

**DEPARTMENT OF FAMILIES, HOUSING, COMMUNITY SERVICES AND
INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS**

SUBMISSION TO

**THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AFFAIRS**

**INQUIRY INTO
LANGUAGE LEARNING IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES**

1. Introduction

The Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (the Department) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into language learning in Indigenous communities. The Department prepared this submission in consultation with the Departments of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C); Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR); and the Attorney-Generals (AGD). The Department is responding in relation to the Inquiry Terms of Reference:

- the contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture; and
- measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services.

As the table below indicates, departments have variously taken the lead in responding to particular Inquiry terms of reference based on allocation of policy responsibility:

- the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Office for the Arts) has responsibility for Indigenous languages policy;
- the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations has responsibility for education and English literacy programs; and
- the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs has responsibilities for:
 - coordinating policies across the Commonwealth Government in relation to Closing the Gap; and
 - Indigenous interpreters and translators.

Terms of reference	Lead agency	Consultation
1. The benefits of giving attention and recognition to Indigenous languages	PM&C (Office for the Arts)	FaHCSIA, DEEWR
2. The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture	FaHCSIA, PM&C (Office for the Arts)	DEEWR, PM&C
3. The potential benefits of including Indigenous languages in early education	DEEWR	
4. Measures to improve education outcomes in those Indigenous communities where English is a second language	DEEWR	
5. The educational and vocational benefits of ensuring English language competency amongst Indigenous communities	DEEWR	
6. Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services	FaHCSIA	AGD, DEEWR
7. The effectiveness of current maintenance and revitalisation programs for Indigenous languages	PM&C (Office for the Arts)	
8. The effectiveness of the Commonwealth Government Indigenous languages policy in delivering its objectives and relevant policies of other Australian governments	PM&C (Office for the Arts)	FaHCSIA, DEEWR

2. The contribution of Indigenous languages to Closing the Gap and strengthening Indigenous identity and culture (Terms of Reference 2)

2.1 The Closing the Gap Strategy

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) sets out the National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage (the Strategy) as a schedule to the NIRA. The foundation of the Strategy is the identification of and commitment to targets to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, and associated ‘building blocks’ or areas for action. The Strategy acknowledges the importance of Indigenous culture, engagement and positive relationships with Indigenous Australians. **Attachment A** is an excerpt from relevant sections of the NIRA schedule.

The Strategy acknowledges that culture must be recognised in actions intended to overcome Indigenous disadvantage:

“Pride in culture plays a vital role in shaping people's aspirations and choices. Efforts to Close the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage must recognise and build on the strength of Indigenous cultures and identities.”¹

In 2008, all Australian governments made a commitment to Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage and since then a comprehensive range of reforms to achieve this goal have been and continue to be implemented. Under the NIRA, COAG has agreed that six core service delivery principles be applied when designing and delivering services for Indigenous people.² Two of these principles support the use of Indigenous interpreters where appropriate: Indigenous Engagement and the Access Principle:

- *Indigenous Engagement Principle:* Engagement with Indigenous men, women, children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services:
 - (b) engaging and empowering Indigenous people who use government services and the broader Indigenous community in the design and delivery of programs and services as appropriate; and
 - (f) recognising Indigenous culture, language and identity.
- *Access principle:* Programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs. In particular, attention is to be given to:
 - (a) considering appropriate and adequate infrastructure and placement of services, including transport, information technology, telecommunications and use of interpreter services;
 - (b) minimising administrative red tape that may be a barrier to access; and
 - (c) providing adequate information regarding available programs and services.

¹http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/national_agreements/downloads/IGA_FFR_ScheduleF_National_Indigenous_Reform_Agreement_Feb_2011.doc (Page A-20)

² COAG National Indigenous Reform Agreement *page A-24*

Within the Commonwealth Government, lead agency responsibility for improving access to effective interpreter and translation services for Indigenous language speakers rests with the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. Responsibility for Indigenous language policy more broadly, including revitalisation and maintenance of Indigenous languages, rests with the Office for the Arts, in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

2.2 The evidence base

The Productivity Commission's *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011* report found that Indigenous language and Indigenous culture and law are all linked with Indigenous wellbeing. Consultations undertaken by the Productivity Commission in developing the 2011 report found that no single indicator could be used to adequately reflect the importance of culture in the lives of Indigenous people.³ The Productivity Commission concluded that loss of language and disadvantage can be linked in two main ways, finding that disadvantage may occur at:

“...an individual level through a reduction in the numbers of speakers, contributing to individual loss of culture and decreased wellbeing of remaining speakers”⁴; and
 “...an aggregate level, with the loss of distinct languages or a reduction in the ability of a community to maintain cultural practices.”⁵

Two of the six COAG Closing the Gap targets are health related: life expectancy and child mortality. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework monitors progress in closing the gap for Indigenous Australians by monitoring change across multiple determinants of health, different ways of conceptualising health outcomes and the performance of the health system as a whole.⁶

The Health Performance Framework recognises that determinants of health include environmental and socio-economic factors, community capacity, health behaviours and person-related factors. Education and employment, which comprise the remaining four COAG Closing the Gap targets, are understood in the Health Performance Framework as determinants of health. The Health Performance Framework monitors health outcomes in terms of four broad domains: health conditions; human function; life expectancy and wellbeing; and deaths. Of relevance to understanding the role of language to Closing the Gap, the Health Performance Frameworks measures human functions as well as traditional approaches to measuring health and wellbeing.⁷

³ *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators Report 2011*, 2.14

⁴ ABS Census of population and Housing found that 12% of Indigenous people in Australia reported speaking an Indigenous language at home.

⁵ National Indigenous Languages Survey report 2005 (AIATSIS and FATSIL) found that from an estimated 250 Indigenous languages before European colonisation, only around 145 languages were still spoken. The majority of these were considered ‘severely and critically endangered’.

⁶ The 2010 report against this framework can be accessed at <http://www.health.gov.au/indigenous-hpf>.

⁷ See <http://www.health.gov.au/indigenous-hpf>. 2010 report, Community function 1.14 section

In the development of the Health Performance Framework, consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and research identified the functions that are relevant to the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities to achieve greater levels of family and individual development. These functions are: connectedness to country, land, history, culture and identity (of which language is an element); resilience; leadership; having a role, structure and routine; feeling safe; and vitality. The Health Performance Framework states:

“If these functionings were improved then the potential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families to achieve better health and wellbeing would be improved. They would have greater capacity and freedom to be well.”⁸

Recent work undertaken by Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) into Indigenous wellbeing provides strong evidence of a relationship between speaking an Indigenous language and wellbeing. The Committee may wish to note CAEPR’s analysis of the ABS 2008 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey* (NATSISS).⁹ Approximately 10,000 Indigenous adults and children aged under 15 were surveyed in the 2008 NATSISS. One quarter of adults (24.7%) surveyed could either understand or speak an Indigenous language.¹⁰

CAEPR’s analysis, conducted by Dr Nicholas Biddle, found that learning an Indigenous language and participating in Indigenous cultural activities was associated with a higher level of self-reported happiness for Indigenous Australians in 2008. It found “that higher levels of education (in particular qualifications) was associated with greater language and cultural maintenance”.¹¹ Biddle’s analysis of the 2008 NATSISS concludes:

“Rather than being in conflict with mainstream notions of wellbeing, maintenance of Indigenous culture appears to support them.”¹²

This is consistent with Dockery’s analysis of the ABS NATSISS 2002 which also found a positive link between Indigenous Australians’ attachment to their traditional culture and a range of mainstream socio-economic indicators.¹³

⁸ See <http://www.health.gov.au/indigenous-hpf>. 2010 report, Community function 1.14 section

⁹ CAEPR has published their findings as the series “Measures of Indigenous Wellbeing and Their Determinants Across the Lifecourse”. The papers in this CAEPR series summarise the evidence on Indigenous wellbeing and the variation in measures of wellbeing across the lifecourse, including an examination of the role of language in wellbeing. The findings can be accessed at <http://caepr.anu.edu.au/population/lectures2011.php>. In particular, Lecture 10 “Sustainability—Land, language and culture” (Biddle N. and Swee H.) and Lecture 13 “Summary and conclusions” (Biddle N.) are relevant to the Terms of Reference of this Inquiry.

¹⁰ The CAEPR analysis of the NATSISS was commissioned and jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State governments from 2010.

¹¹ <http://caepr.anu.edu.au/population/lectures2011.php>. Lecture 10, p 18, Biddle N. and Swee, H

¹² <http://caepr.anu.edu.au/population/lectures2011.php>. Lecture 13, p 20, Biddle N.

¹³ AM Dockery, “Culture and wellbeing: The case of Indigenous Australians” Curtin University Centre for Labour Market Research DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES 09/01

The ABS is also progressively analysing the findings of NATSISS in relation to Indigenous children and youth. The ABS found that Indigenous youth in remote areas who speak an Indigenous language are less likely to experience risk factors associated with poor wellbeing. In 2008, almost half (47%) of all Indigenous youth (aged 15–24 years) in remote areas spoke an Indigenous language, and these young people were less likely to engage in high risk alcohol consumption and illicit substance use than those who did not speak an Indigenous language. They were also less likely to report being a victim of physical violence.¹⁴

Care needs to be exercised, however, in interpreting these findings on the beneficial effects of the ability to speak an Indigenous language or of other attributes of Indigenous culture. What is reported by these studies are only observed associations between variables selectively chosen as representing Indigenous culture with other outcomes, without sufficient basis to claim that the former causes the beneficial effects on the latter.

In remote Australia, English is a second or more distant language for a significant proportion of Indigenous people. The Productivity Commission's *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011* report found that Indigenous people in remote areas generally had poorer outcomes than Indigenous people in major cities and regional areas across many indicators including educational outcomes, income, hospitalisation for potentially preventable diseases and housing. The Productivity Commission concluded that:

“The relationship between remoteness and disadvantage is at least partly due to ‘the tyranny of distance’ creating barriers to accessing services and engaging with the labour market. However, remoteness can also be a proxy for other factors affecting Indigenous disadvantage, such as English language proficiency.”¹⁵

The Productivity Commission reported that in the ABS NATSISS 2002 a question about communication problems was asked of all respondents, regardless of whether or not their main language was a traditional Indigenous language. Communication problems were reported by twenty-five percent of Indigenous people surveyed whose main language was an Indigenous language; in addition, eight per cent of Indigenous people surveyed whose main language was not an Indigenous language, also reported that they had experienced communication difficulties.¹⁶

In the ABS NATSISS 2008, only people who spoke an Indigenous language as their main language were asked whether they had problems communicating with service providers. Twenty-seven per cent of people who spoke an Indigenous language as their main language reported difficulty communicating with service providers. Communication difficulties were reported more frequently by people who lived in remote locations and by older people.¹⁷

¹⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics 4725.0 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing: A focus on children and youth, Apr 2011

¹⁵ Productivity Commission, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2011*, section 3.6

¹⁶ Productivity Commission, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2011* report; section 11.42

¹⁷ Productivity Commission *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2011* report; section 11.42

Building on the strengths of Indigenous culture and identity can also support Closing the Gap reforms. The evidence base indicates that strong language and culture contributes to the overall well-being of Indigenous individuals and families, including young people. There appears to be a positive association between formal education, including qualifications, and maintenance of Indigenous languages and cultures. However, while strong language and culture is an asset, if this is accompanied by lack of English language proficiency, barriers persist for Indigenous people, including in relation to education, employment and access to services and housing.

Indigenous Australians, like all Australians of diverse cultural backgrounds, need to be able to engage effectively with services and conversely, services need to engage effectively with Indigenous people. Failure to communicate effectively and achieve common understanding with Indigenous people in both the design and delivery of services not only undermines the ability of a service to engage Indigenous people and thereby improve outcomes, but at a macro-level can undermine the impact of national reforms under the Closing the Gap framework.

3. Measures to improve Indigenous language interpreting and translating services (Terms of Reference 6)

3.1 Australian Government policies for improving Indigenous language interpreting and translating services

Under the National Indigenous Reform Agreement service delivery principles, the Commonwealth and all States and Territories have agreed that programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people, including through access to interpreting services. In line with the Government's commitment to enhancing understanding and respect for human rights across the public sector, the Department recognises that Indigenous people who require assistance communicating in English should have access to an interpreter so they can understand and be understood. State and Territory governments have responsibility for ensuring interpreters are available, when needed, to assist clients of their services.

The need for, and current state of development of Indigenous interpreting services varies significantly across States and Territories. There are two established Indigenous interpreting services in Australia, as well as interpreters in other locations providing services in particular languages. The Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service (NT AIS) provides interpreting across the Territory. The Kimberley Interpreting Services (KIS) provides interpreting in Kimberley and central desert languages. Some language centres funded by the Office for the Arts' Maintenance of Indigenous Languages and Records Program also provide interpreting.

The Council of Australian Governments has agreed under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery that the Commonwealth should develop a national framework, working with the States and the Northern Territory, for the effective supply and use of Indigenous language interpreters. The development of the national framework is also part of the National Indigenous Languages Policy.

The Department is developing a draft National Framework for the effective supply and use of Indigenous language interpreters and translators (hereafter the draft Framework) informed by the Commonwealth Ombudsman's eight best practice principles on the use of interpreters and consideration of the issues raised in the Ombudsman's reports on interpreters.¹⁸ The development of the draft Framework includes consideration of approaches that could be adopted to:

- increase the supply of suitably qualified Indigenous language interpreters;
- stimulate the demand for and use of interpreters by Indigenous communities, governments and third party services providers; and
- create a sustainable industry for Indigenous language interpreters.

It is expected that the Framework will be developed over 2012 and be the key means to improve capacity and overall engagement across all levels of government, as well as third party service providers, Indigenous Australians and the industry sector.

¹⁸ Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Use of Interpreters*, March 2009; Commonwealth Ombudsman, *Talking in language: Indigenous language interpreters and government communication*, April 2011

3.2 Commonwealth funding supporting Indigenous language interpreting and translation services

The Commonwealth Government provides funding for Indigenous interpreting through the Schedule (E) of the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement (NT NP) and the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (RSD NP).

Through NT NP, the department provides funding to the Northern Territory Government for the NT AIS. The agreement provides \$8.085 million dollars over three years to 2011-12 for the professional development, training and accreditation of interpreters and the employment of community liaison/mentor officers and community-based interpreters. The funding is to build the capacity of the NT AIS. During this period the NT AIS increased the reach of the service and improved recruitment and training for interpreters. The NT AIS reports that requests for interpreters by governments have increased from 3,947 tasks in 2007-08 to 6,461 tasks in 2010-11.

The RSD NP (2008-09 to 2013-14) identifies allocation between the Commonwealth, States and the Territory for interpreting and translation, with \$38.7 million being identified across the duration of the Agreement, \$19.8 million by the Commonwealth and \$18.9 million by the States and Northern Territory. The Department has allocated most of the Commonwealth's RSD interpreter and translation funds to Remote Operations Centres (ROCs) to be administered in an integrated fashion with other engagement activities.

The Attorney-General's Department (AGD) administers a Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government for interpreter services to Indigenous people. Funding supports free access to interpreters for Northern Territory law, justice, health agencies and AGD funded legal assistance service providers. The interpreting services are provided by the NT AIS.

3.3 Working with Indigenous interpreters

The Commonwealth Government is using interpreters and translation services to engage Indigenous people in the design and delivery of policy and programs. Interpreters are being used to support major policy consultations such as the Northern Territory Stronger Futures, Indigenous Constitutional Recognition and RSD. The department is also working with communities and consultants to undertake research projects using Indigenous languages.

Many Commonwealth departments are taking steps to raise awareness of the benefits of using interpreters and factoring this into how they go about delivering programs and services. It is anticipated the National Framework will assist greater consistency of approach across departments, whilst supporting a flexible approach that provides for the needs of different services.

For example, the Department is reviewing internal protocols relating to Indigenous service delivery and engagement to identify circumstances when departmental staff should use interpreters in their engagement with individuals and communities. To assist in this process, a draft Commonwealth policy protocol on the use of Indigenous interpreters is being developed. A first version of this protocol will be tested by the Northern Territory Office. DEEWR has developed a protocol on the use of migrant and Indigenous interpreters in service delivery. This protocol, which is consistent with the Ombudsman's recommendations, could be considered as a basis for the whole-of-government strategy on using and working with Indigenous interpreters. Our intention is to review the experience of agencies in using each protocol and to build on these to develop one that could be used by all Commonwealth agencies. The Department and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) are also discussing the relationship of this task to work being led by DIAC to update the Commonwealth Language Services Guidelines.

One of the measures being implemented under the NT NP is the training of interpreters on Commonwealth initiatives, to prepare them for interpreting on those initiatives. Interpreters have received training on income management, the School Enrolment and Attendance measure, Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), legal training and Constitutional Recognition and Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory.

In the implementation of the RSD NP, each jurisdiction is taking steps to ensure that community members have a sound understanding of the processes with the intention of enabling effective local participation in developing Local Implementation Plans. This has included the use of interpreters in community meetings and formal community reference groups where appropriate, as well as using translators and interpreters in the production of a range of culturally appropriate media products such as local radio broadcasts, banners, posters and fact sheets. Specific examples of working with Indigenous interpreters include:

- In 2011-12 by the Darwin Remote Operations Centre is training all staff, not just those involved in the Remote Services Delivery Strategy, on the importance of using and effectively working with Indigenous language interpreters. Training is being delivered through the NT AIS.
- In Western Australia, the department has provided the KIS funding to build their capacity and provide services to individuals and families who are usually residents in the RSD locations such as Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing, the Dampier Peninsula and surrounding communities. The KIS funding is also used to facilitate specialised training programs aiming at increasing the number and skill level of interpreters in those RSD locations.
- In South Australia, interpreters and translators assist with communication of a wide range of RSD issues to the Amata and Mimili communities, including radio presentations, talking posters and key point community presentations in plain English with voice over and translation in writing into Pitjantjatjara. Interpreters have been involved in the development and review of Local Implementation Plans, including discussion of Closing the Gap targets and related concepts. These have involved large group interpreting activities such as the three-day 'Ngurintja'

community engagement workshop with Amata community members from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands to evaluate progress of their Local Implementation Plan. These three days involved approximately 30 RSD agency representatives and nearly one third of the Amata community. Male and female Pitjantjatjara language interpreters enabled community members to speak directly about Amata and the changes they would like to see occur. Interpreters have also provided a 10 week Pitjantjatjara language course to department staff.

In addition, to help communities develop their Local Implementation Plans other research based activities often involving community languages have also been undertaken. The local research projects have enabled local community voices to feed directly into the development, monitoring and evaluation of the Plans. Twenty-two local projects have been approved since 2009 and some communities are now on their second research project. For example, Ntaria (Hermannsburg) community in the Northern Territory is currently running its second research project. This project is focusing on safer driving, a priority identified under their Plan. Research conducted in Arrernte or Luritja dialects by local people has been a central part of the project.

In addition to funding for interpreters, local Indigenous Engagement Officers (IEOs) have been recruited in the remote priority locations to help communities understand and engage with the implementation of the RSD NP. IEOs play a critical role as part of the Single Government Interface in the remote locations and provide invaluable cross-cultural support and advice to both communities and government officials. This support can include assistance with interpreting and translation of local languages, which is particularly useful to Government Business Managers engaged in their day-to-day business within communities.

3.4 Some issues in developing Indigenous language interpreting

The Commonwealth Ombudsman identified the following challenges in recruiting and retaining sufficient numbers of interpreters:

- poor literacy and numeracy amongst those individuals who have the requisite Indigenous language skills;
- the ability to find people who are able to meet the demands of being an interpreter when there can be competing or conflicting cultural obligations;
- many people who would be suitable interpreters have other employment;
- the irregular nature of interpreting work can make it an unattractive employment option;
- the number of Indigenous languages spoken across Australia, coupled with a decreasing number of fluent speakers in some languages; and
- lack of accreditation at professional level for Indigenous language interpreters by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters.¹⁹

¹⁹ Commonwealth Ombudsman: *Talking in language: Indigenous language interpreters and government communication*. April 2011, p.4

Training and accreditation

Increasing the supply of qualified interpreters involves attention to recruitment and retention of interpreters. Under the NT NP, the government is providing funding to the Northern Territory Government to recruit community liaison and interpreter support development officers. These positions support the operation of the interpreter service by recruiting new interpreters and supporting the retention and professional development of existing interpreters, many of whom have limited formal training. The NT AIS advise they have experienced greater success in retaining community based interpreters where there is strong supervision and support for interpreters from development and community liaison officers. Governments will continue to monitor the lessons arising from this approach.

Increasing the supply of qualified interpreters involves training so interpreters can perform their role professionally. Batchelor Institute, TAFE South Australia and Central TAFE have all run in recent years, or are currently running, the Diploma in Interpreting. There are significant challenges, however, in increasing the number of accredited Indigenous interpreters. As part of the NT NP, the Commonwealth Government has provided funding to the Northern Territory Government so the NT AIS can develop and deliver training programs and training materials for Indigenous interpreters and increase the number of accredited interpreters employed by the service. This project is focusing on increasing the number of interpreters accredited at para-professional level, and developing models of training delivery that are matched to the needs of learners. In 2010-11, this work resulted in 17 new accreditations at National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) para-professional level. There are currently 66 accredited interpreters working with the NT AIS.²⁰

Across Australia, the NAATI advises that it has awarded 262 accreditations in interpreting in Indigenous languages, with accreditations being provided in relation to 46 Indigenous languages; some people are accredited in multiple languages. Almost all accreditations are at the para-professional level. The exception is three speakers who have been accredited at NAATI professional level for Djambarrpuyngu, a Yolŋu Matha language. There are only ten Indigenous languages where there are eight or more accreditations at NAATI para-professional level, noting not all accredited interpreters are currently working.²¹ These languages are: Burarra, Djambarrpuyngu,

²⁰ NAATI's purpose is setting, maintaining and promoting high national standards in translating and interpreting, and implementing a national quality-assurance system for credentialing practitioners who meet these standards. NAATI credentialing provides quality assurance to the clients of translators and interpreters and gives credibility to agencies that employ practitioners who are credentialed appropriately. NAATI's agreed work program and funding base means its predominant focus is on migrant languages. NAATI has undertaken some work in Indigenous languages. NAATI is a not for profit company limited by guarantee and incorporated in Australia under the Corporations Act 2001. It is jointly funded by the Australian and State and Territory governments, as well as earning revenue from testing fees. The Members of the Company are the nine Ministers who are responsible for multicultural affairs and/or citizenship in the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. In 2010-11 NAATI awarded 1,467 accreditations to interpreters (predominantly in migrant languages) of which 440 were awarded via testing (30%), 984 were for qualifications from a NAATI-approved Australian institution (67%) and 43 for an overseas tertiary qualification (3%).

²¹ People cease interpreting for many reasons. People may find more regular and better remunerated employment, or retire from work, including for health reasons.

Kala Lagaw Ya, Kriol, Luritja, Murrinh-Patha, Pitjantjatjara, Wangkatha, Warlpiri and Western Arrernte.

The Department has commenced discussions with the NAATI and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on issues associated with the accreditation of Indigenous interpreters. The NAATI advises that it is exploring measures to developing specialist interpreting endorsements, which could complement current generalist accreditation.

Activities implemented under the NT NP have highlighted the many practical challenges faced by participants in completing interpreting training and passing accreditation tests. The numerous challenges of providing, accessing, completing and delivering training and accreditation in remote Australia need to be emphasised. The NT AIS has provided significant levels of support for student interpreters throughout this process. During 2011-12, they will be developing an on-the-job model of training delivery. Governments will continue to monitor the lessons arising from this approach.

Online training technologies hold promise to enable flexible and more cost-effective modes of training delivery, to overcome barriers that have inhibited the development of a trained Indigenous interpreting workforce. TAFE South Australia lecturers delivering interpreting training in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands and other parts of South Australia are finding that synchronous online teaching, employing a wide repertoire of digital technologies, are accepted and effective for students living in remote Indigenous communities.²²

The department is working with DEEWR to explore how the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and the Indigenous Employment program can assist training, accreditation and employment of Indigenous interpreters. CDEP is well placed to provide foundational training for potential interpreters in the critical areas of literacy and numeracy.

Recognising culture

In line with the principles in the Australian Government's Framework for Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, strengthening the capacity of Indigenous interpreting services should be informed by the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The NT AIS is established within the Northern Territory Government Department of Housing, Local Government and Regional Services, but provides services within an Aboriginal cultural framework. In the Kimberley, KIS is a community-controlled Aboriginal organisation. Both services, although structured differently, have established a strong "social license" to operate by providing interpreting services in the "right way", paying attention to both professional interpreting codes of ethics and Indigenous social protocols.²³

²² Inawantji Scales, Georgina Nou: *Issues involved in delivering Interpreter training to remote Indigenous communities in South Australia, AIATSIS Conference presentation 2011*

²³ Colleen Rosas (Coordinator NT AIS), David Newry (founder KIS), Deanne Lightfoot (CEO KIS), personal communications and presentations at AITSIS 2011 conference.

Glass, who conducted consultations on the new qualifications for interpreters and translators²⁴, notes “All interpreters must work not only with the language but with the culture of the language that they interpret for... An important skill for interpreters is to teach others to understand that effective cross-cultural communication is a shared responsibility: others must cooperate with the interpreter to get a good outcome.”²⁵

Cross-cultural communication was discussed at the 2011 Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Conference, which held a two day National Indigenous Interpreting meeting as part of the conference. The NT AIS and KIS, as well as interpreters working in remote South Australia, advise that interpreters negotiate cross-cultural differences between mainstream society and those of the communities they work in on a daily basis. KIS advises that respect for and working with the intricacies of cultural relationships and protocols lays the foundation for successful interpreting assignments.

At the AIATSIS Conference, Brown, Collyer and Hunt discussed the particular challenges faced by young Indigenous interpreters, such as culturally appropriate roles and different linguistic forms used by younger and older people.²⁶ Developing the capacity of young people who have the depth of English and traditional language skills necessary to pursue qualifications in interpreting, will be an important part of developing the Indigenous interpreting industry in Australia. In order to deepen the traditional language skills of younger people, KIS advises they support one-on-one learning relationships between a “master” (elder, speaker) and an “apprentice” (language learner), who work together speaking only traditional language.²⁷

Interpreting is required across complex areas, each with their own vocabulary, concepts and context, such as health, mental health, law, community meetings on government policy and negotiations on matters such as native title. Many English words and western concepts have no immediate equivalents in Indigenous languages, so Indigenous interpreters need to work out ways of communicating these concepts in their language. Legal and health interpreting require specific competencies.

As part of ongoing practice, Indigenous language interpreters seek the guidance of elders with nuanced and deep understanding of language and culture, in order to shape the language into new patterns of meaning. A case study of the approach used to interpret “antibiotic resistance” was presented at the 2011 AIATSIS conference. The group discussion arising after this presentation showed that mentoring and advice provided by elders was an important feature of interpreting practice and professional

²⁴ See PSP04 Public Sector Training Package, which has been endorsed by the National Quality Council. It includes the Diploma of Interpreting (PSP52410) and the Advanced Diploma of Interpreting (PSP61110). Further information about qualifications, accredited courses and units of competency in interpreting and translating can be found at www://Training.gov.au which is the official national register of information on Training Packages, Qualifications, and Registered Training Organisations.

²⁵ Glass, H *New qualifications for interpreters and translators* Brobawai, Newsletter of the Kimberley Interpreting Service volume 8 number 1 December 2010

²⁶ Lianna Brown, Eugenie Collyer and Derek Hunt Nyuntu-ma ngun ngumayijang karu-nginya (Gurindji: you’re still just a kid [of the next generation]: Challenges faced by young interpreters. AIATSIS Conference 2011

²⁷ Wendy Rogers, Valma Banks, David Newry, Mathew Taylor: *Culture first in interpreting*. AIATSIS Conference 2011

development. Many interpreters reported that they regularly sought advice from elders and family members to work out how to convey concepts in their language.²⁸

There have been some projects to develop Indigenous language-English glossaries for health and legal terms, ordinarily joint projects conducted over several years between expert language speakers, linguists and health/legal specialists.²⁹ Ford and McCormack note it is important that the specialists have a strong understanding of the English concept behind the term being considered, an ability to communicate this in plain English and then sufficient time to work with expert language speakers to develop an accepted translation.³⁰

NT AIS and KIS advise that similar work is an important part of their services when working with government agencies to interpret English language communication products into Indigenous languages. Services re-script communication products, by front-translating them to plain English in ways that recognise that many Indigenous languages have markedly different grammatical features to English. They advise it is often difficult to communicate clear, accurate and natural messages without rescripting.³¹

Other strategies, such as team interpreting, may also assist in the provision of quality services, in areas such as legal and health interpreting. In team interpreting, two or more individuals are involved in the interpreting activity to ensure that effective communication occurs. Chapman and Mitchell, describe the use of this in Darwin Hospital where a Yolŋu Matha interpreter is paired with a registered nurse. The nurses role is to assist in cross-communication with other medical staff, using his or her understanding of medicine and institutional structures to assist the interpreter communicate health terms, processes and procedures.³²

Insights from these services and practitioners suggest that the extension of Indigenous interpreting services should involve consideration of how the quality and effectiveness of these services can be enhanced by drawing on Aboriginal people's cultural expertise in language, governance and quality control. A further issue to be explored is whether there are opportunities in linking the development of Indigenous interpreters with other activities underway to support the maintenance of Indigenous languages. The department is discussing potential linkages with the Office for the Arts, which has responsibility for Indigenous language policy and programs.

²⁸ Rod Chapman and Alice Mitchell: *Team interpreting: a partnership to interpret meaning AIATSIS 2011 conference paper*; personal communications AIATSIS 2011 conference

²⁹ See for example the Legal English to Yolŋu Matha Dictionary and the Interactive Yolŋu Matha Anatomy Dictionary at <http://www.ards.com.au/langdict.htm>. Aboriginal Resource and Development Service Inc is working to develop a comprehensive database that will include common anatomical terms, diseases, health disorders and conditions, nutrition, and basic physiological and psychological functioning of the body.

³⁰ Lysbeth Ford and Dominic McCormack LLB *Difficult words that come from non-Aboriginal law: Murrinh tetemanthay ngarra murrinh law kardu bamam thangun*, a Murrinhpatha—English legal glossary (updated June 2011)

³¹ Steve Swartz, Della Pearce, Baydon William *Say What?—Could the Government Please Speak English! Rescripting, Interpreting and Training Challenges at AIS AIATSIS 2011 conference*

³² Rod Chapman and Alice Mitchell: *Team interpreting: a partnership to interpret meaning AIATSIS 2011 conference paper*

Service delivery

A mix of service modalities also needs to be considered if the reach of Indigenous interpreter services is to be extended. This is likely to involve a mix of phone and face to face service delivery, as well as communication technologies such as video-conferencing and Skype. While there may not be high demand for Indigenous interpreting in some jurisdictions, consideration needs to be given to establishing the systems that will enable Indigenous people and service delivery agencies to access Indigenous interpreters when they need them (for example, when an Indigenous language speaker travels to a major urban centre for specialist medical treatment).

Improving booking arrangements, building in sufficient preparation time and supporting interpreters to undertake their interpreting tasks are all elements of improved service delivery. A practical and organised approach is necessary to ensure interpreters are available when they are needed, including in remote locations. Interpreters need to be given sufficient time to prepare prior to undertaking the interpreting task and the opportunity to ask questions and clarify answers.

A key learning arising from all of the Commonwealth Government's work with interpreters in recent years is that sufficient lead times and careful planning are very important to enable effective use of interpreters.³³

³³ For example, coordinating the recruitment, booking and preparation of interpreters for a major consultation across remote Australia (such as the recently completed consultation on Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory) is a significant planning exercise. In this instance, the department seconded a staff member to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service to assist with arrangements.

Attachment A

Extract from the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (A19-A20)³⁴**THE CLOSING THE GAP TARGETS**

COAG reforms aimed at Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage are underpinned by a clear policy framework. At the core of this framework are the six targets. They are to:

- close the gap in life expectancy within a generation;
- halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- ensure all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years;
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade;
- halve the gap for Indigenous people aged 20-24 in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and
- halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

The Building Blocks Approach and the Evidence Base

Improving outcomes for Indigenous people requires adoption of a multi-faceted approach that sees effort directed across a range of Building Blocks. An improvement in the area of one building block is heavily reliant on improvements made across the other Building Blocks. The Building Blocks are:

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

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement provides a more detailed explanation of the Building Blocks approach. While each of the Building Blocks contributes to achieving one or more of the six specific targets, by addressing these concurrently, the conditions will be established to reduce Indigenous disadvantage across a broad range of policy fronts.

The Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage framework produced biennially by the Australian Productivity Commission has been realigned to reflect the new COAG environment and the Building Blocks approach.

³⁴ http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/national_agreements/downloads/IGA_FFR_ScheduleF_National_Indigenous_Reform_Agreement_Feb_2011.doc

THE IMPORTANCE OF CULTURE

Connection to culture is critical for emotional, physical and spiritual well being. Culture pervades the lives of Indigenous people and is a key factor in their wellbeing – culture must be recognised in actions intended to overcome Indigenous disadvantage. Pride in culture plays a vital role in shaping people's aspirations and choices. Efforts to Close the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage must recognise and build on the strength of Indigenous cultures and identities.

Assuming, promoting and supporting a strong and positive view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and culture are important ways to reduce social exclusion for Indigenous Australians and to support them in their endeavours and aspirations for a positive future. Cultural awareness and competency on the part of policy makers and people implementing government programs, the elimination of overt and systemic discrimination, and the development of programs that meet the cultural needs of Indigenous people will be an important part of the Closing the Gap initiatives.

ENGAGEMENT AND PARTNERSHIP WITH INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

COAG recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as Australia's first peoples. In his Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples on 13 February 2008, the then Prime Minister acknowledged that all governments have a special responsibility to engage with Indigenous communities in order to rebuild the trust lost through 'the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss'. COAG is committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve the Closing the Gap reforms, recognising that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have demonstrated leadership to create opportunities for their families and communities and are working with governments and the not-for-profit and corporate sectors to build on these opportunities.

To date, engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the development of the Closing the Gap agenda has been at a very broad level. Implementation of the National Agreements and National Partnerships, both mainstream and Indigenous specific, agreed by COAG across the health, education, housing, employment and service delivery spheres will require developing and maintaining strengthened partnership arrangements. This is in line with the *National Framework of Principles for Government Service Delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* agreed by COAG in 2008.