

PRESIDING OFFICERS RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATION 1
OF THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND
AGEING REPORT ON
REGIONAL HEALTH ISSUES JOINTLY AFFECTING AUSTRALIA AND THE SOUTH
PACIFIC: REPORT OF THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY DELEGATION TO
PAPUA NEW GUINEA AND THE SOLOMON ISLANDS

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate establish a parliamentary mentoring program between women in the Australian Parliament and women in Pacific Island Parliaments or aspiring female candidates.

Response:

The Commonwealth Parliament, together with state and territory parliaments, provides support and assistance to Pacific Island Parliaments through a range of activities, including involvement in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA). Branches from the Australian Region of the CPA are twinned with Pacific Region Branches, with the Commonwealth of Australia Branch managing the overall twinning arrangements, providing advice and support as required.

The purpose of twinning is to foster parliamentary cooperation between Branches of the Australian and Pacific Regions, through the exchange of information, assistance with training and exchanges of visits between Parliaments.

In 2008 the Australian Region Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians (CWP) Steering Committee was established to facilitate networking between women Parliamentarians from Australia, New Zealand and the Pacific nations to assist in improving access for all women to the democratic process. Each Australian State and Territory Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Branch is represented on the Committee. The Commonwealth of Australia CPA Branch is represented by the Deputy Speaker, Ms Anna Burke MP. The Australian Parliament also provides secretariat support for the Steering Committee.

The CWP would be an appropriate group to consider the establishment of a parliamentary mentoring program between women parliamentarians in Australia and the Pacific. The Committee will be asked to consider the proposal as part of its program of activities, particularly in the context of established Parliamentary twinning arrangements in the region.

However, an official mentoring program for aspiring female candidates in the Pacific is not supported. While personal mentoring arrangements may occur, it is important to avoid perceptions of favouritism or endorsement of political candidates.

Non-government organisations such as UNDP and other UN Agencies (i.e. UNIFEM) also have involvement in supporting the advancement of women, including into parliament. The Centre for Democratic Institutions at the ANU coordinates courses around party formation and preparation of candidates. Members of the Australian Parliament are regularly included to present sessions in the CDI programs.