

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Secretary,

**House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs
Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission for this Inquiry.

This brief submission aims to provide the Standing Committee with some key issues for consideration ahead of the Inquiry final report and recommendations, particularly relating to designing appropriate sport services that achieve non-sport outcomes and the delivery of effective services for Indigenous Australians.

As an Aboriginal man with 18 years experience working in Indigenous affairs, eight of these in the sports industry, I am able to provide the Standing Committee with an experienced perspective for this Inquiry.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission, please contact me on [REDACTED]

I look forward to the final report.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Carl Currey
Director
Left-field Business Solutions

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House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring

It is widely acknowledged that sport, if used appropriately, can improve physical and mental health, reduce youth crime and antisocial behaviour, enhance social cohesion, improve educational outcomes and strengthen employment opportunities for individuals and communities.

For Indigenous Australians the value of these non-sport outcomes is significantly higher given the level of disadvantage that exists.

Critical to the use of sport as a vehicle to achieve non-sport outcomes is the development and design of programs and services that clearly identify what role sport plays. This is critical because sport is neither a panacea nor a silver bullet that will achieve holistic outcomes.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG), as the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia, provides governments and funding recipients with clear principles as to how programs and services for Indigenous Australians should be developed and delivered.

Genuine partnerships between governments, the private and not-for-profit sectors and funding recipients (including the sports industry) are also essential to achieve clearly defined outcomes like the closing the gap targets.

1. Designing Appropriate Sport Services

Sport can play a key role in delivering non-sport outcomes but it is critical that funding providers are clear about what the expectations are. It is unrealistic to expect the sports industry can deliver non-sport outcomes in isolation as this is not their core business, nor should it be. The core business of the sport industry is to deliver quality sport programs and services to achieve quality sport outcomes, which include increase in participation and improved high performance results.

To address this issue, partnerships between the sport industry and service providers whose core business is to improve outcomes in Indigenous education, employment, health, social wellbeing, juvenile justice etc. should be mandatory.

It should also be clear about what data (quantitative and qualitative) is to be collected to determine the impact of the initiative. Output related data (no. of participants, sport sessions etc.) only provides one part of the data set and this needs to be measured along with participant, deliverer and partnership feedback.

As an example, Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) are spread throughout Australia and can be engaged as a partner to establish baseline health data for Indigenous Australians living in particular areas, ahead of any sport-related service being delivered. Periodically, as participants present to the AMS for regular check-ups, and as long as they are part of any cohort participating in the sport-related service, changes in individual health status can be measured. This information can then be included as part of the data collection and used to demonstrate outcomes.

Independent evaluation of programs and services should also be mandatory to ensure accuracy and validity of data collected.

Through genuine partnerships and a collaborative approach the delivery of successful, ongoing programs that meet community-need are improved which leads to far greater improvements in participation, effectiveness and long-term results for Indigenous Australians.

In accordance with better practice¹, when using sport as the basis for designing and implementing initiatives for strengthening communities, the following elements should also be taken into account:

- Effectively engage and consult people from the community and build partnerships between businesses, councils, government and non-government organisations to collaborate and cooperate to promote and participate in physical activity.
- Ensure that programs are culturally appropriate, safe and respectful to the values and traditions of participants to maximise ongoing participation.
- Recognise different interests and abilities in the community and provide opportunities for different types of involvement in programs, including physical, social and cultural activities.
- Provide opportunities to build local capacity of community members to manage programs, encourage ownership and support sustainability.
- Identify local champions to promote the values of ongoing participation.
- Target community groups that are more disadvantaged and less likely to be active.
- Provide local facilities as gathering places for activities.
- Conduct periodic surveys or focus groups with participants and stakeholders to help inform the ongoing management and development of programs.

Underpinning this approach should be:

- funding security (at least three to five years) and a commitment to sustain services for as long as it takes to achieve outcomes
- acceptance that programs require flexibility
- independent evaluation processes.

2. Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage

Indigenous Australians are recognised as the first peoples² of this nation. This significant recognition entitles Indigenous Australians to specific services that best meets their needs. Any homogenisation of Indigenous services into a one-size fits all approach undermines this recognition and devalues the unique and special place Indigenous peoples hold within Australia.

COAG has also acknowledged this unique position of Indigenous Australians in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA), which frames the task of closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

¹ Chau, J. (2007). Physical Activity and Building Stronger Communities. *NSW Centre for Physical Activity and Health*. p.13

² *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Recognition Act 2012* (Cth) s 3(1).

The NIRA, which is one of six National Agreements³, sets out the objectives, outcomes, outputs, performance indicators and performance benchmarks agreed by COAG. It also provides links to those National Agreements and National Partnership Agreements across COAG, which include elements aimed at closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

COAG acknowledges that closing the gap is a long-term, ambitious framework. It also acknowledges that improving opportunities for Indigenous Australians requires intensive and sustained effort from all levels of government, as well as the private and not-for-profit sectors, communities and individuals.

3. Service Delivery Principles for Programs and Services for Indigenous Australians

Schedule D of the NIRA focuses on a set of service delivery principles for programs and services for Indigenous Australians (see page 2). These service delivery principles provide a clear guide to how current and future programs and services can achieve more effective outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

Box 1: Service Delivery Principles for Services for Indigenous Australians

Priority principle: Programs and services should contribute to Closing the Gap by meeting the targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs.

Indigenous engagement principle: Engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services.

Sustainability principle: Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets.

Access principle: Programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.

Integration principle: There should be collaboration between and within Governments at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services.

Accountability principle: Programs and services should have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation.

Source: Schedule D - National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA)

These principles can also be used as a litmus test against existing programs to determine their consistency with the NIRA.

As the funding of sport related programs for Indigenous Australians is spread amongst a number of Australian Government agencies there is an immediate risk that these programs do not operate cooperatively to achieve the closing the gap outcomes.

³ There are currently six National Agreements in place across healthcare, education, skills and workforce development, disability services, affordable housing and Indigenous reform.

The NIRA and service delivery principles provide the basis for an overarching framework which agencies that fund sport for non-sport outcomes can operate under. Such a framework should be developed and managed by the lead agency for Indigenous affairs, the Department for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), in consultation with the lead agency for sport, the Department of Regional Australia, Local Government, Arts and Sport (DRALGAS) and other agencies already investing in sport programs for non-sport outcomes.

Funding to the sports industry from the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), Australian Institute of Sport (AIS) and other State/Territory Institutes and Academies of Sport should be exempt from this framework as this funding predominantly supports sport-specific outcomes like participation, capability building (coaching and officiating), junior and elite pathways (e.g. State/National Championships, Commonwealth Games, World Championships etc.).

This approach protects the integrity of sport-for-sport outcomes and ensures the sports industry is in a much stronger position to work with other government agencies without compromising their core business of delivering quality sport programs.

The ASC provides funding to some sports to increase Indigenous participation as part of an inclusive sport philosophy. This move to inclusive sport resulted in a targeted Indigenous program being abolished as this approach had created the belief amongst the sports industry that they needed specific funding to achieve this. In reality, the funding sports already receive is enough to increase participation across a range of ethnicities, including Indigenous. More work needs to be done with the sports themselves on how they can attract and retain more Indigenous participants, which is a role the ASC is managing.