

# Chapter 1

## Australia's domestic response to the World Health Organisation's Commission on Social Determinants of Health report 'Closing the gap within a generation'

### Terms of Reference

1.1 On 22 August 2012 the Senate referred the following matter to the Senate Community Affairs Committee for inquiry and report:

Australia's domestic response to the World Health Organization's (WHO) Commission on Social Determinants of Health report "Closing the gap within a generation", including the:

- (a) Government's response to other relevant WHO reports and declarations;
- (b) impacts of the Government's response;
- (c) extent to which the Commonwealth is adopting a social determinants of health approach through:
  - (i) relevant Commonwealth programs and services,
  - (ii) the structures and activities of national health agencies, and
  - (iii) appropriate Commonwealth data gathering and analysis; and
- (d) scope for improving awareness of social determinants of health:
  - (i) in the community,
  - (ii) within government programs, and
  - (iii) amongst health and community service providers.

1.2 The reporting date for the inquiry was set by the Senate for 27 March 2013.

### Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 The committee invited submissions from the Commonwealth Government and interested organisations. The committee received public submissions from 68 organisations and individuals (listed at Appendix 1).

1.4 The committee held four public hearings over the course of the inquiry. The hearings were held in:

- Canberra – 12 October 2012 and 23 November 2012; and
- Melbourne – 4 and 11 December 2012.

1.5 A list of witnesses who appeared before the committee is set out in Appendix 2.

1.6 Submissions, additional information, the Hansard transcript of evidence and responses to questions on notice can be accessed through the committee's website at: [http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate\\_Committees?url=clac\\_ctte/index.htm](http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate_Committees?url=clac_ctte/index.htm)

1.7 References in this report are to individual submissions as received by the committee, not to a bound volume.

1.8 The committee sincerely thanks all submitters and witnesses for their contribution and participation in the inquiry process. The committee recognises that this inquiry would not have been possible were it not for a number of key organisations whose ongoing advocacy and work continue to progress the social determinants agenda.

### **Structure of the report**

1.9 This report is comprised of 5 Chapters:

- Chapter 2 provides a broad overview of the theory and evidence indicating that social determinants play an important role in individual health outcomes in Australia;
- Chapter 3 summarised the World Health Organisation published report *Closing the Gap in a Generation* and its key recommendations;
- Chapter 4 discusses government responses to the social determinants of health in Australia. Current state and Commonwealth government initiatives are reviewed; and
- Chapter 5 summarises the current data gather mechanisms for the social determinants of health, as well as arguments regarding the efficacy and appropriateness of current efforts.