locations. Five of these facilities began operations in 2011.

The Building the Education Revolution program has approved funding of \$98.5 million for school projects in the 29 Remote Service Delivery locations. Of the Northern Territory's allocation, \$7 million is quarantined for new classrooms in communities. This program is funding around 24,000 projects nationwide in almost 9500 schools, supporting jobs and local economies while building educational and productive capacity for the future.

In the Northern Territory the Community Education Centre in Yirrkala has been funded for building refurbishments, a sporting facility and construction of a new early learning centre. In Galiwin'ku, Shepherdson College is receiving a manual arts work area, community hall and science centre. The Our Lady of the Sacred Heart Thamarrur Catholic School in Wadeye has been funded for multiple projects, including a library, science centre and outdoor learning centre.



CASE STUDY

School attendance: St Michael's Catholic Primary School, Palm Island

St Michael's Catholic Primary School in the Queensland community of Palm Island has been able to achieve impressive gains in school attendance, with some assistance from two mainstream National Partnership Agreements.

Innovative teaching and learning practices as well as parental and community engagement have seen attendance rates at the school climb from 62 per cent in 2008 to 74 per cent in 2010*.

St Michael's recognises that attendance is a complex issue. The school works with families and the local community to deal with issues that impact on school attendance and engagement. It regularly communicates with parents, families and community members about attendance. Community Liaison Officers undertake home visits and a morning bus run provides a vital connection to the school.

At St Michael's the standard Australian curriculum is supplemented by teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, and parents and families are valued partners in the educational development of their children. Two Community Liaison Officers and a Cultural Support Officer organise regular cultural days and events that celebrate student achievements. These are attended by the local community who are able to recognise and support educational success.

The liaison officers work with the school's leadership team to ensure that the school's directions align with the community's desire for a high-quality education that shapes the whole person. Teachers at the school receive annual training in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and Indigenous staff support cultural development throughout the year.

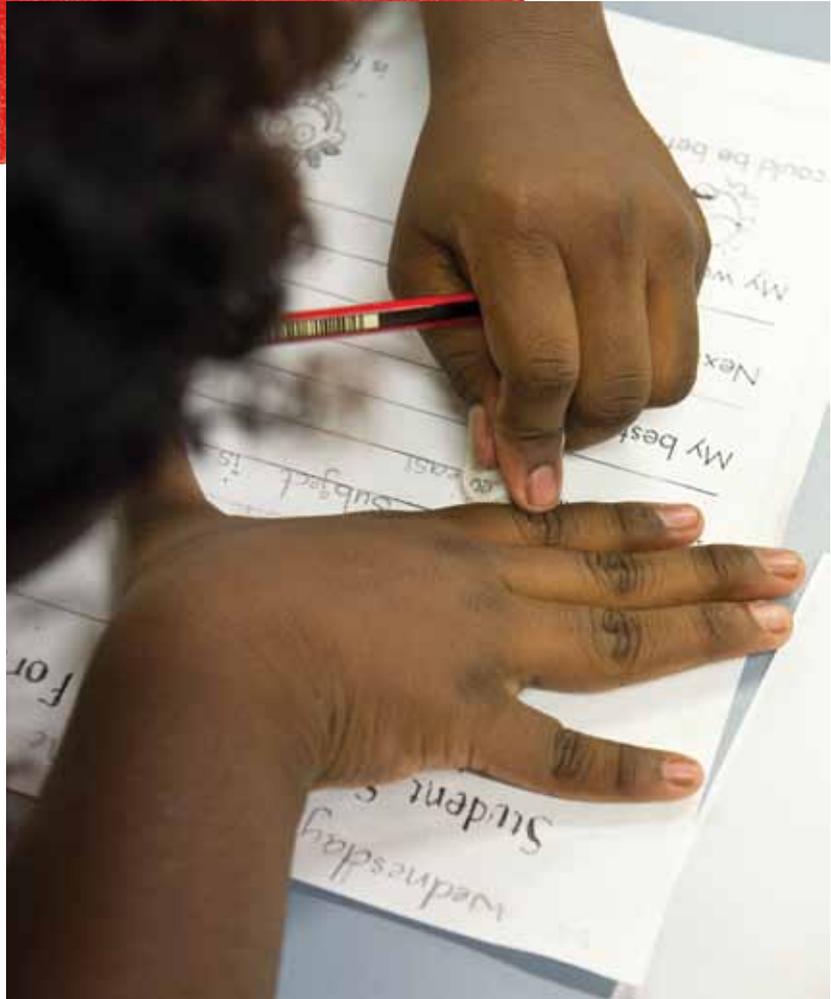
The school works with local health services to deal with the health-rated issues that affect attendance and achievement at many remote schools. Ear, eye and dental health programs help in the early identification problems that may affect students' ability to learn. All classrooms are fitted with a phonic ear sound amplification system. A specialist teacher for the hearing impaired and speech pathologists visit regularly to support staff at the school.

St Michael's has received \$561,780 over two years under the Literacy and Numeracy National Partnership and is also participating in the Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities National Partnership.

**Children's attendance at St Michael's Catholic Primary School, Palm Island fluctuates due to the effects of a transient group moving to and from the mainland. The attendance rate spiked at 79 per cent in 2009 and then reduced to 74 per cent in 2010.*



The school bus and activities at St Michael's School, Palm Island. Photos: DEEWR.



At school in Angurugu,
Groote Eylandt, NT. Photo:
Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

Northern Territory schools

Education is a priority for the Australian Government in the Northern Territory, as the Territory has the lowest rates of Indigenous school attendance and achievement. Encouraging school attendance was a key topic for discussion in the Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory consultations (see page 30).

Since 2007 capital and other investments have been made to expand the capacity of remote schools in the Northern Territory, under the Northern Territory Emergency Response and Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory. Over four years to 2012-13, \$107.8 million has been provided to recruit, train and deploy up

to 200 extra teachers. At the beginning of the 2011 school year, a total of 191.9 full-time equivalent teachers were in place, and the measure will meet its target by 2012. The Australian Government is also funding construction of at least 51 teacher houses to help accommodate and retain these teachers. So far 47 houses are on site and operational.

Other initiatives in the Northern Territory, reported under 'Literacy and numeracy' above, are supporting quality teaching, including developing career pathways for Indigenous staff and increasing the number of Indigenous staff with education qualifications. Teachers and students in 92 schools across the

Territory are being supported to achieve improved results in literacy and numeracy through new intensive approaches.

The School Nutrition Program provides meals to around 4770 children daily and has created 160 jobs for local people across the Northern Territory. Breakfast and/or lunch are provided to promote good nutrition and improve children's attendance and engagement with school.

Engagement with school

The Australian Government is working to improve its engagement with Indigenous people to ensure that they are able to enjoy the full benefits of the Australian education system, recognising that cultural and historical impacts, including institutional racism, exclusion and poor personal experiences of education among many parents, continue to discourage some Indigenous children from engaging with school.

The Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) Program is a community-driven program for parents and caregivers of Indigenous young people. It supports initiatives that assist families and communities to 'reach in' to schools and other educational settings to engage in their children's education through participation in educational decision making, developing partnerships with education providers, and supporting and reinforcing their children's learning at home. Since the program started in 2009, 430 diverse projects across all States and Territories have been initiated, aimed at nearly 50,000 parents and carers and a further 25,400 community members.

The Sporting Chance Program supports institutions such as the Clontarf Foundation football academies, the Former Origin Greats Queensland academy and other sport-based initiatives. There are currently 64 projects across all mainland States and the Northern Territory, with approximately 11,500 Indigenous students participating. Average attendance rates for students involved in these academies are higher than for the total Indigenous student cohort. Participating schools report significant improvements in literacy and numeracy, as well as in self-esteem, attitudes and behaviour.

The Australian Government's *Learn Earn Legend!* initiative is encouraging and supporting young Indigenous Australians to stay at school, get a job and be a legend for themselves, their family and their community. *Learn Earn Legend!* is delivered by community leaders, sport stars and everyday 'local legends' whom young Indigenous Australians respect and admire as role models. *Learn Earn Legend!* supports events and programs throughout Australia, including the National Rugby League Indigenous All Stars matches, Former Origin Greats Employment and Careers Expos, the All Stars Indigenous Youth Summit 2011 and Dreamtime at the 'G and associated Australian Football League matches.



CASE STUDY

Parental and Community Engagement Program: Weung Bueng (mother/father) project

The Weung Bueng — or mother/father — project is designed to build the capacity, strength, confidence, knowledge and skills of Indigenous parents and carers to help their children succeed at school. An initiative of the Mununjali Housing Development Company in Beaudesert in southern Queensland, it is funded by the Australian Government's Parental and Community Engagement (PaCE) Program.

From June 2010 to the end of 2012 the project will deliver around 50 workshops to the Beaudesert community. To date, 80 parents and carers have completed workshops. The workshops have covered a range of subjects driven by parents' expressed needs and the learning stages of their children: early years (0–5 years); primary (5–12 years); and secondary years (12–19 years). Topics have included: preparing for school, how to read to children, understanding the school system, helping with homework, and communicating with schools.

A major aim of the Weung Bueng project is to build positive relationships between schools and the local Indigenous community. As the project has developed, workshops have moved progressively from community settings, with occasional school staff attendance, into schools.

Overall relationships between parents/ caregivers and local schools have improved significantly through this project. For example, a parent who attended a PaCE workshop gained the confidence to meet with key school support staff to discuss her son's behavioural issues and work out a plan for him. The student went from being suspended to recently receiving an award for positive behaviour.

Strategies to build parents' capacity over the longer term include implementation of a Parent and Carers School Partnership Agreement Framework; parents being equipped with certificate courses in educational support; and the creation of a committee of parents who provide feedback through the school to the education authorities.

Each successful PaCE project marks a positive change in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Each family benefiting can influence other families. The program is helping to bring about intergenerational change in Indigenous school engagement and achievement by assisting individuals and families

Expanding access for remote students

Tailored assistance is provided to Indigenous students living in remote and very remote areas to help ensure they can access the quality education needed to open up opportunities for the future.

The Australian Government funds the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation to provide scholarships to Indigenous secondary students for up to six years while they complete their studies. In 2011 the foundation reported that it had placed 311 students. The 16 partner schools are assisted to support their Indigenous students. The foundation also seeks corporate donations.

To assist remote students to complete Year 12, three new boarding facilities are being established in the Northern Territory. The Australian Government has provided \$28.9 million for the construction and operation of the facilities and the Indigenous Land Corporation has committed a further \$15 million in capital, bringing the total investment to \$43.9 million.

In many remote communities in the Northern Territory, students do not have access to a secondary school or are unable to continue beyond Year 10 without leaving their families and communities to live in a major regional area or city. This places additional pressure on these students who, apart from having to deal with the challenges of the final two years of school, have to cope with being away from their families and friends. By providing the means to complete secondary schooling 'on country', the Australian Government is supporting students and their families who have neither the financial resources nor the social capital to move far from home.



The 'on country' facilities are being developed in partnership with the Indigenous communities and outstations they will service. The Wadeye facility is under construction. The second facility, to be built at Garrthalala in East Arnhem, has strong community engagement and support and planning for construction is well under way. A third facility in the Warlpiri Triangle in Central Australia is the subject of community consultations.

The Government is also building hostels for secondary-school students from remote areas so they can receive a quality education while living in a supportive environment. Indigenous Boarding Hostels Partnerships has funded a 45-bed expansion at the existing Wiltja facility in South Australia, and a 120-bed purpose-built facility at Weipa in Queensland. The latter opened for the 2012 school year.

Shepherdson College is a Community Education Centre located at Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island in north-east Arnhem Land, NT. It offers a comprehensive education program from pre-school to middle school and senior secondary (including the opportunity to do Vocational and Technical Education courses and distance education). There are also a number of homeland education centres attached to the school. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

FAST: Improving school engagement In Alice Springs

The Families and Schools Together (FAST) program is running for two years through the Gillen and Yipirinya Schools in Alice Springs. FAST is a collaborative family strengthening program funded as part of the Alice Springs Transformation Plan.

It is helping Indigenous parents from the Alice Springs town camps to engage with their children's education and overcome a legacy of alcohol and drug abuse, violence and delinquency. The eight-week course brings extended families together to talk about their problems and find ways to deal with them. Adults receive coaching support and also spend time in play-based learning with their children. There is an emphasis on engaging fathers.

The program also helps strengthen relationships between Indigenous families and schools – an important part of improving children's education.

Nine extended families participated in the first FAST program cycle at Gillen School, including 49 adults and children. At Yipirinya School, four extended families comprising 20 adults and children are enrolled in FAST. The eight-week cycle at Yipirinya School will conclude early in 2012. Fifty per cent of the Gillen School families and all of the Yipirinya families have been identified as facing challenges in raising their children.

Families have reported a range of improvements through their participation in the program. One mother felt she has learnt new skills, after previously feeling like giving up. Another, the parent of an autistic child with high needs, says: "I realised I had been failing my other children and made them a special focus as we participated together in the FAST program."

A number of blended families say that relationships between the parents have improved; the families are now working together as a team and stepfathers have been building stronger relationships with their partners' children. One separated couple spoke up in the regular parent 'chat' time about the way the program has helped them to co-parent more effectively. Their relationship has improved to the point where they want to accept the graduation certificate as a whole family.

David Glyde, principal of Gillen School, says: "FAST families are now engaging with school activities such as assemblies and school carnivals in a way that was not happening before. Families who would previously drop their children at the kerb are now confident to come right into the school buildings and catch up with teachers and other parents."

Lance Box, Yipirinya School curriculum coordinator, agrees: "FAST has brought parents to the school during school hours, where they never would have come in the past. Parents have talked very positively to other parents about the difference the FAST has made for them. I have noticed improved relationships between parents and their children as they have participated in FAST, and students have been attending school more regularly both during and following the program."

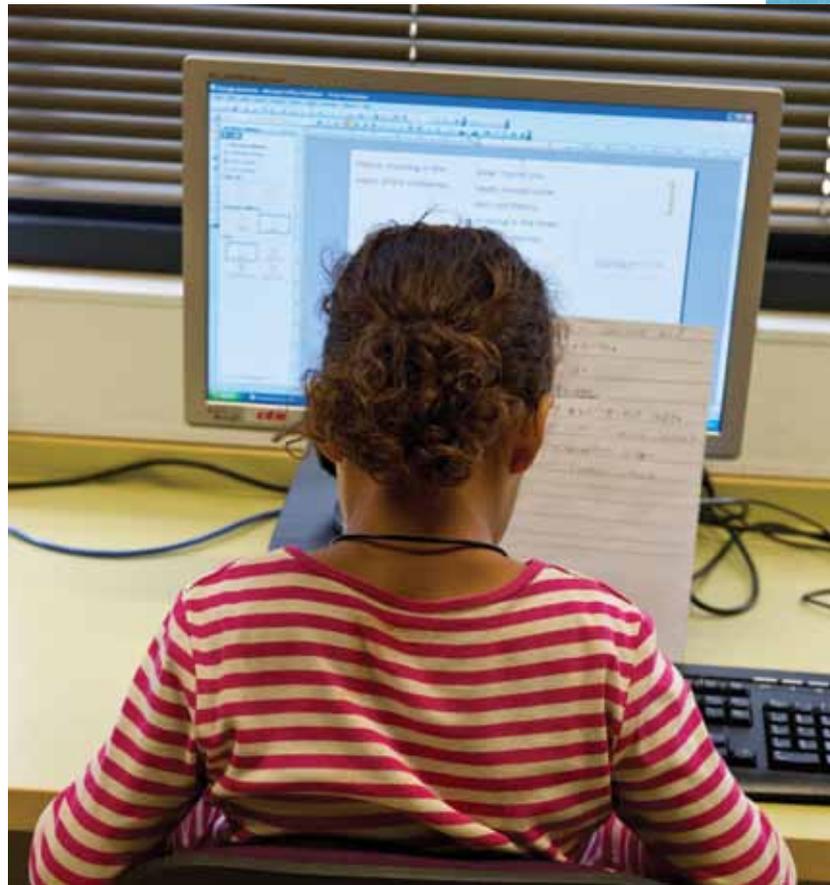


Indigenous Affairs Minister, Jenny Macklin, with Trent Scrutton at Yipirinya School, Alice Springs, NT. Photo: FaHCSIA.

School Enrolment and Attendance Measure

The School Enrolment and Attendance through Welfare Reform Measure (SEAM) aims to improve educational attainment by increasing school enrolment and attendance. SEAM has been applied in areas of Queensland and the Northern Territory where school attendance is low. SEAM suspends parents' welfare payments, as a last resort, if their children are not enrolled in and attending school regularly.

SEAM will be improved and expanded through the proposed Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory legislation (see page 32). The additional SEAM sites in the Northern Territory have been chosen because attendance is particularly poor in many of these sites and more work is needed to encourage and support parents to ensure their children attend school.



The 2010 evaluation of SEAM showed that the measure is having a positive effect on both enrolment and attendance. During 2010 the SEAM trial was successful in ensuring that all compulsory school-aged children in families in the scope of the measure were enrolled in school or had an eligible education alternative such as registered home schooling. There is evidence that receiving an enrolment notice or experiencing a suspension of payment contributes to parents' enrolling their children at school. From 2009 to 2010, students who were involved in the SEAM

trial improved their attendance rates more than other children attending the same schools. Importantly this improvement was mostly a result of a decrease in unauthorised absences – those directly targeted by SEAM. Social-worker contact provided by Centrelink was shown to be vital in helping to improve the absence rates of referred students, particularly for those with high absence rates.

Importantly, SEAM is helping parents to focus on the importance of their children attending school regularly.



Activities for young people encourage school engagement at the Gap Youth Centre, Alice Springs, NT.
Photo: FaHCSIA.

Linking education to jobs

The mainstream National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions has measures directly working towards the Closing the Gap target for Year 12 attainment and a successful transition to work for Indigenous young people. In 2010-11, 5750 Indigenous young people benefited from the Youth Connections element (18 per cent of the total caseload). During that period 35 per cent of Indigenous participants recorded a sustained improvement in their engagement with school, training or employment; a further 23 per cent were assessed as making significant progress.

Under the School Business Partnerships Brokers element, brokers are expected to work closely with their regions' Youth Connections providers to strengthen services for Indigenous young people, particularly in service regions with significant Indigenous populations. Of the 2000

partnerships nationally, one in six have an Indigenous focus. Three Youth Connections service providers are currently providing diversionary educational activities as part of the Government's Petrol Sniffing Strategy in the Central Desert region in the Northern Territory, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia and the East Kimberley in Western Australia. These projects are helping young people to re-engage with school and develop life and employability skills.

The 2011 Budget provided funding for a pilot program to give Indigenous students the skills and knowledge to become a ranger. Indigenous Ranger Cadetships will begin in the first group of six schools in the 2012 school year, with another six schools joining in 2013. The pilot will help Indigenous young people to finish school while acquiring skills that are culturally relevant and linked to employment opportunities available in the broader natural-resource-management sector.

Health

The health of a population is a key determinant of economic and educational success. Indigenous people generally have worse health outcomes and on average do not live as long as other Australians. Broader determinants of health such as environmental and socioeconomic factors impact on health outcomes and how people access health care. Investment and effort across all the building blocks are required to close the gap in Indigenous health outcomes.

The Government has been funding major improvements to the Indigenous health system, working in partnership with Indigenous people and the community-controlled health services that provide primary health care for many Indigenous Australians. Expanding the reach, capacity and workforce of this network continues to be a priority, together with improving access to mainstream services.

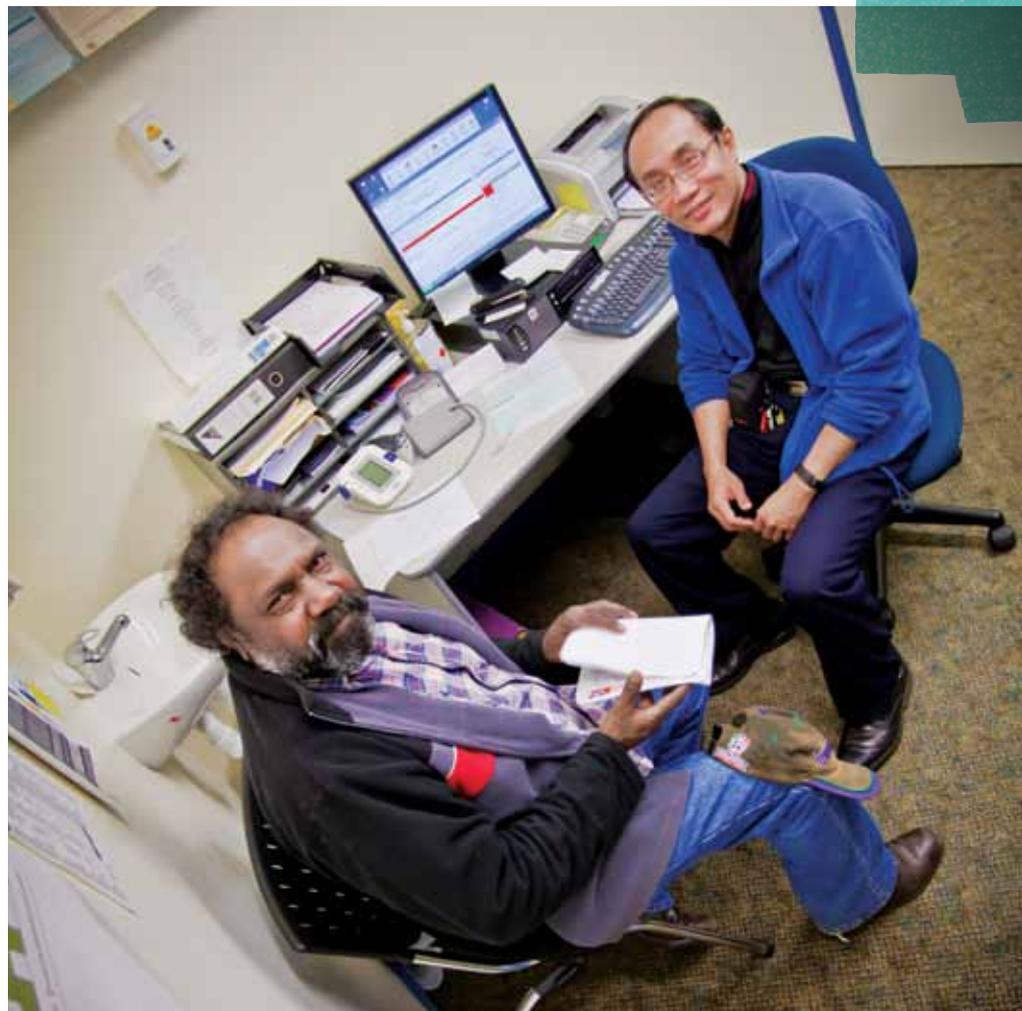
Given the urgency and extent of Indigenous health issues, the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes is providing unprecedented extra investment in cooperation with the States and Territories.

Progress against the plan

Indigenous Chronic Disease Package

The Australian Government has committed \$805.5 million over four years from 2009-10 under the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes. Its main focus is chronic disease, estimated to contribute around two-thirds of the gap in Indigenous health outcomes. The National Partnership Agreement is making measurable improvements in chronic-disease management and follow-up care in primary health care, tackling risk factors, and expanding the Indigenous health workforce.

A comprehensive approach to chronic-disease management is encouraging greater uptake of health checks to detect health conditions and providing systematic follow-up, including disease management plans. In 2010-11, 48,954 Indigenous health assessments were undertaken. This is an increase of 64 per cent over 2009-10, building on the 26 per cent increase in 2008-09. Training for health workers to deliver chronic disease self-management programs has been progressively rolled out from 1 July 2010. Chronically ill patients are getting more support through the General Practice system. More than 2400 practices are now signed up to the Practice Incentives Program and around



Barry Gilbert completing his health check with Dr Sann Lwin at Geraldton, WA. Photo: DoHA.



A community store at Lajamanu, NT. Good nutrition is essential for health and a focus of the Australian Government's health campaigns and food-security measures. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

32,000 Indigenous patients have been registered for chronic disease care. Indigenous patients living with, or at risk of, chronic disease are also able to access affordable medicines under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme co-payment assistance measure which began in July 2010. More than 98,000 patients are benefiting.

Importantly, the package is also targeting risk factors such as smoking, poor nutrition and lack of exercise, and delivering community education.

The package is making significant progress to change behavioural norms and address high smoking rates in Indigenous communities. Smoking is a major threat to the health of Indigenous people. Almost half of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over smoke, more than double the rate for the wider Australian population. The Government has engaged Dr Tom Calma to provide leadership for a national network of Regional Tackling Smoking and Healthy Lifestyle Teams. Teams of Regional Tobacco

Coordinators (40 positions), Tobacco Action Workers (41 positions) and Healthy Lifestyle Workers (81 positions) work with Indigenous communities to reduce the lifestyle-risk factors that contribute to preventable chronic disease. Regional teams have implemented a range of community-based health promotion and social marketing activities to reduce the number of people smoking and to improve nutrition and increase people's levels of physical activity.

Nationally more than 200 health workers and community educators have been trained in smoking cessation. Quitlines have been enhanced to meet Indigenous needs, including specific Indigenous positions and cultural-awareness training for staff.

These anti-smoking measures are building on the Indigenous Tobacco Control Initiative, funded for four years from 2008-09. This initiative has supported 18 different time-limited projects to research what works, develop and pilot a range of innovative

smoking prevention and cessation strategies for Indigenous people, and provide training to staff working in Indigenous health.

The Government also funded the 'Break the Chain' anti-smoking advertisements, the first national Indigenous anti-smoking campaign (television, radio, print advertising and posters).

The first phase of Local Community Campaign Grants was implemented in 2010-11, supported by national campaign activities branded 'Get Active, Eat Good Tucker, Live Longer!' Twenty-five 'Live Longer' Healthy Community Day events were held across Australia. These are locally driven community events that celebrate all that is healthy in a community and reinforce the 'Live Longer' campaign messages.

The capacity of the primary care workforce is being expanded in Indigenous and mainstream health services to increase the uptake of health services by Indigenous people. Additional workers have been funded and recruited, including Indigenous Outreach Workers, health professionals and practice managers. Extra nursing scholarships, registrar training posts and nurse clinical placements are also being provided.



A Healthy Community Day at Campbelltown, NSW, part of the Australian Government's 'Get Active, Eat Good Tucker, Live Longer!' campaign. Photo: DoHA.

CASE STUDY

**North Coast Aboriginal Health Forum:
Making connections for
better health**



In anticipation of the Closing the Gap reforms and specifically the National Partnership Agreement, the Alliance saw the need for more strategic engagement with its key health partners in the region. A collaborative forum has been established bringing together the ten Alliance members, the five Divisions of General Practice and two Local Health Districts. Together these 17 bodies serve an Indigenous population of more than 35,000 people.

The forum's basic aim is to improve health services and health outcomes for Aboriginal people through greater coordination. It also aims to build awareness of the National Partnership Agreement and its various elements to ensure they are implemented effectively in the region.

Since its establishment in February 2010 the forum has recorded some significant achievements, including the development of a formal partnership agreement between the Alliance and the North Coast Divisions of General Practice that provides a framework for joint planning and sharing of resources and information. This partnership agreement has facilitated a number of collaborative service arrangements across the region which have improved access to specialist and allied health services for Indigenous people.

The forum is also successfully promoting uptake of key aspects of the Indigenous Chronic Disease Package, including the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme co-payment and the Practice Incentives Program, which provides incentives for primary health providers to improve health care for Indigenous people including best-practice chronic-disease management.

The forum has also provided a pathway for the Alliance to become a foundation partner of North Coast Medicare Local, the new primary health care organisation stretching from Tweed Heads to south of Port Macquarie. Other partners are four Divisions of General Practice and North Coast GP Training. This partnership ensures Aboriginal involvement and input at all levels of the new organisation as it pursues its strategic objectives including improved mental health services, enhanced IT connections between health sites, expanded after-hours health services, and better connection to the community.

The National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes is working across Australia to support the health sector and ensure Indigenous people have access to better services and care, from both mainstream and community-controlled health services.

The prevention and management of chronic disease requires the forging of new linkages across the spectrum of health-service providers. Aboriginal health organisations based on the north coast of New South Wales have been taking this challenge very seriously.

The Many Rivers Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance is a partnership of ten Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations that since 2006 has grown from a regional consultative group into an incorporated consortium whose members share resources and programs and provide mutual support. The Alliance is also an active advocate on behalf of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities its members serve.

Liz Laurie with a patient at the Galambila Aboriginal Health Service in Coffs Harbour, NSW. Photo: DoHA.

Expanding primary health care

The primary health care system provides front-line services that assist Indigenous people to look after their health and reduce the burden on hospitals. Ongoing funding of more than \$400 million in 2011-12 will support services delivered by Indigenous health organisations.

The Establishing Quality Health Standards initiative is providing \$35 million over four years to 2014-15 to support eligible Indigenous health organisations to meet best practice through accreditation under mainstream health-care standards.

At 31 October 2011, 132 of the 199 eligible health organisations had received clinical and/or organisational accreditation from bodies such as the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and the International Organization for Standardization.

On-site pathology testing for the management of diabetes continues to be set up in many rural and remote community-controlled health services as part of the Government's Quality Assurance for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Service Pathology Program. This service model, including support for Aboriginal Health Workers, will be operational in around 160 health services by June 2012.

The Government provided \$1.3 billion in the 2011 Budget for strategic Health and Hospitals Fund projects across regional Australia. This will provide 15 new, expanded or renovated Indigenous health clinics and 24 new renal dialysis chairs for Indigenous communities.



Health checking at Angurugu Health Centre, Groote Eylandt, NT. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

The new store at Ngukurr, NT, is managed by Outback Stores.
Photo: Outback Stores.



Northern Territory health services

From 2009-10 the Expanding Primary Health Care Delivery Program in the Northern Territory is providing additional health and care services in remote locations, as well as support and coordination from regionally based primary health and specialist services. There are 14 Health Service Delivery Areas across the Northern Territory engaged in continuous quality improvement linked to key performance indicators for Aboriginal health. The first of the new regional Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Boards was established in May 2011 in the west Arnhem Land region.

The Remote Area Health Corps is contracted to place no fewer than 375 health professionals from across Australia in short-term placements in the Northern Territory in 2011-12; at 30 November 2011, 292 health professionals had been placed. In 2010-11, 465 placements were made: 62 general practitioners, 215 registered nurses, 44 allied health professionals and 144 dental staff.

Follow-up care has been provided arising from the child health checks undertaken in the first stage of the Northern Territory Emergency Response: 2567 children received a dental follow-

up service in 2010-11 and 972 children received an ear, nose and throat follow up¹¹.

The Mobile Outreach Service *Plus* provides counselling and support for any forms of trauma related to child abuse and sexual assault for Aboriginal children, their families and communities in the remote Northern Territory. In 2010-11, 395 visits were made to 83 remote communities to deliver 879 case-related services and 1570 non-case-related services such as community education and external professional development.

The renal access project continues to establish satellite renal dialysis facilities in remote Territory communities. Renal-ready rooms in Barunga and Alpuurrulam (Lake Nash) are operational. The Mobile Dialysis Bus, launched in March 2011, continues to visit communities in the Central Australian region, with 15 trips already planned for 2012, including six communities in northern South Australia. The bus has also provided education and information sessions at the Alice Springs and Tennant Creek shows and the Barunga Festival in June and July 2011. Renal drop-in centres in Darwin and Alice Springs are up and running.

Food security

A secure and healthy food supply has long been a major problem for people living in remote Indigenous communities. Lack of competition and retail management expertise has often meant there was little to buy in these stores; goods and food were often very poor quality; and basic consumer protection lacking. Increased costs from remoteness and disruption to supply caused by weather have added to these problems.

An Australian Government licensing scheme for community stores in the Northern Territory has required store managers to offer a range of healthy food and drink and make it attractive to customers and has provided support to improve management practices. At December 2011, 90 Territory stores were licensed. An independent evaluation found that licensing has resulted in marked improvements not just in food quality but in management practices, hygiene and the employment of Indigenous staff. It has meant the end of 'book up', freeing many people from a cycle of debt. Additional funding for stores infrastructure, such as point of sale systems, take-away upgrades, shelving or new generators, is also available through the licensing scheme. Selected staff and board members of community-owned

¹¹ Figures differ to those published in the 2010-11 Department of Health and Ageing Annual Report due to data updates.

stores are receiving retail-management and governance training. The proposed Stronger Futures legislation will expand and improve the licensing scheme operating across the Northern Territory (see page 32).

The Commonwealth company Outback Stores is available to assist in the management of remote stores. In 2011 Outback Stores was providing management services to 21 stores in the Northern Territory and expanding to remote areas outside the Territory. At December 2011 it was managing two key remote stores in South Australia and three in Western Australia, and is in an advanced stage of progressing agreements with three further communities.

The Government has also supported collaboration and knowledge sharing between Indigenous store organisations and, during 2011, provided funding to the Arnhem Land Progress Association to work with the Mai Wiru Regional Stores Aboriginal Corporation in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in northern South Australia to develop a new business model. In 2011 the Australian Government provided special support to the South Australian Government and the APY Executive to improve nutrition, food security and store governance in the Lands.

In February 2011, as part of the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities, COAG agreed a National Healthy Eating Action Plan under which governments have committed to improving demand for, and access to, healthy food.

Eye and ear health

In February 2009, the Australian Government announced \$58.3 million over four years to expand eye and ear health services for Indigenous Australians to reduce avoidable vision and hearing loss and help meet the Closing the Gap targets for education and employment.

There has been a substantial expansion of trachoma-control activities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia, the three jurisdictions where this disease is endemic. Indigenous children aged five to nine in 130 communities across 16 rural and remote regions have been screened and if necessary treated. Analysis of data shows a decline in trachoma in Western Australia.

A total of 142 procedures were completed during three eye-surgery intensives in Alice Springs in the period 2009-11.

Bob Harvery and
Rebecca Russell at
Brungle Aboriginal
Health Service, NSW.
Photo: DoHA.



76 | Over the first two years of the ear and eye health initiative more than 750 pieces of ear health testing and treatment equipment were distributed to community-controlled health services nationally, and 160 Aboriginal Health Workers were trained in the use of ear equipment.

A social marketing strategy was launched on 1 July 2011 to improve the awareness of ear disease among Indigenous people. The Care for Kids' Ears campaign strategy includes partnerships with Indigenous media organisations, and the development of targeted resource kits and grassroots communication activities through community-based events nationally.

Acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease

A special initiative is reducing the incidence and impact of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease in Indigenous communities by improving detection, diagnosis and treatment. A national coordination unit at the Menzies School of Health Research is working with the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland to standardise data collections, set up a register of patients and implement training and education programs. In Australia this is a major cause of heart problems for remote Indigenous people.

Substance misuse

The continuation and expansion of Australian Government-funded rehabilitation and treatment services has increased access to substance-misuse services for Indigenous people in all States and Territories. These services include residential rehabilitation, non-resident transitional aftercare and wellbeing centres. More than 30

services have been strengthened. In the Northern Territory aftercare services are provided in Darwin and all regional towns. In Queensland, four wellbeing centres are operational servicing Remote Service Delivery communities in the Cape and Gulf regions.

The Government's Petrol Sniffing Strategy is seeking to reduce the harm from petrol sniffing across wide areas of remote Australia in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia. Low aromatic Opal fuel has been rolled out in 120 sites in regional and remote Australia. In 2011 the fuel was made available in Kakadu National Park in the Northern Territory and the Goldfields region of Western Australia. Other aspects of the strategy are reducing the trafficking of petrol, illicit substances and alcohol, and expanding youth services, activities and infrastructure, including diversionary programs to provide pathways back to school, training and employment.

Tackling alcohol-related harm in the Northern Territory, including the harm caused to individuals by excessive drinking, was a priority topic in the Stronger Futures consultations. The proposed Stronger Futures legislation (see page 32) has several measures that will help governments, people and communities to combat alcohol abuse. Other initiatives relating to alcohol management are reported under the Safe Communities building block.

Mental health

The Australian Government has made mental health a priority and outlined a vision for mental health reform; investment will total \$2.2 billion over the next five years, including \$1.5 billion in new measures. The reforms aim to

improve the lives of thousands of Australians including Indigenous Australians affected by mental illness.

Indigenous Australians will benefit from the Government's investments in mental health, particularly those targeting prevention and early intervention (especially for children and young people) and better outcomes for people with severe and debilitating mental illness. The 2011 Budget made a significant investment in National Mental Health Reform. Out of \$205.9 million in funding over five years for the Access to Allied Psychological Services Program, \$36.5 million has been earmarked to increase Indigenous Australians' access to these services. Around 18,000 additional Indigenous people are expected to benefit over five years. The Kimberley region in Western Australia has already received extra funding to establish a suicide-prevention service.

The Budget initiative is also providing \$269.3 million over five years for expanded community-based mental-health services through the Targeted Community Care Program. Indigenous Australians will benefit from this expansion which includes an additional 425 community mental-health workers – called personal helpers and mentors – to work one-on-one with people with severe mental illness. These services have a strong focus on cultural healing for Indigenous people. The program assists vulnerable people, their families and carers and builds capacity to prevent mental illness. About 9 per cent, or 9500, of the clients assisted by Targeted Community Care services in 2010–11 identified as Indigenous Australians.

CASE STUDY

Kimberley Indigenous Suicide Prevention Initiative

The Australian Government is leading efforts to stem the high rates of Indigenous suicide in the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

To help meet urgent needs in the region, the Kimberley Indigenous Suicide Prevention Initiative was launched in April 2011, in advance of this year's development of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy (see pages 119–20).

Additional funding of \$492,000 is being provided to Boab Health Services, the Kimberley Division of General Practice, in 2010–11 and 2011–12 to increase its capacity to provide culturally appropriate suicide-prevention services. In addition, the Australian Psychological Society is receiving \$285,000 to develop and deliver Indigenous-specific suicide-prevention training to providers in the region.

Mental health and suicide prevention were a focus of the 2011 Budget. The Kimberley Initiative is mostly funded from the Indigenous services component of the expanded Access to Allied Psychological Services Program.

Local people and organisations helped to shape implementation of the Kimberley Initiative through week-long consultations in Broome in early August 2011. Among those consulted were the Standby Bereavement Service, Alive and Kicking Men's Group, the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service and Kimberley Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Health Service, as well as

experts such as Professor Pat Dudgeon. Indigenous people spoke strongly about the importance of culture and country and the need to acknowledge and support many traditional ways and beliefs.

Currently two senior experienced psychologists, one located in Broome and the other in Kununurra, are delivering culturally appropriate suicide-prevention services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the region. Boab Health Services has formed linkages with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and medical organisations, drug and alcohol services and hospitals and emergency departments, to assist with referrals and service delivery.

The Australian Psychological Society is finalising its training package, which will be available online to the network of service providers in February 2012.

At Beagle Bay,
Kimberley, WA. Photo:
Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.



Aged care

A Quality Framework has been developed to set culturally appropriate standards for the 28 aged-care services funded under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program. These services aim to provide high-quality culturally appropriate care to older Indigenous Australians close to their home and community. The framework was piloted with 21 services, and a quality review team is being established for ongoing assessment and monitoring.

The Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Service Development Assistance Panel, established in October 2010, provides professional support to Indigenous aged-care providers in remote and very remote areas. At the beginning of 2012, nine assignments were under way and a further five under development. Six have been completed.

In 2010-11, grants were provided to 19 Indigenous aged-care services for staff training, equipment purchase and improved care.

Remote airstrips

The Australian Government's Regional Aviation Access Program is providing critical safety upgrades at remote and isolated airstrips, including in remote Indigenous communities. This program provides technical services and training to Indigenous communities responsible for the operation of 59 aerodromes in northern Australia, capital funding for airstrip upgrades, and a subsidy for regular air services to 83 Indigenous communities or to airstrips servicing these communities.

A total of 59 aerodrome inspections were undertaken in 2010-11, and 24 of 30 contracted airstrip upgrades completed across Western Australia, the Northern Territory and South Australia. This program has enabled safer aviation for passengers and medical evacuations and the delivery of essential goods and services such as food and medical supplies.

Sport and recreation

The Indigenous Sport and Recreation Program funds sport and physical recreation activities, recognising their contribution to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians. It covers a wide range of programs, services and initiatives. Projects that increase the active participation of able and disabled Indigenous Australians in sport and recreation are funded through an annual grant round. Subsidies are also provided for the employment of Indigenous Australians in the sports and recreation sector.

The Australian Sports Commission receives funding for the Elite Indigenous Travel and Accommodation Assistance Program which assists Indigenous sportspeople participating in official national championships and international sporting competitions, including coaches, trainers and officials. The Australian Sports Commission also administers a network of Indigenous Sport Development Officers who work to promote and encourage participation in sport across Australia.



CASE STUDY

National Centre of Indigenous Excellence: Building health and resilience

Henry Button, 34, grew up in country Victoria at Echuca on the banks of the Murray River. A Taungarong/Wiradjuri man, he fondly remembers spending time swimming with friends and enjoying water sports, but he never expected that this would lead to a full-time job and a bright future in sports and recreation management.

Henry is the aquatics operation team leader at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE) at Redfern in Sydney. He had previously worked as a lifeguard in regional Victoria, but when the centre opened in February 2010, Henry took up a casual job as a lifeguard at the swimming pool in the Eora Sports, Arts and Recreation Centre. Now, two years later, Henry has completed an accredited middle-management training course and been promoted to the team leader position.

"Working at the NCIE is the greatest feeling in the world and I am proud to be able to work at a place where there is a real sense of ownership by Indigenous people," Henry says.

"I have learnt many new skills, and there are opportunities for me to develop a professional sports and recreation management career.

"A bonus of this whole process is that I have been able to change my own lifestyle — I have lost 34 kilograms in weight and now have a real sense of wellbeing."

Henry Button on duty at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence pool complex.
Photo: ILC.

Henry is one of 51 Indigenous people employed at the centre, a state-of-the-art facility built by the Indigenous Land Corporation on the site of the former Redfern Public School. In its first two years, more than 10,000 young Indigenous Australians have stayed at the centre, or used its facilities, to participate in development opportunities in the four pathways of arts and culture, learning and innovation, health and wellness, and sport and recreation.

The NCIE features the Eora Campus, a 110-bed campus with conferencing facilities and a commercial kitchen and the Eora Sports, Arts and Recreation Centre, featuring a basketball stadium, heated pool, training field, cardio and weights gyms, low ropes course, dance studio, activity rooms, arts and crafts studio and computer lab.

The NCIE is an independent not-for-profit organisation under the direction of the NCIE board. It works with partners such as the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy, Gondwana National Indigenous Children's Choir, Australian Football League and the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation to develop and deliver programs to improve the life chances of young Indigenous Australians.

The Australian Government, through the Indigenous Land Corporation, provided \$50 million for the purchase of the site and construction of the centre. In 2010–11 the corporation provided \$1.9 million to fund the operations of the NCIE.

For more information, go to www.ncie.org.au



80 | **Road safety**

Indigenous people have three times the rate of road death compared with non-Indigenous road users. A complex range of causes underlie this statistic: Indigenous people are less likely to wear seatbelts and more likely to drive on lower-standard remote roads in vehicles with a lower safety standard. Alcohol is also often a factor in crashes. Many Indigenous people have poor access to licensing services and other support systems.

The National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020, released in May 2011 by the then Australian Transport Council, sets out a 10-year plan to reduce the numbers of deaths and serious injuries on Australian roads by at least 30 per cent, focusing on four key areas: Safe Roads, Safe Speeds, Safe Vehicles and Safe People. The strategy addresses the special needs of Indigenous communities, including implementing programs to increase opportunities for driving practice for disadvantaged learner drivers. It also highlights the need for locally relevant and culturally appropriate Indigenous community education campaigns promoting road-safety messages. The strategy aims to make substantial improvements by 2020 in Indigenous access to graduated licensing and to vehicles with higher safety ratings.

Work underway on the construction of housing in Yarrabah, north Queensland. The Australian Government has committed \$14 million to housing in Yarrabah, including a 33-lot subdivision. Photo: FaHCSIA.

At Ntaria, NT. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.



Healthy homes

Access to decent housing is critical to Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage. Decent housing is essential for protecting children, improving health, education and employment, and for rebuilding positive community norms.

The Australian Government aims to provide Indigenous people with the same housing options and opportunities as other Australians, wherever they live. It has a very active agenda of Indigenous housing reform across remote, regional and urban areas.

Housing is part of a wider Closing the Gap story that goes beyond physical structures – the Australian Government's housing policy promotes personal responsibility, socioeconomic participation and intergenerational wealth creation. The reforms are engaging Indigenous people and organisations to ensure people understand the benefits of a good home and the opportunities it brings.

Progress against the plan

Prior to the Government's investments and reforms of the last four years there had been no effective and coordinated effort to improve housing for Indigenous people. Housing stock in remote areas has been particularly poor due to decades of underinvestment on the part of governments, poor construction standards and lack of maintenance.

Most remote Indigenous housing is built on land owned by Aboriginal land trusts or held in trust by State Governments. These forms of tenure can present considerable barriers to

individuals and governments wanting to secure an interest in land for purposes such as accessing private-sector finance, home ownership, business development and service delivery including social housing.

The Government has been putting in place a comprehensive Indigenous housing reform framework aimed at:

- expanding available social housing across Australia so more Indigenous people have a base to succeed in life
- making sure the houses built or refurbished are well built, well maintained and last
- promoting responsible tenancies where people look after houses and pay fair rent
- increasing opportunities for home ownership where possible, including through leasing on Indigenous land.

National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing

The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing is making an unprecedented investment of \$5.5 billion over ten years (2009-18) to tackle the very poor housing conditions in many remote areas. Agreed in November 2008, the agreement is being implemented by the States and Territories. As is required under the Closing the Gap framework, the arrangements include strict accountability for outcomes.

Ambitious targets have been set:

- up to 4200 new houses to be delivered to help reduce severe overcrowding
- around 4800 existing houses, in disrepair or uninhabitable, to be rebuilt or refurbished

- the housing construction workforce to comprise at least 20 per cent local Indigenous people over the life of the agreement – to ensure that the Government's housing investment is providing wider benefits to Indigenous people.

To support this significant capital investment, the Australian Government requires that jurisdictions introduce robust and standardised property and tenancy management arrangements. These arrangements ensure that rents are collected and a regular repairs and maintenance program is in place to help meet tenants' needs and to extend the life of houses in remote communities. Tenants of new houses are provided with living skills support to help them understand their rights and responsibilities and how to care for their new homes.

The National Partnership Agreement is also expanding accommodation in regional locations to help people from remote areas to access services, training, education and employment.

The Australian Government has worked hard to establish good working relationships with the States and Territories. Progress in construction was initially slow, with jurisdictions failing to reach their targets. The National Partnership was renegotiated in late 2009, to build in incentives to performance. The introduction of a biennial competitive bids process means that up to 25 per cent of a jurisdiction's capital works funding can be reallocated if agreed targets are not met.

CASE STUDY

National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing: The greening of Wadeye

Life is looking up in Wadeye, south-west of Darwin, thanks in part to major investment from the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing. Wadeye is the Northern Territory's largest Indigenous community and home to more than 20 different Aboriginal clan groups.

"Wadeye used to be a very, very uncomfortable place to live," says 58-year-old resident Arthur Karui. "There were too many people and a lot of violence. We used to live in a small area at Top Camp in the middle of town where we used to be squashed in."

Arthur, his wife Anna and three sons have moved to a three-bedroom house in the new subdivision of Nilinh, three kilometres out of town.

"We feel very comfortable here," Arthur says of his new home. "It is more peaceful for the family and the neighbours. It's enjoyable for the kids and a lot easier for them to play; we have the bush out the back where we gather tucker and firewood."

"Now only relations come round. We don't let the others come in and we don't drink. We are planning on building a park over the road where the kids can play."

Nilinh is one of two new subdivisions in Wadeye, allowing people to live away from the community centre and providing more space to promote community harmony. Seventy of 105 new houses built in Wadeye are in these subdivisions. Over the last two years the number of houses in the community has increased by more than 50 per cent.



A total of \$69 million has been invested to help close the housing gap in the community, including the refurbishment or rebuilding of 105 existing houses. Due to years of poor maintenance under former arrangements, many of these houses had unusable kitchens and bathrooms. They are now functional and safe and local families have a decent place to cook, bathe and sleep at night, to be prepared for school or work.

Pride of place in Wadeye now extends to the community's gardens.

"We are planting a garden and I want to plant more," says Arthur Karui. "There is a little bit of friendly competition among the 16 families living here to see who can make the best garden. We are looking forward to a good wet season. One day this place will be like a jungle with nice big shady trees."

In 2011 Wadeye participated in the Territory Housing Garden Competition. Twenty-seven residents entered the Territory-wide competition and won awards in three separate categories

The unprecedented investment through the National Partnership Agreement is also creating new opportunities for employment and economic development. During the two years that capital works have

been under way in Wadeye, the New Future Alliance has consistently had more than 25 per cent Indigenous employment on housing works. So far 148 Indigenous people have participated in workforce development and training opportunities in Wadeye.

Local Indigenous business Thamarrurr Development Corporation was engaged to provide concrete for the construction of 49 new houses in the community. This significant contract gave a boost to the business helping it to tender competitively for other contracts and provide jobs and training for local people.

Thamarrurr Development Corporation is also helping to build gardens in Wadeye by operating a nursery providing plants and materials.

Arthur Karui working on his new garden at Wadeye, NT. Photo: Northern Territory Government.

In 2010-11 all jurisdictions exceeded one or both of their capital works targets, with New South Wales, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory exceeding both of their targets.

During 2010-11, 490 new houses were delivered against the target of 463 new houses and 2288 rebuilds or refurbishments were delivered against a target of 2012. Since the National Partnership Agreement started, 1024 new houses have been completed and 3697 houses have been rebuilt or refurbished nationally (to 31 December 2011). This progress is set to continue in 2011-12, with jurisdictions starting work ahead of schedule.

Northern Territory housing

As the jurisdiction with the greatest remote Indigenous population, \$1.7 billion has been allocated to the Northern Territory under the National Partnership Agreement. Given the acute need in the Territory, the housing program has been accelerated so that 934 new homes and 2915 rebuilds or refurbishments will be in place by the end of June 2013. To date 475 new houses and 1926 rebuilds or refurbishments have been completed, improving the quality of life for more than 2400 Indigenous families in more than 59 communities and 25 town camps. This is an unprecedented effort.

The program in the Northern Territory initially suffered delays in construction. The Australian and Northern Territory Governments commissioned a review of program implementation in 2009 and made major changes to the working arrangements to get this critical program back on track. An Australian National Audit Office report in November 2011 found that targets were being met, construction costs were broadly comparable to general industry standards, and program-management costs were running to target at 8 per cent.



Elder Timmy Galalingu with his lemongrass crop in front of his refurbished house in Galiwin'ku, NT.
Photo: Northern Territory Government.

Edward Campbell was employed in construction works in Alice Springs, NT. Photo: FaHCSIA.



Indigenous jobs in housing

The target of 20 per cent Indigenous employment is being exceeded in the Northern Territory where Indigenous employees have made up some 30 per cent of the construction workforce since the program began. Indigenous people have eagerly embraced the opportunity for training and employment, and building contractors have shown a genuine commitment to Indigenous employment, in many cases exceeding their contractual targets.

The skills and experience acquired in the construction workforce have equipped Indigenous people for employment in ongoing property and tenancy management work in the Northern Territory. Minimum Indigenous employment requirements under service-delivery contracts between the Northern Territory Government and the shires have been exceeded: 65 per cent of the labour employed in property management is provided by local Indigenous employees (compared with a minimum requirement of 40 per cent), and local people provide 85 per cent of the labour in tenancy management (compared with a minimum requirement of 50 per cent). These skills may be transferable to local repairs and maintenance business opportunities in the future.

All other States have met or exceeded the target of at least 20 per cent Indigenous employment. In 2010-11 more than 60 per cent of the workforce on housing projects on Palm Island in Queensland was Indigenous. Of this total, 31 per cent were local apprentices, 19 per cent were local qualified tradespeople and 14 per cent were local trainees.

In the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia, 20 local Indigenous workers have completed a joint Commonwealth-State pre-employment program and attained accreditation in a Certificate I in Civil Construction, with a further 13 Indigenous workers expected to gain their accreditation within a year.

Alice Springs Transformation Plan

In Alice Springs, the Australian and Northern Territory Governments are embarked on a major program to upgrade housing, infrastructure and social services for residents of town camps and the many visitors to the town from remote areas. This is reported in the case study at pages 9-10.

The plan is integrating the town camps into the wider town, with improved roads and infrastructure, weekly garbage collections, expanded bus services, dog-control services and night patrols. Town-camp streets are being named and houses numbered, enabling a regular postal service and better access for emergency services.

Improved social-support services are targeting a number of issues: alcohol rehabilitation, help for families, early learning and schooling, activities for young people, tenancy support and mental health.

The housing and other accommodation is being managed on the same principles as all Closing the Gap housing programs: people are being assisted to be good tenants; more vulnerable people are being helped to move into public housing in the future to break the cycle of homelessness

Tiwi elder Bernard Theddius Tipiloura in front of his new house at Wurrumiyanga (Nguuu), NT. His community has a 99-year whole-of-township lease. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Land-tenure reform

The Australian Government is working closely with State and Territory Governments to reform land tenure and administration on Indigenous land. The preferred approach is to establish long-term leasing arrangements so that social housing providers can access private-sector finance and have the power to implement high-quality tenancy management and so individuals can secure finance for home ownership and business development.

The Australian Government is committed to respecting the rights of traditional owners and preserving the underlying communal title.

Secure land tenure is a precondition for major capital investments under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, to ensure asset protection, define responsibilities for maintenance and underpin major reforms to tenancy management. Achieving land-tenure reform has proved

complex and challenging; however, during 2011 the States and Territories continued to secure social housing through long-term leasing or housing management agreements to enable capital works to proceed.

In the Northern Territory, the first 40-year leases over housing in Central Australia were signed for the communities of Lajamanu and Ntaria, following extensive negotiations with traditional owners. In the northern region a 40-year lease was entered into at Numbulwar. Of the 16 communities in the Northern Territory allocated major housing works, 14 have a long-term lease in place.

The proposed Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory legislation (see page 32) will allow the Australian Government to modify Northern Territory legislation in relation to community living areas and town camps to facilitate voluntary long-term leasing, including for the granting of individual rights or interests and the promotion of economic



86 | development. (Community living areas are smaller portions of land excised from a pastoral lease and granted as conditional freehold to an Indigenous community or family for residential purposes.)

On the Tiwi Islands negotiations for a 99-year whole-of-township lease were concluded at Milikapiti and Ranku in November 2011, creating new opportunities for home ownership and economic development. Under this form of leasing, traditional owners in the Northern Territory, represented by land councils, can negotiate a headlease with the Executive Director of Township Leasing who then subleases to other parties wanting to use the land.

Home ownership

Nearly 40 per cent of Indigenous households in urban and regional areas own or are buying their own homes, compared to 19 per cent in 1991. In remote areas there are numerous barriers to home ownership including tenure complexities, high construction costs, limited housing markets, unstable incomes and lack of financial literacy.

The Home Ownership Program, now managed by Indigenous Business Australia, has provided almost 15,000 low-cost housing loans since the mid-1970s; it is one of the Commonwealth's most successful Indigenous programs.

CASE STUDY

Home Ownership Program: Donna Piper's story

Donna Piper and her husband John purchased their Sydney home with a loan from Indigenous Business Australia in 2007. Since then they have created an increasingly valuable asset and a welcoming hub for their wider family.

Being 'solid' for her family is important to Donna, a Tharawal woman from La Perouse who spent an unsettled childhood moving from house to house with her mother and sister.

"We had nothing when we were kids... We always lived with family because we never had a place of our own ... We ended up living in a house where people were renting out rooms, but they didn't want kids, so my sister and I had to go and live at my father's place ... We went to so many different schools."

It was while raising their own four children and living in government housing that Donna and John became determined to create a different future for their family.

"I wanted more for the kids, I wanted them to be proud, to be brought up thinking, look mum and dad have got a house."

Donna says negotiating their way through the process of buying a home increased their overall confidence in financial matters.

She has also developed strong budgeting skills.

"I've just got two of my friends into budgeting. They asked me how I pay our electricity bill? And I said because I put 'x' dollars a fortnight away. And I write it down, I've got it in my handbag: the electricity, the water, an extra \$50 off my home loan ... same thing every fortnight.

"We had nothing in our childhood, but now we cope — we enjoy our life, but we pay our bills."

As her children enter adulthood and start families of their own, Donna is encouraging them to reap the benefits of home ownership, when the time is right.

Donna also appreciates the choices that home ownership might offer her in the future. She hopes eventually to cut back on work and, by providing child care, both assist her children to pay off their own home loans and enjoy time "just being grandma".

"Through this home loan, they've given us a chance to make something of our lives. I wanted to do it ... and I want my kids to have something like this in their lives, not because they're Aboriginal, just because they're people."

For more information on the Home Ownership Program, go to www.iba.gov.au



Solar collectors at Ntaria, NT. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA

In 2010-11, 606 new loans were approved, assisting 1653 Indigenous people. At December 2011 the active home loan portfolio stood at 3737. The waiting list for home loans has reduced from 633 at the end of 2010 to 451 at December 2011.

In 2007 this scheme was joined by the Home Ownership on Indigenous Land Program which provides extra assistance including financial training in recognition of the greater challenges in owning homes in remote communities. The introduction of reformed tenancy arrangements across Australia prepares tenants to manage their finances and develops the skills for home ownership. The Government is committed to assisting those who have the means, capacity and desire to borrow for home ownership, wherever they live.

Other remote housing programs

Since 1997 the Aboriginal Community Assistance Program (AACAP) has improved living conditions and environmental health in remote communities across Australia. The program delivers one \$6 million project each year which can benefit multiple communities. AACAP 2011 has been delivered in the Fitzroy Crossing communities of Eight Mile (Joy Springs) and Bayulu in Western Australia. This project has provided improvements in primary health, dental health and physical training, veterinary and vocational training, as well as housing, water and sewage works and construction of a new health clinic in Bayulu.

The Fixing Houses for Better Health Program successfully provided critical safety and health-focused repairs and maintenance to 547 community houses in 111 remote Indigenous communities and improved more than 5000 houses from 1999 to 2011. The program was awarded a Leadership in Sustainability Prize in March 2011 and the Housing for

Health component was a finalist in the international United Nations World Habitat Awards. The program ceased on 30 June 2011, as States and Territories are now required to build key elements of its approach into their ongoing provision of remote housing.

The Remote Indigenous Energy Program, part of the Australian Government's Clean Energy Plan, provides \$40 million over five years from 2011-12 to help Indigenous communities manage their energy efficiently and use it to contribute to improvements in health, education and economic development. The program will support the installation of renewable energy generation systems in up to 50 remote Indigenous communities. It also includes training in basic system maintenance and the provision of information on energy efficiency to help households and communities in managing their energy. The program will be of particular benefit to communities that currently rely on expensive diesel generator systems for power.

The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing reaches to the Bass Strait community of Cape Barren Island, Tas.
Photo: FaHCSIA.



The Remote Indigenous Energy Program builds on the Bushlight program which pioneered the provision of reliable and affordable renewable energy systems to isolated Indigenous communities. Since 2002, Australian Government funding of around \$63 million allowed Bushlight to install 142 renewable energy systems in 120 remote Indigenous communities and provide regular maintenance to 265 renewable energy systems in 220 communities nationally.

Aboriginal Hostels Limited

Aboriginal Hostels Limited is the main provider of temporary accommodation to Indigenous people across Australia. The Commonwealth-owned company, in operation for almost 40 years, manages 54 hostels and one visitor park in Alice Springs, as well as providing some financial assistance to non-government organisations to run a further

47 hostels. Its facilities cover all major population centres providing safe, comfortable, culturally appropriate and affordable accommodation. Some facilities are for specific purposes, such as attending secondary education or undergoing renal dialysis, but most are for Indigenous people travelling away from home. In 2010-11 Aboriginal Hostels Limited provided around 487,000 nights of accommodation to Indigenous people. In a typical day, some 1475 people stay in the company's facilities. Most hostels provide three meals a day, adding up to around 1,500,000 meals a year. More than three-quarters of the company's employees are Indigenous. Staff help guests to access a wide range of additional services. The company's operations are increasingly being integrated into the wider Closing the Gap strategy.

Mainstream housing

Indigenous housing is an important sub-set of wider housing reform. The National Affordable Housing Agreement is working to provide all Australians with affordable, safe and sustainable housing. Through the National Affordable Housing Specific Purpose Payment the Australian Government provides \$1.2 billion to the States and Territories annually for housing programs to address supply and affordability issues for all Australians, with a focus on disadvantaged citizens. Many Indigenous people, especially those living in regional and urban areas, are benefiting from these initiatives across the community. At 1 January this year more than 17,000 new homes had been delivered to vulnerable Australians under the \$5.6 billion Social Housing Initiative, the single largest investment in social housing ever undertaken by an Australian Government. Around 14 per cent of the people living in this new social housing were Indigenous Australians. The target of 19,600 homes is expected to be met in 2012.

Economic participation

The Australian Government is putting jobs and economic development at the centre of its agenda to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. All Australians should be able to share in the opportunities provided by Australia's strong economy and enjoy the financial and social benefits of work. Long-term reliance on welfare payments undermines individual capacity and entrenches disadvantage.

In October 2011 the Government launched the *Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018* which will help provide pathways for Indigenous Australians to have the same opportunities as all Australians – to get an education, find a job or start their own business, own their own home and provide for their families.

The strategy integrates existing initiatives, including the Indigenous Employment Program, the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program and the Working on Country Indigenous Ranger Program, into a coherent policy framework. It will ensure that the Australian Government continues to create job opportunities, connect Indigenous Australian with jobs, strengthen links between training and jobs, and drive demand for Indigenous employment.

The strategy builds on major 2009 reforms to the employment services network for all Australians, as well as the Indigenous programs that interface with this network – the Indigenous Employment Program and CDEP.

Above all increased Indigenous economic participation requires partnerships across the community. A growing number of businesses including major corporations are committing to assist and employ Indigenous people.

Progress against the plan

The Government's plan for Indigenous economic development is comprehensively mapped out in the *Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018*, co-launched in Sydney on 19 October 2011 with the Minerals Council of Australia.

The strategy identifies five areas as key to improved economic participation for Indigenous Australians:

- strengthening foundations to create an environment that supports economic development
- education
- skills development and jobs
- supporting business and entrepreneurship, and
- helping Indigenous people to achieve financial security and independence.

The strategy is the result of extensive consultation with Indigenous people and other stakeholders. It sets out a policy framework for Indigenous economic development that will guide government decision-making and program development through to 2018. Actions contained in the strategy will be updated every three years as the strategy drives the development of new policies and initiatives.

The Australian Government has a long-standing memorandum of understanding with the Minerals Council to boost Indigenous training and employment, especially as the mining industry operates in many areas with relatively high populations of Indigenous people. Information on the Minerals Council's own Indigenous economic strategy is provided below.

Mainstream employment services

The reformed mainstream services, Job Services Australia and Disability Employment Services, are the largest providers of employment services to Indigenous Australians. At October 2011, 95,874 Indigenous people were registered with these services (11.2 per cent of the total case load). Indigenous people receive specialist services in some 170 service sites.

Job Services Australia providers recorded 46,080 Indigenous job placements in the 12 months to October 2011, around 9.8 per cent of total job placements. Job placements are also converting into long-term jobs for Indigenous people, with almost 21,620 job placements converting to 13-week outcomes over the same period.

A three-year Innovation Fund is supporting place-based solutions for the most disadvantaged job seekers to June 2012. Ten projects with funding of \$3.6 million focused on Indigenous job seekers are expected to help around 1030 people, providing 225 jobs, 495 training places, 69 work-experience places and 760 mentoring opportunities. In addition, 11 Indigenous organisations have been funded under the Jobs Fund across five States and Territories. These projects have resulted in 270 jobs, 160 traineeships and 35 work-experience places.



Birrang Enterprise Development Company Ltd, a CDEP provider in far western New South Wales, runs a successful nursery business in Bourke. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Indigenous Employment Program

The Indigenous Employment Program supports the national network of employment service providers, offering a range of innovative targeted assistance. It encourages and supports employers to offer sustainable jobs to Indigenous people, enables Indigenous people to train and prepare themselves for jobs, and helps to develop Indigenous businesses.

In 2010-11 there were 31,453 commencements in the Indigenous Employment Program including 14,400 employment placements across a range of industries. In 2011-12 the new Indigenous Youth Career Pathways Program aims to assist more young people to make the transition from school to further education and work. It provides \$50.7 million over four years to allow up to 6400 Indigenous students to undertake a school-based traineeship.

From July 2009 the Indigenous Employment Program received additional funding over four years for 6000 Workplace English Language and Literacy places to provide intensive language, literacy and numeracy assistance for people employed, or expected to be placed in employment, through the program. (A significant proportion of Indigenous Employment Program participants have low literacy and numeracy skills: at least 40 per



cent of those in employment and 70 per cent of those unemployed or outside the labour force.) There are 34 approved projects nationally. By December 2011, 1985 participants had begun training since January 2010. Like the wider Indigenous Employment Program, this component works closely with employers, integrating its training with vocational training and meeting the requirements of particular workplaces.

Under the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory, intensive language, literacy and numeracy training is also being offered to eligible job seekers to boost their skills (\$3 million over three years).

Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP)

The reformed CDEP scheme, launched on 1 July 2009, promotes economic and social development in remote communities around Australia. CDEP providers are funded to deliver projects to engage participants in meaningful activities including employment, training and skills development, work experience, study and community development.

There are two distinct streams:

- work readiness, so people can progress out of CDEP
- community development, so activities can strengthen communities and meet local needs. Providers have developed action plans, funded by the Australian Government, to underpin community-development work.

CDEP is capped at 15,000 participant places, of which 10,704 were utilised at 30 June 2011. In 2010–11, 2057 participants had moved from CDEP into jobs in the external labour market.

Future remote servicing arrangements

The CDEP scheme is in place in remote communities because of the very limited labour market and often complex barriers to employment that many job seekers in these communities face. Many remote Indigenous people lack the education, skills and experience to get and keep a job. A significant number have a disability. The current model of employment services and participation does not adequately address the characteristics of, and challenges faced by, remote Australia.

Just over 31,800 Indigenous people are registered with Job Services Australia providers in Remote Employment Services Areas. The Job Services Australia network is being strengthened in these areas to allow greater flexibility for services to work with job seekers and meet employers' needs; however, the Government recognises that more needs to be done.

Reformed remote servicing arrangements will be introduced from July 2013. Consultations were undertaken last year after the July 2011 release of the discussion paper *The Future of Remote Participation and Employment Servicing Arrangements*. More than 40 remote communities were visited. A special panel is also providing advice on effective approaches for remote communities. Simpler, more flexible and place-based services as well as efforts to develop remote economies will maximise local employment where possible while responding to the needs, capacity and demographics of remote job seekers and a very limited labour market.

Existing funding agreements for Job Services Australia, Disability Employment Services and CDEP will remain in place until the new model starts.

National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation

The National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation is transitioning CDEP positions into full-time jobs in government service delivery with proper wages and conditions. As many as 2000 ongoing positions are being created; so far 1538 positions have been identified and funded: 1235 Australian Government funded positions and 303 State/Territory positions. Previously the work done in these positions was subsidised by CDEP.

The National Partnership provides \$172.7 million in Commonwealth funding and \$56.2 million in State/Territory funding over five years from 2008 for complementary action to create employment and business opportunities for Indigenous people.

The National Partnership commits jurisdictions to developing Indigenous workforce strategies in all major COAG reforms contributing to the Closing the Gap targets. Workforce strategies are having an impact in the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing, as reported under the Healthy Homes building block.



92 | Government procurement policies are being reformed and strengthened to generate Indigenous employment and maximise opportunities for Indigenous businesses. An Indigenous Opportunities Policy came into full effect on 1 July 2011, for all government-contracted projects involving expenditure of \$5 million (or \$6 million for construction) in regions with significant Indigenous populations. It requires tenderers to submit a plan for training and employing local Indigenous people and for the use of Indigenous suppliers. At December 2011, 17 plans had been approved and references to the policy have been identified in eight approaches to market.

An Indigenous supplier network, the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council (AIMSC), was established by the Australian Government in 2009 to encourage the growth of Indigenous businesses; it links corporate and government purchasers with certified Indigenous suppliers of goods and services. To December 2011 the network had certified 124 Indigenous suppliers and attracted 131 corporate and government members. It had generated \$22.9 million in contracts and over \$13 million in transactions between suppliers and members. AIMSC-certified suppliers employed around 450 Indigenous full-time equivalent staff.

Under this National Partnership Agreement targets have also been set by all jurisdictions for public-sector employment of Indigenous people. Recruitment and career development strategies are in place to raise Indigenous public-sector employment to 2.6 per cent nationally, reflecting Indigenous people's proportion of the total population, and at least 2.7 per cent across the Australian Public Service. Under the Indigenous Employment Strategy being implemented by the Australian Public Service Commission, 131 Indigenous people were engaged by agencies in 2011, 400 Indigenous staff received career-development training and the commission engaged regularly with Indigenous employees and agency representatives. The 2012 intake of Indigenous graduates, cadets and trainees is 164.

Trevor Ellis and Danika Nayna are Indigenous public servants helping to produce the Australian Government's Indigenous Newlines Radio program. Photo: FaHCSIA.



CASE STUDY

Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council

The chief executive officer of the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council (AIMSC), Natalie Walker, describes it as a "dating service for business". AIMSC was set up in September 2009 to help integrate Indigenous-owned businesses into the supply chain of private-sector corporations and government agencies.

"AIMSC has experienced faster than expected growth and an increasing interest in and demand for its services," Natalie says.

In February 2010 Telstra commissioned the AIMSC-certified business Gilimbaa to create artwork for its Reconciliation Action Plan. Brisbane-based Gilimbaa worked closely with Telstra's corporate communications team to deliver a unique visual identity for the plan, which has been made available to Telstra staff and the community both online and in printed form. As Telstra's commitment to their Reconciliation Action Plan evolved, so did the artwork. In May 2011, Gilimbaa was re-engaged to update the design. Gilimbaa also created the design for the Australian Government's Indigenous Economic Development Strategy.

"As an Indigenous creative agency, working with Telstra to help tell the story of their Reconciliation Action Plan journey, we have been able to learn more about their business, and foster an important two-way learning process," says David Williams, Gilimbaa's chief executive officer.

Adelaide-based Print Junction is a family owned and operated Indigenous business with more than 40 years' experience in the graphic design and print industry. The team from Print Junction was introduced to executives from Corporate Express, a single-source supplier of business essentials, at an AIMSC Connect 2010

Business Opportunity Fair/Trade Show in Sydney. Print Junction has since been added to the Corporate Express print-procurement panel, allowing the company to get work on a regular basis. This has helped Print Junction to build its business, become more competitive and employ more Indigenous staff.

"The benefits of working with a client like Corporate Express have been many and varied. It has opened up consistent opportunities to gain work and given us exposure to a large network. We have been able to increase our sales and grow with a large corporate company," says Leah Torzyn, creative director of Print Junction.

Another beneficiary has been All The Perks, based in Sydney. In July 2010 the company approached the National Rugby League (NRL) with a marketing and public relations proposal to promote the NRL Indigenous All Stars as well as the Indigenous *Learn Earn Legend!* initiative (see page 63). All The Perks negotiated a contract to deliver a niche public-relations campaign for the Indigenous All Stars NRL Regional Tours and the Indigenous Youth Summit programs, held in conjunction with the Australian Government. All The Perks has been able to add value to the NRL's growing Indigenous and community-development programs through targeted public relations, community engagement and strategic brand support — all aimed at attracting more fans and reinforcing messages about Indigenous employment and Closing the Gap. All The Perks has gained a better understanding of sports marketing and built a profitable relationship with the NRL and the Australian Rugby League.

For more information, go to www.aimsc.org.au



Michael McLeod, the founder of AIMSC, with the organisation's CEO, Natalie Walker. Photo: Lari Gadza.

Kym Wiley of Townsville, Qld, owns Coyote K9's, a mobile dog-washing service, and was working on increasing her client base when she heard about Indigenous Business Australia's Into Business workshops. "I was getting my business built up but was at a point where I didn't know where to go, or what my next steps were," Kym says. By attending the workshops, Kym has become more confident and excited about being in business, and understands she is ultimately responsible for the success of Coyote K9's. Photo: IBA.



Business development

Owning and managing a business is one of the paths to prosperity for many Australians. The Government encourages and supports Indigenous Australians to take this path where economic-development opportunities exist.

Indigenous Business Australia provides small business loans at concessional rates as well as business advice and mentoring to Indigenous Australians starting, or thinking about starting, a business. At December 2011, Indigenous Business Australia had a business-loan portfolio of 328 loans valued at \$53.6 million. Seventy-one new business loans were approved in 2010-11 with \$10.1 million of new loans provided. This activity created or supported 125 jobs for Indigenous Australians.

A new business-support product Into Business provides free workshops to prepare Indigenous people for business and raise understanding of business principles. Across Australia 1421 people attended the 266 workshops held in 2010-11 with a further 1074 people attending workshops in the six months to December 2011.

Indigenous Business Australia's Equity and Investments Program supports joint ventures between Indigenous people and industry partners. At June 2011 the program held 26 assets valued at \$188.4 million across the retail, commercial property, mining, manufacturing, primary industry, tourism and hotel sectors. It created or supported 264 jobs for Indigenous Australians.

Business connections

Connections with the wider business community are essential if Indigenous businesses are to thrive and Indigenous employment is to grow. An advisory group is providing expert input on the policies needed to support growth of the Indigenous business sector. The Government is also supporting Indigenous business chambers to increase their membership and link up with mainstream businesses. A Government-supported Ambassador for Business Action, Mr Colin Carter, works to encourage Australian businesses to contribute to Closing the Gap.

Recent years have seen increased engagement of the wider business community.

Shell's Social Investment Portfolio 2011-2014, launched in November 2011, is an example of a private-sector organisation working with community and non-government organisations to help support and improve the lives of disadvantaged Australians, including Indigenous Australians. Through the portfolio, Shell has allocated \$5 million a year over three years to 20 social investment partners that will deliver education programs to disadvantaged Australians.

The Minerals Council of Australia announced the Minerals Industry: Indigenous Economic Development Strategy on 19 October 2011. The Minerals Council's strategy identifies the same five priorities as the Australian Government's *Indigenous Economic Development Strategy 2011-2018* and focuses on improving socioeconomic outcomes through employment and enterprise development.

In 2011 Oz Minerals won the South Australian Premier's Social Inclusion in Mining and Energy Award for excellence in community programs. Oz Minerals' Pre-Employment Training Program allows local Indigenous Australians who have not worked in the mining industry to gain a qualification, work experience and employment at the company's Prominent Hill mine. Seven pre-employment training programs have been completed since 2006. The sixth program included trainees from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, with eight graduates from that program being offered full-time roles at Prominent Hill.

Thiess Pty Ltd is Australia's leading construction, mining and services contractor. Thiess has recently recruited and retained 14 Indigenous workers who completed a 20-week pre-vocational program, part-funded by the Australian Government, at the Thiess Archerfield Workshop. Individual training and mentoring plans were developed for each participant. All participants were offered full-time positions, with some taking up apprenticeships and traineeships within the organisation. A second intake of 12 Indigenous jobseekers has recently been recruited.

Coles has commenced the National First Step Program, an innovative program part-funded by the Australian Government. The program incorporates training, work experience and mentoring for 205 Indigenous Australians before they start work. The company uses Indigenous program coordinators and cultural awareness training to help make this program a stepping stone to employment in Coles. The National First Step Program builds on lessons learnt from an earlier Coles pilot which provided training and employment opportunities to 50 Indigenous job seekers in New South Wales and cultural-awareness training for 70 Coles managers.

The Woolworths Employment Project in conjunction with the Mining, Energy and Engineering Academy and the Australian and South Australian Governments is leading the way in delivering new training and employment opportunities in the retail industry in South Australia. The project involves up to 217 participants undertaking a 10-week job-readiness program. Woolworths has committed to employing all participants who successfully complete the training; 102 Indigenous Australians have

already started jobs in the retail industry. Mentoring provided to participants before and after employment has been a large factor in the success of this program.

Across Australia, Jawun Indigenous Corporate Partnerships is forging corporate and philanthropic partnerships to support innovative programs in Cape York in Queensland, Shepparton in Victoria, Redfern-Waterloo in New South Wales and the East Kimberley in Western Australia. Jawun has engaged 20 partners across the financial, legal, construction and retail sectors, generating \$6.3 million in-kind contributions and \$1.2 million in financial contributions. For every dollar of government funding, the organisation has generated 16 times that amount from its partners. Jawun has demonstrated that building individual capabilities and local partnerships between private-sector employers and Indigenous communities and organisations helps to foster economic development.



Indigenous Land Corporation: Pathways to employment

James Marrday is on track to become one of the first students to graduate from Year 12 at his local school. He is one of three students at Gunbalanya in the Northern Territory undertaking a school-based apprenticeship at Gunbalanya Station, a flood-plain pastoral enterprise leased by the Indigenous Land Corporation from traditional owners.

In a town where no young people have graduated from Year 12 at the local school, the apprenticeship program is not only helping to turn James's life around; it will provide opportunities for many other young people in the community.

Partnering with Gunbalanya School is the Clontarf Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that provides Indigenous students with mentoring and support to build leadership and to develop positive attitudes to health, education and employment.

James used to have a part-time job stacking shelves at the community store, but he wanted to broaden his horizons, so Clontarf looked for other opportunities. When the chance came up to do a school-based apprenticeship on the cattle station on the outskirts of Gunbalanya, he jumped at it.

James graduated with Certificate II in Agriculture (Beef Cattle Production) in 2011, studying subjects as diverse as horse dentistry, working with buffalo and pasture improvement. In 2012 he will study for his Certificate III and undertake his Year 12 studies.

Since he started his school-based apprenticeship, he's become a role model for other kids.

"It's a big problem, those kids they don't know what they're doing, they should come to school," James says. "When I finish my Year 12, I'm probably going to get the other younger guys to come to

school. I'm trying to take the lead and show the little small guys, so they look at me and say 'I want to be like him!'"

The Indigenous Land Corporation's Gunbalanya pastoral and meatworks operation is a significant investment to help close the gap in economic participation through the operation of an Indigenous business with a focus on local employment and training. Major capital works have been completed to expand the existing meatworks and develop grazing infrastructure on the 80,000-hectare property.

In 2011 the combined Gunbalanya operations employed 20 Indigenous staff. During the year Indigenous staff undertook Certificate II courses in agriculture or meat processing. They also completed training in courses such as animal welfare, low-stress stock handling, welding, first aid, health, and literacy and numeracy.

James is just one success story arising from the Indigenous Land Corporation's work at Gunbalanya.

For more information, go to www.ilc.gov.au

James Marrday with Dave Russell from Clontarf Foundation at Gunbalanya Station, NT. Photo: Liz Trevaskis, ABC Rural/ILC.



Land-based jobs and businesses

Land ownership and native title rights are not only cultural assets; land and associated legal rights are an important economic asset. The Australian Government wants to see Indigenous land used as a base for sustainable jobs and enterprises.

The Indigenous Land Corporation, established in 1995, plays a central role in Indigenous economic participation. It acquires land on behalf of Indigenous groups and helps Indigenous people to manage and profit from existing land holdings. In 2010-11 the corporation acquired six properties to achieve socio-economic, cultural and environmental benefits for Indigenous people. At November 2011 the corporation had bought a total of 238 properties. Last financial year 12 properties were divested to Indigenous organisations, increasing the total of properties divested to 160. A further 30 properties are scheduled for divestment over the next three years.

More than two-thirds of corporation projects in 2011 involved collaboration with other government agencies, industry and non-government organisations. The collaborations brought technical skills, funding and human capacity to deliver greater benefits for Indigenous people. The corporation's acquisition of Fish River Station in the Daly River region of the Northern Territory has provided the base for a major environmental collaboration to rehabilitate land, create ranger jobs and protect threatened species and Indigenous cultural sites.

Through its regional land-management projects – including the Indigenous Pastoral Program in the Northern Territory and Indigenous Landholder Services and the Kimberley Weeds Project in Western Australia – the Indigenous Land Corporation is helping the Indigenous owners of 55 properties to bring land back into production and improve land management. The Indigenous landholders and communities on six properties have sought the corporation's assistance to develop pastoral businesses. The properties are leased by the Indigenous Land Corporation which is working with communities to develop infrastructure, build herd size and deliver the training and capacity required for the operation of commercial businesses.

Across Australia the Indigenous Land Corporation supports businesses that also train and employ Indigenous people. The 16 businesses across Australia operating in 2011 directly employed 135 staff and hosted 188 trainees. Since the inception of the corporation's training to employment initiative in 2008, 364 Indigenous people have commenced training, 126 people have completed 12-month traineeships and 92 graduates have been offered jobs.

In 2011 the corporation collaborated with Wan Unkunjta, representing traditional owners, to buy Ayers Rock Resort at Yulara in the Northern Territory so it could operate a successful and viable Indigenous tourism enterprise and create large-scale Indigenous training and employment opportunities. A major eco-tourism enterprise at Mossman Gorge in far north Queensland is nearing completion and will create up to 70 Indigenous jobs in 2012.



Indigenous Land Corporation: Ayers Rock Resort now a base for a training academy

Growing up in a multi-lingual environment has given Marsha Riley an advantage working with the large number of international tourists that visit Ayers Rock Resort. Marsha understands five different Central Australian Indigenous dialects and English is her third language.

From Ntaria (Hermannsburg) in the Northern Territory, Marsha was the only Indigenous trainee at the resort when the Indigenous Land Corporation acquired the property in May 2011. In its first six months under Indigenous ownership, the resort provided employment for 55 Indigenous people across a wide range of positions.

"Being at the resort you get to work first hand with guests from many different parts of the world who speak different languages," Marsha says. "My traineeship has helped me a lot, and having grown up with so many language groups, I was used to different languages being spoken."

She says her family was happy about her getting the opportunity, but also a bit sad that she had to go away to do her training.

"The first three months of my training, I felt a bit homesick and also with the change of environment, I missed home a bit. But, eventually I got over that and it's been great."

Marsha has graduated with a Certificate III in Hospitality and is now employed in a permanent position as a shift leader at the resort. Marsha has a five-year plan to stay at the resort and develop a career in the industry. She will begin a Certificate IV in Hospitality in 2012.

Marsha has been joined by new Indigenous trainees enrolled at the National Indigenous Training Academy established by the Indigenous Land Corporation at Ayers Rock Resort. The academy partners with William Angliss Institute in Victoria to provide Indigenous trainees from around Australia with accredited, nationally recognised qualifications. Graduates from the academy are guaranteed a job at the resort, at one of more than 150 Accor hotels throughout Australia or with other hospitality and tourism operators.

The acquisition of the resort in partnership with local Indigenous business interests has returned 104 square kilometres of traditional lands to the Indigenous estate and will deliver hundreds of Indigenous employment and training opportunities in an area that otherwise has very limited employment opportunities. The aim is to have 50 per cent Indigenous employment at the resort by the end of 2018, providing up to 340 jobs.

For more information, go to www.ilc.gov.au

Marsha Riley on duty at Ayers Rock Resort, NT. Photo: ILC.



Other initiatives are seeking to involve Indigenous people in rural industries across the agricultural, pastoral, forestry and fisheries sectors. The Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation is developing an Indigenous pastoral project under the Northern Australia Beef Industry Strategy, to help communities to develop under-performing pastoral activities into successful enterprises.

FarmReady Grants to help land managers respond to the impacts of climate change supported training for 1268 Indigenous participants in the three years to 31 December 2011, and funded two projects directly focused on Indigenous Australians. The Government is also opening up new economic opportunities through the Carbon Farming Initiative. Land managers will be able to generate credits that can be sold to other businesses wanting to offset their own carbon pollution. A \$22.3 million Indigenous Carbon Farming Fund will support Indigenous projects; community consultations have begun on this initiative.

The Working on Country Indigenous Ranger Program allows Indigenous people to care for country and helps the Australian Government meet its environmental responsibilities. More than 680 rangers are currently employed in paid positions across 83 ranger teams located in all States and the Northern Territory. In the Northern Territory the Stronger Futures jobs package will add a further 50 positions. This program provides real employment and training opportunities for some of the most remote and economically marginalised communities in Australia. It recognises the cultural relationships and family and community bonds between Indigenous Australians and



their country; it incorporates the aspirations and ambitions of Indigenous people who want to care for their country. The rangers are role models and often leaders in their communities. They work with local schools to pass on traditional ecological knowledge.

Indigenous people currently make up around half of the 64 staff employed on the Northern Australia Quarantine strategy. The strategy provides quarantine services in the Torres Strait and animal and plant surveillance in the coastal areas of northern Australia between Cairns and Broome, areas that are particularly vulnerable to exotic disease, pest and weed risks. Indigenous employees deliver services critical to Australia's biosecurity status, including quarantine inspections, facilitating scientific surveys and traditional land access, managing ranger contracts and educating communities about biosecurity and compliance with quarantine laws. In 2010-11, 46 fee-for-service arrangements were also in place with Indigenous communities in high-risk areas across northern Australia.

Tjuwanpa rangers at Ntaria, NT: (left to right) Aaron Meneri, Christian Malbunka and Billy Raggett. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

Native title

Native title holders and claimants are leveraging their legal rights to create opportunities for economic participation. The native title system has operated since January 1994. At times it has struggled to cope with the volume of claims and negotiations and the complex interplay of interests involved. For these reasons the Australian Government has been advancing a process of native title reform, aimed at speedier resolution of claims, facilitating alternative means of settling claims, and making sure that Indigenous people get longer term benefits from the agreements negotiated under the system.

These important reforms are part of the systemic strengthening of foundations, identified as a priority action under the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy.

CASE STUDY

Caring for country: Rangers and the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy

Indigenous rangers and biosecurity staff are providing essential services in some of Australia's most sensitive environments

The Waanyi Garawa and Garawa rangers are employed on a Working on Country project run by the Northern Land Council. Beginning in late 2008, the project employs and trains seven full-time rangers to manage the 16,000 square kilometres of Aboriginal Land Trust land in the Gulf of Carpentaria on behalf of traditional owners.

In October 2011 they won a Northern Territory Landcare Aware for their achievements in reinstating a traditional fire regime across Waanyi and Garawa country. Prior to 2008, the region had been plagued for at least 15 years by frequent large and hot wildfires late in the dry season. These fires were up to 18,000 square kilometres in size, burnt across property boundaries, and were having a major impact on the region's biodiversity, cultural sites, infrastructure and pastoral values.

During the early dry season (before the end of June) in the years from 2009 to 2011, the rangers worked hard in close collaboration with local communities to reinstate a traditional fire regime. Using a blend of modern methods (for example, helicopters) and traditional ecological knowledge, the program has been putting in place a prescribed program of patch burning.

is staff of the Northern Australia Quarantine Strategy combine caring for and traditional knowledge with biosecurity work. Their commitment to environment, affinity with community and positive attitude are exemplified by Titom Nona, Biosecurity Officer on Badu Island in Torres Strait and James 'Jimmy' Bond, Community Team Leader at Bamaga on the tip of Cape York, Qld.



Jimmy Bond (above) helping with cattle monitoring and Titom Nona (below left) with mosquito traps in critical biosecurity areas in far north Queensland. Photos: NAQS.

"The importance of my biosecurity role really hit home for me and my community in 1995 when there was a Japanese encephalitis outbreak on Badu," Titom says. "The outbreak claimed the lives of two community members — sadly, one was a child. Two other community members also fell ill but survived.

"My role included advising of risks posed by keeping pigs in the community as they carried the disease and were the source of the outbreak. This was very challenging as keeping pigs is part of our traditional way of life. The community started a piggery to keep all of our pigs and I assisted in monitoring for the disease by taking weekly blood samples from the pigs."

Jimmy Bond helps to coordinate sentinel cattle bleeding at Seisia and other actions to check for the presence of exotic animal diseases.

"We also do other duties here in Bamaga, such as inspecting goods moving from the quarantine zones in Torres Strait — and we do a lot of public awareness with local people. Our community work is vital to our success and we do our best to give people the information they need," Jimmy says.

"I am an outdoor sort of person. I love the bush — the land and the sea. My work is just an extension of my life."

Additional funds of \$50.1 million over four years were provided from 2009-10 to strengthen Native Title Representative Bodies (or equivalent bodies representing native title claimants) and to improve the rate of claim resolution. The Australian Government is also participating with the States and Territories in a Joint Working Group on Indigenous Land Settlements to promote and facilitate broader land settlements and benefits from native title agreements.

In 2009 the Native Title Amendment Act gave the Federal Court a central role in managing claims. The court has been prioritising its caseload, publishing lists of matters capable of resolution within shorter timeframes. Agreement has also been reached with the Northern Territory Government and the two land councils representing native title claimants on a short-form process for dealing with claims over Northern Territory pastoral leases. As a result there has been a notable increase in the number of claims resolved through consent between the different parties, rather than litigation. During 2010-11 there were a total of 30 determinations of native title (including four negative), compared with ten determinations in 2009-10. There were 26 consent determinations in 2010-11 (including two conditional determinations), compared to nine in 2009-10.

The additional resources provided to representative bodies have enabled them to rise to the challenge of representing their clients within a more streamlined system. The Australian Government is addressing a critical shortage of experienced anthropologists who assist claimants in identifying traditional ties to land claimed.

A grant program has been supporting the training and placement of anthropologists to undertake native title field work and strengthening links with academic anthropology. As the native title system matures, anthropologists are increasingly involved in negotiation of complex native title agreements.

Negotiated agreements, including consent determinations, open more opportunities for economic development. In 2010-11 several major agreements have been finalised that are likely to provide quite substantial benefits to affected communities. The agreement on the Kimberley Liquefied Natural Gas processing hub makes provision for \$1.5 billion in benefits including a range of employment, training and other economic opportunities over time. A \$2 billion agreement has secured the Pilbara operations of Rio Tinto with similar flow-on benefits for local people.

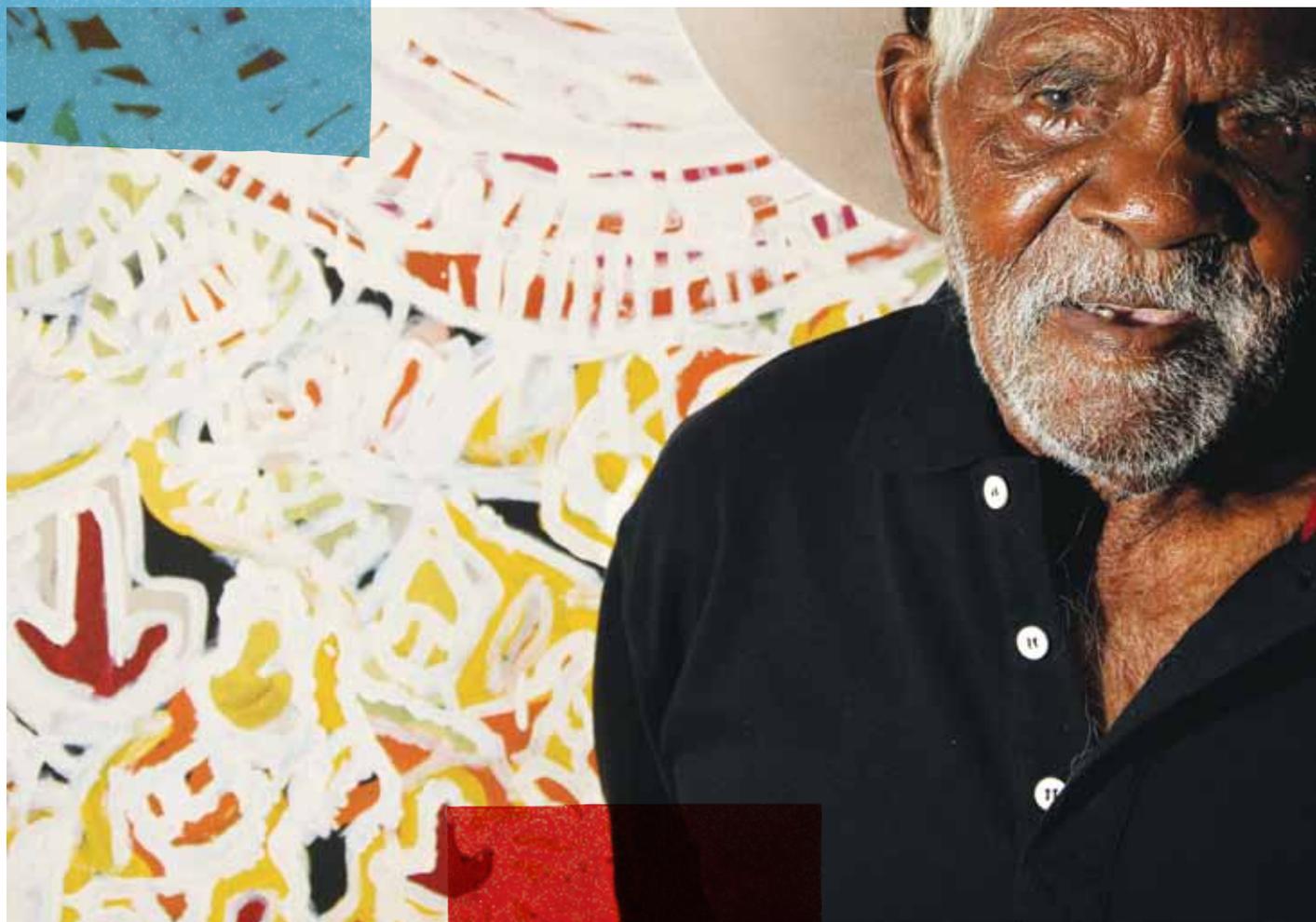
In Victoria, the Australian Government is supporting an innovative approach to native title under the State Government's Traditional Owner Settlement Act, releasing \$6 million to the State in 2011 for the settlement of two claims that provide wider economic and social benefits for two groups of Indigenous people.

Given significant increases in the number and value of native title agreements, the Australian Government is concerned to promote best practice in agreement making. Agreements need to be workable, sustainable and more transparent.

Cultural enterprises

Indigenous people are producing some of the most striking contemporary art in Australia, much of it originating in Indigenous-owned art centres in remote areas. The Government has increased funding for the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program which assists peak bodies, art centres and other organisations involved in the production, promotion and marketing of Indigenous art. Extra funding has been made available for professional development for artists, art centre managers and board members. The aim is to build a sustainable and high-quality Indigenous visual arts sector, on a base of stable and profitable Indigenous art centres. In 2011-12 the program has funded 98 activities to date, supporting around 6500 artists working out of more than 80 art centres.

To ensure that artists and their families can benefit from the strong commercial demand for Indigenous art, the Australian Government facilitated the development of an Indigenous Art Code. The need for a commercial code of conduct was one of the central recommendations of the 2007 Senate Inquiry report *Indigenous Art – Securing the Future*. The code was developed consultatively, and agreed in August 2009. A public company, Indigenous Art Code Limited (IartC), has been set up to administer the code, with operational funding and secretariat support from the Australian Government.



Dickie Minyintiri with his work *Kanyalakutjina* (Euro tracks) which won the 28th Telstra National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2011. Dickie Minyintiri works at Australia's oldest Indigenous art centre, Ernabella Arts, in Pukatja in northern South Australia. Ernabella is a non-profit organisation; income from sales is shared between its 50 artist members and the costs of running the business. The income helps the artists and their families as well as strengthening culture and community. In 2011–12, the Australian Government provided \$100,000 to Ernabella Arts through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program. Photo: Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory/OFTA.

Indigenous artists are also benefiting from the resale royalty scheme for visual artists that began in June 2010. This ensures that, following eligible commercial resales, Australian visual artists receive a direct financial benefit as the market value of their work increases. The first 18 months of the scheme generated more than \$300,000 in royalties for Indigenous artists.

The Indigenous Contemporary Music Action Plan, an initiative of the Culture Ministers' Council, has given rise to the Breakthrough program which funds emerging

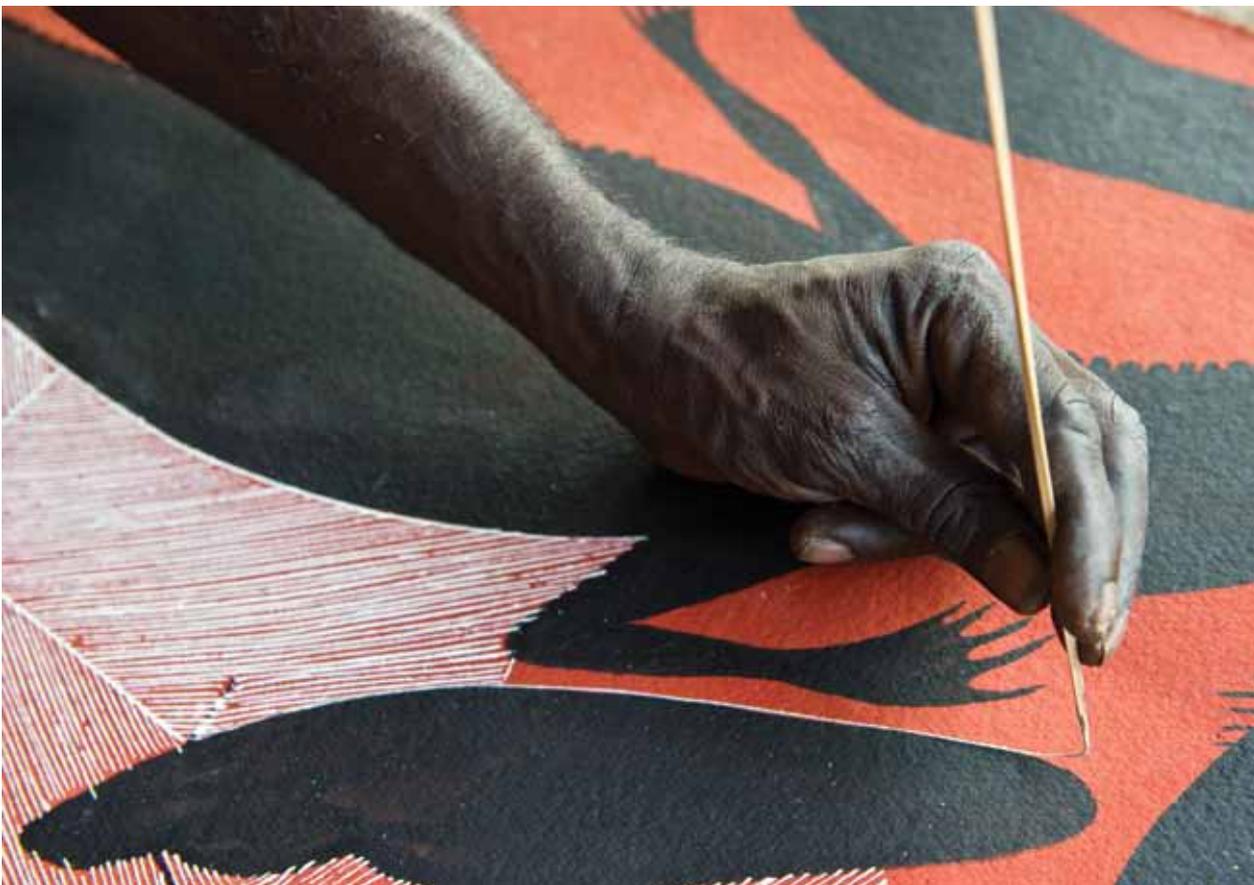
Injalak Arts at Gunbalanya, NT, is one of many art centres that are generating income and strengthening culture in remote Indigenous communities. Injalak received \$150,000 in Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support funding in 2011-12. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

Indigenous musicians and bands to produce a high-quality recording of original tracks suitable for broadcasting and commercial release.

The Indigenous Employment Initiative is providing jobs in Indigenous arts, culture, language and broadcasting organisations in regional and remote areas. Employees are engaged in a range of roles— for example, community media officers, arts workers, gallery assistants, broadcasting technicians and language assistants. Around \$20 million is invested annually to support more than 600 jobs for Indigenous people in arts and culture sectors, providing important social and economic benefits to individuals and communities. This is another example of the conversion of CDEP positions to full-time employment.

Digital connections

The digital economy offers obvious benefits to Indigenous people, especially those living in remote communities. Better telecommunications can assist Indigenous people to take advantage of educational, social and cultural opportunities, and they are fundamental to economic development. The Indigenous Communications Program is helping to ensure people in remote communities have access to a telephone. Over the four years from 2009-10, the program is providing fixed satellite community phones or mobile satellite handsets to around 300 remote Indigenous communities that do not currently have access to a public telephone, along with ongoing maintenance of around 550 existing Indigenous community telephones.



104 | The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Public Internet Access is increasing internet connections across remote Australia as well as training people to use online technology. The four-year agreement, which ends on 30 June 2013, has a target of new or improved access for 100 communities, of which 58 had been connected by June 2011. Training had been provided in 72 communities, well over the target of 50 over the life of the agreement.

Welfare reform and financial management

The Australian Government's agenda for welfare reform is contributing to Indigenous people's wellbeing and encouraging personal responsibility and participation in the wider economy. This report has already outlined the main measures in place across Australia.

To complement these welfare-reform measures, money-management services are being delivered in remote locations with high Indigenous populations. Education and intensive coaching are available so people can make more informed financial decisions, budget for their families' needs and use technology such as automatic teller machines and internet banking. Supplementing the network of training providers, MoneyMob Talkabout is a mobile service operating in the Northern Territory that tells the 'story of



money' in an educational and entertaining way. To 30 June 2011, 3021 people had participated in activities during visits to 73 remote communities and 150 school sessions and 56 community sessions had been conducted.

Service-delivery reform in the welfare system

Wider reforms of service delivery in the welfare system will also assist Indigenous people. The 2011 Budget provided \$74.4 million to fund case coordination trials over four years. This more intensive approach responds to one of the key challenges of service delivery, that the most vulnerable people do not get access to services commensurate to their needs.

Staff of the Department of Human Services will work with customers to help them identify their needs, goals and aspirations and establish a plan of action to link them to a range of services.

Case coordination will be established in 19 locations in 2011-12, including the Remote Service Delivery site of Walgett in New South Wales, increasing to 34 locations in 2012-13 and 44 locations in 2013-14. Twelve of the 19 trial sites scheduled for 2011-12 have commenced operations. Approximately 10 per cent of customers receiving case coordination to date are Indigenous.

Across Australia there are nine Local Connections to Work sites in operation assisting disadvantaged young people and those who have been unemployed for three years or more. At November 2011, around 7.5 per cent of their clients were Indigenous.

Staff of the Department of Human Services/Centrelink are working with Indigenous people around Australia to encourage participation in the wider economy. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Safe communities

All Australians should live without violence and fear. Family violence is a national problem, but evidence shows that Indigenous people are more likely to suffer violence and abuse than other Australians, in particular Indigenous children who are consistently over-represented in child-protection systems.

The Australian Government has a strong commitment to ensuring that Indigenous women and children are supported to thrive in safe families and communities. Indigenous people are themselves increasingly calling on government to help them to tackle alcohol abuse, provide effective responses to crises, support vulnerable families and children, change attitudes and behaviours and invest in the skills of local people who are showing leadership against violence.

An Indigenous Safe Communities Strategy will be developed with State and Territory Governments in consultation with Indigenous Australians and key stakeholders from 2012. The strategy, expected to be implemented from 2013, will represent a commitment by governments to work with Indigenous people to improve community safety.

Meanwhile significant progress is being made to support Indigenous community safety through national commitments such as the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, agreed by COAG in April 2009; the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework, announced in November 2009 to address the complex issues that mark the interaction between Indigenous people and the justice system; and the National Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, announced in February

2011. The latter establishes a long-term direction for collaborative efforts by all levels of government to develop community-led solutions to preventing violence.

The Indigenous Family Safety Agenda is a sub-set of this wider effort, funded by the Australian Government and targeting problems specific to Indigenous people. Launched in 2010, it provides a coherent policy framework aimed at addressing alcohol abuse, establishing a more effective police presence, strengthening social norms against violence and coordinating support services to aid the recovery of people who experience violence.

Left to right: Elfrieda McLean, Noel Raggett and Vivienne Entata in front of Ntaria safe house, one of 22 safe places provided by the Australian Government across the Northern Territory. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.



106 | Community safety has also been a major focus of the Australian Government's work in the Northern Territory. The need to protect children drove the launch of the Northern Territory Emergency Response, in the light of findings of the 2007 *Little Children are Sacred* report. Since 2007 legislated measures have been in place to help make Territory communities safer, including bans on alcohol, bans on sexually explicit and violent material and controls on publicly funded computers. Other measures have provided extra police and police stations, night patrols, safe houses, child-protection workers and violence counselling services.

Progress against the plan

Expanded services

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children sets out an ambitious long-term effort to improve the health and safety of children and families. All Indigenous-related targets in the 2009-12 action plan are being met, including the Children and Family Centres and the Communities for Children – Indigenous Parenting Services that are reported under the Early Childhood building block.

The Indigenous Family Safety Program aims to raise awareness and reduce acceptance of family violence, assist Indigenous communities to deal with violence

and expand access to support services. In 2011-12 more than 100 communities across the country are benefiting from more than \$8 million for projects under the program. This includes eight one-off projects in regional communities and 32 projects to continue providing Indigenous family safety services including counselling and mediation services, anger management courses, and men's, women's and youth groups.

Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women's Shelter Inc. is an example of the type of organisation funded by the Indigenous Family Safety Program. It delivers outreach services to Indigenous children, women and men affected by violence. In 2010-11 around

CASE STUDY

Indigenous Family Safety Program: Emily's experience

Sixteen-year old Emily [name changed for privacy reasons] is back on track after a Perth hospital referred her to the Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Service.

At the time of referral, Emily was using drugs and alcohol, and had threatened suicide. She was also in a violent and abusive relationship with a man who had major drug and alcohol issues. While in this relationship, Emily became estranged from her parents and friends. She missed school regularly and had financial problems related to her alcohol and drug use.

A number of counselling sessions were arranged with Yorgum and Emily agreed to engage with her counsellor and work through her issues one at a time. The counsellor identified therapeutic practices (art therapy) and cultural ways (relating to language, identity, and kinship) that would be beneficial to Emily's healing.

A case plan was developed suited to Emily's needs, age and understanding. The counsellor provided a safe, confidential and culturally appropriate space for the two to work together. Open communication with the hospital, the school, child-protection authorities and Emily's parents was integral to the case-management plan.

Emily worked with her counsellor to meet all the requirements of the plan. Emily was able to realise how much control her boyfriend had over her. She identified the behavioural triggers that led to her suicide attempts and drug and alcohol use. She could see that her relationship with her boyfriend was not healthy.

She has since returned to school and reconnected with her family, teachers and friends.

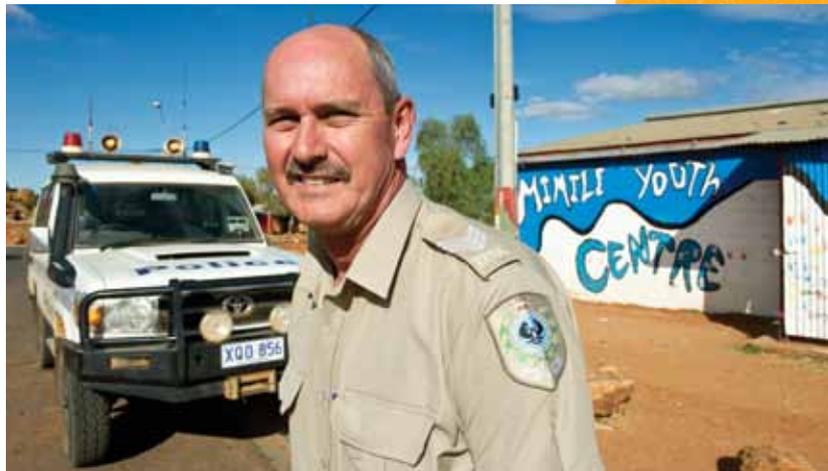
Emily is now a happy 16-year-old girl who is preparing for exams, and having sleepovers, going shopping and going to the movies with her friends.

Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Service is a community-controlled organisation with strong roots in Perth's Nyoongar community. It offers counselling to Aboriginal children who have experienced or witnessed family violence or abuse, Link Up services for members of the Stolen Generations, support for Aboriginal grandmothers' groups and community education and development programs. Trained counsellors, a psychologist and an art therapist work for the organisation and all are Aboriginal. The service arose from a group of women who yarned under a tree in 1991; they were concerned about family violence and its consequences for their community. Nyoongar and Aboriginal English are used routinely in the service.

200 men were helped by the Indigenous Men's Outreach Service which provides men's group programs and individual counselling. Around 1800 women and 800 children came into contact with the Indigenous Women's Outreach Service in 2010-11, via phone, SMS, home visits or participation in programs and workshops. The service delivers case-management support and educational programs focused on life skills, good decision making and raising healthy children. The organisation reports that past clients are now settled into homes and using the problem-solving skills they have gained to deal with the issues and pressures they are facing.

In the Northern Territory the Family Support Package is providing a coordinated response to Indigenous family violence across a number of remote communities. The package funds 22 safe places (women's and men's) in 15 communities as well as Darwin and Alice Springs, a Mobile Child Protection Team and Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Workers in 13 remote communities. The latter provide a culturally appropriate liaison point with the child-protection system and other support services. From January to June 2011 the now fully staffed Mobile Child Protection Team undertook 157 visits to communities and was involved in 1223 matters.

Measures to reduce violence and dysfunction are a key part of the Alice Springs Transformation Plan. In December 2011 a \$3 million pilot project was announced to develop an integrated approach to family violence, linking government and local organisations such as the Alice Springs Women's Shelter, Tangentyere Council, the Central Australia Aboriginal Congress and the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara



(NPY) Women's Council. The project will teach young people about respectful relationships and promote behaviour change among offenders.

Child-protection income management is in place across the Northern Territory as well as parts of Western Australia (see page 55). The extension of this measure to the Northern Territory was part of the Australian Government's response to the *Growing Them Strong, Together* report, which highlighted deficiencies in the Territory's child-protection system. The Australian Government provided \$34 million to strengthen alcohol controls in the Northern Territory, expand the child-protection workforce and provide new more intensive family-support services, as reported under the Early Childhood building block.

Better law-enforcement

Across Australia the National Indigenous Intelligence Task Force, part of the Australian Crime Commission, works to collect and analyse evidence on violence and child abuse committed against Indigenous people. From 1 July 2010 to 30 September 2011 the task force conducted 71 examinations and issued 175 notices to produce documents. The task force has

The Australian Government has funded an expanded police presence in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, SA. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

increased our understanding of the nature and extent of violence and child abuse. Intelligence is shared with law-enforcement agencies and government departments.

The Australian Government's Petrol Sniffing Strategy is working in regions of remote Australia to reduce the incidence and impact of petrol sniffing. The strategy includes more active and visible policing through the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID), with units based in Alice Springs and Katherine in the Northern Territory and Marla in South Australia. The units target and disrupt the trafficking of licit and illicit substances. Dog operations units are located in Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin and work collaboratively with the SAID teams. In the 18 months to December 2011, the teams laid 143 charges or summonses for drug, alcohol and kava offences, and executed 289 search warrants. Large quantities of alcohol, amphetamines, cannabis, kava and other substances were seized, along with 20 vehicles and significant amounts of cash.

CASE STUDY

Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk

First established in 2006 in Alice Springs as part of the Australian Government's Petrol Sniffing Strategy, the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk — or SAID — has expanded over the past five years to include dog operations units.

SAID and the dog units work in the remote cross-border region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory to gather intelligence on suppliers and criminal networks involved in the trafficking of substances and to coordinate policing operations to disrupt trafficking into remote Aboriginal communities.

Inspector Dale Davies is the Police Operations Manager for Regional Western Australia and manages SAID operations throughout the State: "The State has invested in remote policing through the establishment of a number of multi-functional facilities situated in remote communities in Western Australia. Through SAID, the Western Australian police in the three police districts, Goldfields Esperance, Pilbara and the Kimberley, are able to work closely with Northern Territory and South Australian police to target the people who are supplying drugs and alcohol to remote communities."

The units rely on information from a network of community-based organisations to stem the flow of illicit drugs, alcohol and petrol.

Blair McFarland, co-manager of the Central Australian Youth Link Up Service, a petrol sniffing prevention and youth advocacy program based at Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs, talks about a recent incident: "Last week we received a report of an adult supplying petrol to two minors. We arranged for the family of the children to speak with SAID officers and within 24 hours the alleged dealer had been arrested and charged. We know from our contacts on the ground at remote communities that SAID disrupts supply by arresting dealers."

One of the strengths of the SAID program is the amount of community goodwill and support it receives.

Andrea Mason is coordinator of the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Women's Council, which delivers youth, disability, carer respite, aged care and other services across remote communities in the tri-state region: "SAID plays a vital role in the Central Australian region by deterring traffickers ... the women are very supportive of the use of the sniffer dogs and roadblocks to intercept traffickers."

A current officer says: "It is satisfying to know that community members in these remote localities appreciate and support the efforts of SAID."



Dog operations of the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk. Photos: NT Police.

In the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in northern South Australia, three permanent police stations were established or upgraded in 2009-10 as part of the Australian Government's response to the Mullighan Inquiry into child sexual abuse on the Lands.

In the Northern Territory there was no police presence in many remote communities before the Northern Territory Emergency Response. Serious crime often went unreported. Since 2009, 60 extra Northern Territory police recruits have started work. The police station has been upgraded in five communities, and 17 'Themis' – or temporary – stations are operational in remote communities. Five new permanent police stations are being built; the first complex opened at Yarralin in April 2011.

The *Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation Report 2011* shows that the increased police presence has resulted in an increase of incidents reported and subsequent convictions. However, while recorded crime has gone up, community survey results show that people in communities are feeling safer than they did before the Northern Territory Emergency Response. Sizeable proportions of both community members and service providers surveyed for the evaluation said that their communities have become safer.

Since July 2011, eight Community Engagement Police Officers have been assigned to Remote Service Delivery communities in the Northern Territory. They are focusing on building relationships of trust with local people and service providers to proactively identify and address the causes of crime.

The Australian Government has also funded an expansion in night patrols across the Northern Territory. Night patrols

are community-based services that assist people at risk of either causing harm or becoming the victims of harm, to help break the cycle of violence and crime in remote communities. The patrols now operate across 80 communities, employing around 350 local Indigenous people. In 2011 they assisted people on 120,000 occasions. Night patrols promote Indigenous leadership, governance and ownership of community safety. Both the *Northern Territory Emergency Response Evaluation Report 2011* and the Stronger Futures consultations indicated that local people were very supportive of night patrols.

Alcohol management

Alcohol fuels much of the violence and dysfunction that harms people and communities in the Northern Territory and elsewhere.

In addition to the widespread alcohol bans, the Government is working with the Northern Territory Government to encourage communities to develop appropriate solutions to alcohol-related harm through Alcohol Management Plans. Draft plans are complete

for 17 communities, with 26 communities participating in community engagement to build plans.

Community education programs and harm minimisation initiatives have been funded in Darwin, Alice Springs, Groote Eylandt, Binjari and Borroloola to raise community awareness of the consequences of risky drinking as well as providing support and brief interventions for those needing assistance. Harm-minimisation initiatives being undertaken by the Northern Territory Department of Justice include multi-media awareness campaigns and products on unsafe drinking and grog running.

In Alice Springs the Australian Government has funded the buyback of two takeaway liquor licences and the installation of street lighting in 'hot spots' to help to reduce anti-social behaviour. A Senior Community Worker has been employed to address the long-term problems of alcohol-related anti-social behaviour and entrenched disadvantage.

The Australian Government is also supporting the Northern Territory Government's *Enough is Enough* alcohol reforms, providing \$1.5 million to implement the

Zachariah Patterson (left) and Alexander Tasman, night-patrol workers at Lajamanu, NT.
Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.



Banned Drinker Register. The Banned Drinker Register has been rolled out Territory-wide to takeaway alcohol outlets to help identify problem drinkers and enforce bans.

Tackling alcohol abuse was a focus of last year's Stronger Futures consultations and the proposed Stronger Futures legislation strengthens measures to combat alcohol-related harm in the Territory (see page 32).

Across Australia, the Breaking the Cycle election commitment is providing \$20 million over three years from 2011-12 to 2013-14 to support new community solutions for fighting alcohol and substance abuse in Indigenous communities, including development of alcohol and substance abuse management plans.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Substance Use Initiative funds culturally appropriate substance-use prevention, early intervention, treatment, rehabilitation and aftercare. In 2011-12, the initiative will provide about \$67.4 million for drug and alcohol services in regional and remote areas.



Youth in Communities

Diversionary programs play an important role in improving community safety. Through the Youth in Communities initiative the Australian Government is implementing a comprehensive youth strategy in the Northern Territory that diverts young people from risky behaviours and promotes pathways to better health, personal wellbeing and participation in school and work.

Sixteen communities have improved access to youth services and 25 youth workers (including Indigenous youth worker trainees) are employed in priority communities. Four of the five infrastructure projects under this initiative to expand the facilities available for young people are complete. A range of programs and activities are being delivered by service providers, including case management, youth camps, peer mentoring, music, art, sport and cultural activities and alternative education programs. More than 2420 Aboriginal young people have attended the activities provided.

The community-designed sign at Morris Soak town camp, Alice Springs, NT, advises that alcohol is banned. Photo: FaHCSIA.

Governance and leadership

Governance refers to the mechanisms through which communities and wider societies organise themselves to achieve goals. If Indigenous communities, organisations and corporations are not well governed, they will not be effective. They will not be able to deal properly with government and the wider community, make good decisions and plan for the future. Good leadership is closely connected to good governance. Individuals can lead in their families, in their communities or by how they live their lives. The quality of Indigenous governance and leadership sets the environment in which efforts across all the building blocks will make a difference.

The Australian Government is investing in Indigenous governance and leadership at the personal, community/organisation and national level. It also seeks advice from Indigenous people at all levels and through many forums.

Progress against the plan

Developing individuals

The Australian Government's Indigenous Leadership Program aims to develop the leadership capacity of Indigenous men, women and young people aged 18 years and over.

Since the program began in 2004, more than 5000 Indigenous people have participated, embarking on a personal leadership journey to develop the skills to become strong

leaders within their families and communities. Participants on the program benefit from an interactive learning environment where they are encouraged to develop a vision for the future and to plan to achieve that vision.

The Government is also continuing to provide training and development for Indigenous young people in remote areas through the Defence Indigenous Development Program at a cost of \$25.1 million over four years from 2011-12, to improve their employability and introduce them to careers in Defence.

Youth activities at The Gap Youth Centre in Alice Springs, NT. Photo: FaHCSIA





At Lajamanu community, NT. Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

Local capacity building

The Remote Service Delivery National Partnership Agreement has among its aims to improve governance and leadership within the 29 priority locations and related Indigenous community organisations.

In 2010-11, leadership workshops were held in seven of the 15 Remote Service Delivery communities in the Northern Territory and two communities in South Australia. These workshops are held over three days and include modules from the national Indigenous Leadership Program, presentations on the Government's Closing the Gap reform agenda, and other leadership and governance issues as articulated in the Local Implementation Plan for each community.

To facilitate the development of Indigenous research and planning capability at the community level, 22 Community Planning, Research and Development Projects have begun in Remote Service Delivery communities and a further seven are in the early scoping phase. The projects support communities to identify local research and planning priorities in a culturally informed way so good advice is provided to government on systemic issues at the local level.

A framework has been agreed for the development and delivery of Local Community Awareness Programs in each Remote Service Delivery community. Indigenous people will share their local knowledge and experiences through a facilitated series of discussion groups involving community leaders and government staff.

Six leadership workshops were held in other communities in the Northern Territory during 2010-11. Local capacity building has been one of the priorities of Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory, and governance one of the key topics for discussion in the Stronger Futures consultations (see page 30). There was a strong call in many communities to be more involved in decision making, for people in communities to work better together, and for each community to speak with one voice about their concerns and needs.

Corporate governance

The Registrar of Indigenous Corporations is an independent statutory office holder who administers the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act). The Registrar supports and regulates corporations by advising them on how to incorporate, providing training in corporate governance, and by making sure they comply with the law.

During 2010-11 the Registrar provided corporate governance training to 838 people from 325 Indigenous corporations across Australia. The Registrar also conducted 72 formal examinations which check the financial and governance standards within corporations. The information gathered is the basis for continuing work with Indigenous corporations to build their corporate governance to a high standard.

Currently there are more than 2300 Indigenous corporations registered under the CATSI Act. There has been a significant improvement in their reporting compliance with the legislation, increasing from 46 per cent in 2004-05 to 96 per cent in 2009-10.

Training programs are designed to increase corporate governance knowledge, skills and accountability within Indigenous corporations. Training is available to directors, members and key staff by way of residential training in the Registrar's *Managing in Two Worlds* program and in workshops delivered in community through corporation-specific training programs. The content is targeted at participants who may have literacy, language and numeracy issues or whose first language is not English.



In addition to the increased corporate governance training in 2010-11, the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations delivered 22 Introduction to Corporate Governance workshops, four Building Strong Stores workshops and started two Certificate IV in Business (Governance) courses across Australia. The Registrar is also responsible for governance training under Local Implementation Plans in the four Remote Service Delivery sites in Western Australia.

A wide range of other services are provided to Indigenous corporations including mediation and dispute resolution services, access to *pro bono* legal assistance and recruitment assistance.

Certificate IV in Business (Governance), the class of 2011: (left to right standing) Registrar Anthony Beven, Alison Williams, Karyn Sam, Linda Wapau, Rosemary Norman-Hill, Deborah Foley, Christian Lugnan, Lee Chilman, Larry Foley, Glen Crump and facilitator Cathrena McRae; (left to right seated) Mabel Quakawoot, Peter Duncan and Denyse Potts; absent, Anne Towney. The Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations offers a range of accredited and non-accredited training courses in corporate governance which are open to all directors, future directors, members and staff of corporations registered under the CATSI Act. The courses are fully funded by the Australian Government. Photo: The Learning Workshop/ORIC.

Registrar of Indigenous Corporations: LawHelp

LawHelp is a *pro bono* legal scheme designed to assist not-for-profit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations registered under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006*.

LawHelp had its genesis in a conversation in mid-2009 between the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations and the Australian Government Solicitor. Both saw an urgent need for the provision of high-quality *pro bono* legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander corporations, particularly those in regional and remote Australia. For a number of reasons and through no fault of their own, corporations in remote areas find it difficult, sometimes impossible, to access legal assistance.

The Registrar of Indigenous Corporations is principally a regulator, but his office is also tasked with building the capacity of corporations and improving governance. The Registrar's office is committed to lending real practical assistance as and when it is needed.

A number of Australia's leading law firms and practitioners have signed up to LawHelp and give their time and expertise free of charge. As the scheme matures it is likely more firms will join. At present LawHelp is indebted to:

- Allens Arthur Robinson
- Australian Government Solicitor – founding legal services provider
- Blake Dawson
- Clayton Utz
- DLA Piper Australia
- Jackson McDonald
- Minter Ellison Lawyers
- Peter Tree SC, Derwent and Tamar Chambers, Tasmania
- TressCox
- Williams, Love and Nicol.

LawHelp is administered by a secretariat in the Registrar's office. The administration of LawHelp, the assessment process as well as the resulting legal services are all provided to corporations without cost.

Corporations can get assistance across a wide range of legal areas — for example, interpreting the law, negotiation of contracts, employment issues, basic tax issues, consumer protection and trade practices, intellectual property and real property matters.

Officially launched in November 2010, LawHelp has received 30 applications, of which 21 have been successfully referred, five are pending and four have been assessed as unsuitable for assistance.

For more information, go to www.oric.gov.au



At the launch of LawHelp in Canberra, ACT: Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, Anthony Beven; Indigenous Affairs Minister, Jenny Macklin; and local elder Agnes Shea. Photo: ORIC.

National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

The National Congress held its first national meeting in June 2011. Its first report, *Building Our Foundations*, from the inaugural delegates meeting has been published to start a national conversation among congress members, communities, organisations and governments. Key subject matter advisory groups have been established within the Congress, and it co-chairs the National Health Leadership Forum with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. The Congress is currently negotiating an engagement framework with the Australian Government.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance is one of six National Women's Alliances announced in March 2010 to provide an engagement mechanism between the Australian Government and Australian women. The alliance is receiving \$600,000 over three years. In the first year of funding, 2010-11, the alliance was established, set up a governance framework, recruited members and developed an advocacy action plan. The alliance enables Indigenous women to share information, identify issues from their own communities and raise these concerns with government.

Electoral participation

2012 is the 50th anniversary of the passage of legislation giving Indigenous Australians the right to vote in Federal elections. While achieving legal equality in electoral participation in 1962, in practice Indigenous Australians are significantly less likely to enrol to vote, less likely to vote, and more likely to vote informally than other Australians. The Australian Government believes that participation in Australia's electoral and democratic processes is important if Indigenous people are to take responsibility for their futures and hold all levels of government to account for their performance in Closing the Gap.

In 2009 the Australian Electoral Commission received \$13 million over four years for the Indigenous Electoral Participation Program. Twenty-five field officers across Australia, of whom 18 are Indigenous, undertake face-to-face education about electoral matters. They are supported by Indigenous Electoral Awareness Officers who assist in delivering electoral education. The aim is to improve Indigenous people's knowledge of electoral matters, increase enrolment levels, and reduce informal voting. Positive Indigenous participation in democratic processes is particularly important as Australia considers amendments to the Constitution to recognise Indigenous people.





Australian Electoral Commission field officer Jamie Healey helping voter Corrine Scott. Photo: AEC.

CASE STUDY

Indigenous Electoral Participation Program: Indigenous voters count

"Although the next federal election is scheduled for the second half of 2013, it's still important for Indigenous people to get themselves on the electoral roll so they can vote in upcoming State, Territory and local government elections."

Torres Strait Islander Jamie Healey is a field officer with the Indigenous Electoral Participation Program, run by the Australian Electoral Commission. He's working across northern Queensland helping his fellow Indigenous Australians to understand the electoral process.

"I feel this is just one little way I can give back," Jamie says.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hear about how their elders fought for voting rights, he finds they are keen to register and to vote.

During a visit to Yarrabah, a small community south-east of Cairns, Jamie got to know the residents and their attitudes to voting.

He found the idea of registering to vote on the Australian Electoral Roll was well understood in Yarrabah, with most people on the roll. So he turned his attention to addressing any concerns enrolled voters had about why they should or shouldn't vote.

"Once we spoke to them about the history of Indigenous voting and explained that it's their democratic right to vote, it opened their eyes," he says.

"I explained voting is what we fought for, that our old people had worked hard for this. And that brings the young people on board because they can then understand the importance of voting."

He says Yarrabah's leaders are enthusiastic about educating their community on voting, but what struck him most was the sense of pride in the community's elders.

"I was talking with a gentleman about voting and the conversation made me really proud," he recalls.

"At voting time this man gets dressed in his Sunday best and sets out on the long walk to his local polling booth in Gordonvale, which is a good 20 kilometres away. Voting is such an important event to him."

"From my experience, I think the messages are getting through."

The Indigenous Electoral Participation Program began in April 2010 and includes not just extensive field work but also programs for schools, TAFEs and communities; prison visits; sponsorship of small community activities; a future leaders program; and an ambassador program. It also supports Indigenous employment in Australia's electoral processes.

For more information, go to www.aec.gov.au/Voting/Indigenous_vote

CASE STUDY

Torres Strait Regional Authority: Seagrass monitoring

A seagrass monitoring project in the Torres Strait, Queensland, is building the capacity of Islanders to manage their natural resources while providing employment for land and sea rangers. The project has promoted information sharing and collaboration between scientists and Torres Strait communities.

The Torres Strait supports some of the largest and most diverse seagrass habitats in the world. These seagrass meadows are highly productive; some meadows can replace their entire standing crop every ten days. Monitoring of seagrass and other marine habitat is important to Torres Strait Islanders as culturally significant animals such as dugong and turtle rely on seagrass for food. Other sea creatures such as octopus, fish and shellfish also rely on seagrass habitat for breeding and nursery grounds and make up an important part of the islanders' traditional diet.

Any shift in conditions, such as an increase in sea temperature, has the potential to change the marine environment which may affect the animals that rely on seagrass and, in turn, the health and economic and cultural wellbeing of Torres Strait Islanders.

The project supports community-based monitoring of intertidal and subtidal seagrass meadows through a partnership between the Torres Strait Regional Authority Land and Sea Rangers, Tagai State College (an amalgamation of all 17 State schools in the Torres Strait) and scientists based within a Queensland Government department.

The program is funded through the Australian Government's Working on Country initiative. Twenty-one rangers are employed by the Torres Strait Regional Authority, and an additional 19 rangers are being recruited. This will ensure a ranger presence in every Torres Strait community.

Between June and December 2011, community-based seagrass monitoring was undertaken on several Torres Strait islands. The rangers and scientists were joined by more than 60 volunteers. The project includes training and provides technical support to enable Torres Strait Islanders to develop skills and knowledge to assess the condition and the extent of seagrass meadows. An atlas identifying critical intertidal habitats has been provided to all Torres Strait communities. The data collected informs the development of management options to protect these valuable habitats.

Torres Strait Regional Authority rangers monitoring seagrass. Photo: TSRA.

The rangers are being trained so they can take over the program in 2012. So far rangers are monitoring 16 sites on eight of the 17 inhabited islands. Monitoring occurs every three months so any broad changes in the seagrass brought on by seasonal changes are captured.

The program has discovered and mapped the largest continuous seagrass meadow in Australia, covering 845,000 hectares in the dugong sanctuary in the western Torres Strait. Rangers will eventually assist with annual monitoring of seagrasses within the sanctuary area.

Surveys are now underway to determine the extent to which seagrass and other marine habitats are affected by climate change.

For more information, go to www.tsra.gov.au



118 | **Portfolio bodies**

This report has highlighted the contribution of statutory authorities or Commonwealth companies that have been established for the benefit of Indigenous people and allow Indigenous board members and others to have input to government decisions. They manage important services and programs.

Indigenous museum director, Dr Dawn Casey, chairs the boards of both Indigenous Business Australia and the Indigenous Land Corporation. The deputy chair on both boards is Mr Ian Trust, chair of the Wunan Foundation in the East Kimberley in Western Australia. There are seven other Indigenous board members across these two bodies and five non-Indigenous board members. Indigenous people serve on the governing council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, chaired by Professor Mick Dodson, and on the board of Aboriginal Hostels Limited.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority has a board of 20 Indigenous people elected by their communities every four years. This board sets priorities for all Australian Government programs and funding in the Torres Strait Region.

Indigenous people also sit on many key advisory bodies, including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Equality Council, the Aboriginals Benefit Account Advisory Committee and the Expert Panel on Indigenous Constitutional Recognition. Indigenous peak organisations, such as the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages and Culture, also provide advice to government.

All the building blocks

This summary of the significant work being pursued under the building blocks shows that the Closing the Gap strategy is already making a measurable difference to what have been regarded as entrenched problems in Indigenous Australia. The transformation of Alice Springs, the advances in community safety and food security in the wider Northern Territory, the new or refurbished housing on the ground in remote Australia, the Australian Government's Education Revolution, the acceleration of private-sector support for Indigenous employment and the roll out of

the Indigenous Chronic Disease Package are all building towards achievement of the ambitious Closing the Gap targets.

The Closing the Gap framework is helping to overcome generations of disadvantage and of failed or piecemeal policy in Indigenous affairs. Closing the Gap will take time, perseverance and determination. Working with State and Territory Governments and across the community, the Australian Government is building the expectation that good change can happen, and following up this expectation with action.

Above all, Indigenous people are rising to the challenge and taking responsibility for making these changes with governments.

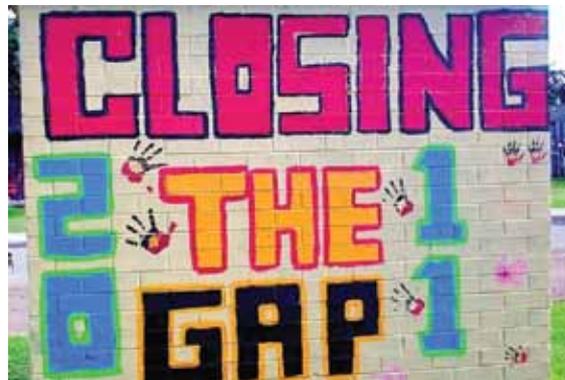


Photo: DoHA.

Chapter 5

Looking forward

In 2012 the Australian Government will continue to drive the implementation of major reforms to education, health, housing, employment and service delivery. There will be continuing strong engagement with Indigenous Australians to learn what is working and where improvements can be made.

Having undertaken extensive consultations with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, the Government will be working closely with the Northern Territory Government and Aboriginal people to develop and implement the measures that will build a better life for Indigenous Territorians.

The Government will continue to work with the South Australian Government and others on a Regional Partnership Agreement for the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands, to put in place community safety and food security measures.

The development of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan will give new energy to the Australian Government's commitment to close the gap in Indigenous health outcomes. The plan will be comprehensive, targeting not only health-specific activity but also the social determinants of health such as education and



Abigail Kris (left) and Zoe Pollock-French at the Healthy Community Day in Redfern, Sydney, NSW. Photo: DoHA.

employment. A Stakeholder Advisory Group is being established and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Equality Council will provide expert advice. The Government will be engaging closely with Indigenous people, State and Territory Governments and others in the development of the plan.

Development of the first national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy and renewal of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait

120 | Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework are related initiatives that will guide the development of policies and programs to support improved mental health for Indigenous Australians over the coming years.

The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing will continue its unprecedented investment in better housing, with more than 500 new homes and almost 1500 refurbishments to be completed during 2011-12.

Better employment and economic outcomes for Indigenous Australians will remain a key priority. Improvements to the operation of remote employment and participation services are under consideration to take account of the challenging economic environment in remote Australia. The Indigenous Economic Development Strategy will continue to drive government action, particularly in improving transitions from education into work, supporting Indigenous business through government procurement, and improving financial planning and financial literacy skills.

Ensuring that Indigenous people have access to the life chances that a quality university education provides will be another focus for 2012. The Australian Government has commissioned a review that will provide guidance on how government, the higher

education sector and Indigenous communities can work together to improve Indigenous access to and outcomes in higher education. Indigenous achievement in higher education would assist in closing the income and employment gaps, improve health outcomes, strengthen community leadership and bring intergenerational benefits.

In 2012 work will commence with State and Territory Governments on the negotiation and development of an Indigenous Safe Communities Strategy, in consultation with Indigenous Australians and key stakeholders. The strategy, expected to be implemented from 2013, will represent a commitment by governments to work with Indigenous people to improve community safety for men, women and children by reducing levels of violence, abuse and neglect, improving service coordination, providing better access to justice and improving offending, treatment and rehabilitation arrangements.

Closing the Gap will always be a work in progress; governments need to go on adjusting their strategies in response to emerging needs or in the light of evidence. The Australian Government's commitment to open and transparent reporting through the COAG Reform Council will continue, as will the commitment to listening to the views of Indigenous Australians.

The Indigenous Expenditure Report released by the Productivity Commission in February 2011 showed that only 23 per cent of the expenditure on Indigenous Australians was accounted for by Indigenous-specific programs while most (77 per cent) came from mainstream funding. Many of these mainstream services and programs are managed by State and Territory Governments. The Australian Government will

continue to work closely with the States and Territories to ensure that, for example, Indigenous children are enrolled in and attending school and Indigenous parents are engaged in their school community and Indigenous people have good access to mainstream health services.

Boosting Indigenous demand for and take up of services, particularly mainstream programs, and improving service delivery and coordination in urban and regional areas will continue to be a priority under COAG's National Urban and Regional Service Delivery Strategy for Indigenous Australians.

There are currently eight Indigenous-specific National Partnership Agreements as well as nine mainstream National Partnership Agreements that are particularly aimed at addressing disadvantage. Many of these agreements will conclude over the next 12 to 18 months, some as early as June 2012. There are also other mainstream National Partnership Agreements that contribute to outcomes for Indigenous Australians. A key focus will be ensuring that our future arrangements with the States and Territories consolidate the progress that has been made and drive continued improvement.

A major focus for the Australian Government will be continuing the dialogue with all Australians about the importance of changing our Constitution to recognise Indigenous people in our nation's founding document. Constitutional change is not determined by governments but directly by the people of Australia. Ensuring that all Australians understand the options for reform and have the opportunity to engage in discussion, ask questions, consider different views and finally come together with a common purpose is crucial if constitutional reform is to be achieved.

Front cover photography

(Top) Anna Rice.

(Bottom) Brianna Milera (right) with Jerome Mokerarinja at Yipirinya School, Alice Springs, NT.

Photos: FaHCSIA.

Back cover photograph

At school in Angurugu, Groote Eylandt, NT.

Photo: Lorrie Graham/FaHCSIA.

