

As a researcher-practitioner in the field of Indigenous children's mental health and wellbeing I am deeply concerned about the harm to Indigenous communities as a result of the NT intervention. The evidence that it has demoralised, disempowered and disenfranchised both Indigenous leaders and community members is widespread. The fact that it has not improved rates of school attendance further demonstrates the misguided nature of the coercive approach that has been taken. The complexity of issues facing Indigenous communities cannot be addressed through initiatives that are at their core humiliating and sorely misinformed with regard to practices of cultural respect. I urge the committee to scrap plans to extend this approach under the title of Stronger Futures and instead undertake the necessary work of consultation and genuine partnership with Indigenous communities. Improvements to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous communities will only be effective when they are aimed squarely at reducing discrimination and are undertaken in ways that seek to build dignity, respect and mutual understanding as highlighted in the UN declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples, to which Australia is a signatory.

Dr Brenda Dobia