

## Setting the context

### Introduction

- 2.1 The recently released report by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP), *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*, confirms the chronic state of Indigenous social and economic disadvantage.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous Australians continue to have the lowest socio-economic profile of all Australians.
- 2.2 In this chapter the Committee presents a demographic and socioeconomic profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, based on the data available. Service provision arrangements are reviewed and the Committee argues that the current arrangements are complex, inefficient, and frequently ineffective. The chapter concludes by examining a different response towards service delivery, one which seeks to empower Indigenous people through the development of partnerships.

### Demographic and socio-economic profile

#### Population

- 2.3 The Indigenous population of Australia recorded in the 2001 Census included 410 003 people, of which 366 429 identified as Aboriginal, 26 046
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<sup>1</sup> Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (SCRGSP), 2003, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*, Productivity Commission, Canberra.

identified as Torres Strait Islander, and 17 528 identified as both. Australia's Indigenous population represents 2.2 per cent of the total Australian population.<sup>2</sup>

- 2.4 A significant increase in the Indigenous population has been recorded over recent Census collections.<sup>3</sup> This is due to factors such as improved collection processes, high fertility rates and an increase in willingness of persons to identify as Indigenous. However, factors such as remoteness and language barriers influence the collection and accuracy of statistical information in regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Remoteness and distribution

- 2.5 The Indigenous population is more widely dispersed than the general population, with approximately 90 per cent of Indigenous Australians living in areas covering 25 per cent of the continent, while 90 per cent of Australia's total population is contained within an area representing 2.6 per cent of the continent.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.6 According to 1999 data, one third of the Indigenous people aged 25-54 lived in major cities, one fifth each in inner regional and outer regional areas, 8 per cent in remote areas and 16 per cent in very remote areas.<sup>5</sup>
- 2.7 According to the 2001 Census, over one quarter (27 per cent) of the Indigenous population lived in remote or very remote parts of Australia, compared to 2 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>6</sup>
- 2.8 The 1999 *Community Housing and Infrastructure Needs Survey (CHINS)*<sup>7</sup> collected information on discrete Indigenous communities, and found that, of the 1 216 discrete Indigenous communities, 889 had a population of less than 50, while 145 had a usual population of 200 or more.<sup>8</sup>

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2 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *2001 Census of Population and Housing; Selected Characteristics*.

3 An increase of 16.2 per cent (57 033 people) since the 1996 Census and an increase of 54.5 per cent (144 632 people) since the 1991 Census. ABS, *2001 Census Basic Community Profile and Snapshot: People of Indigenous Origin*.

4 ABS, *Year Book Australia 2002: Population: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population*.

5 Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (OATSIA) and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA), *Indigenous Socioeconomic Factors Project: Preliminary Report*, 2003, A consultancy report, Jones, R., p. 12.

6 ABS, *4713.0 Population Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians: 2001 Census*.

7 Conducted by the ABS, on behalf ATSIC.

8 ABS, *4710.0 Housing and Infrastructure in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, Australia*.

Nationwide, 80 per cent of discrete Indigenous communities were in the Northern Territory and Western Australia.<sup>9</sup>

- 2.9 There are significant differences in both service delivery and capacity building opportunities for urban, rural and remote populations. The varied geographic locations of Indigenous communities requires a range of responses.<sup>10</sup>
- 2.10 Figure 1 shows the accessible and remote regions of Australia in relation to road distance to service centres,<sup>11</sup> while the following figure illustrates the high proportion of Indigenous people in regional and remote areas. The dispersal and remoteness of Indigenous people have significant implications for service delivery.

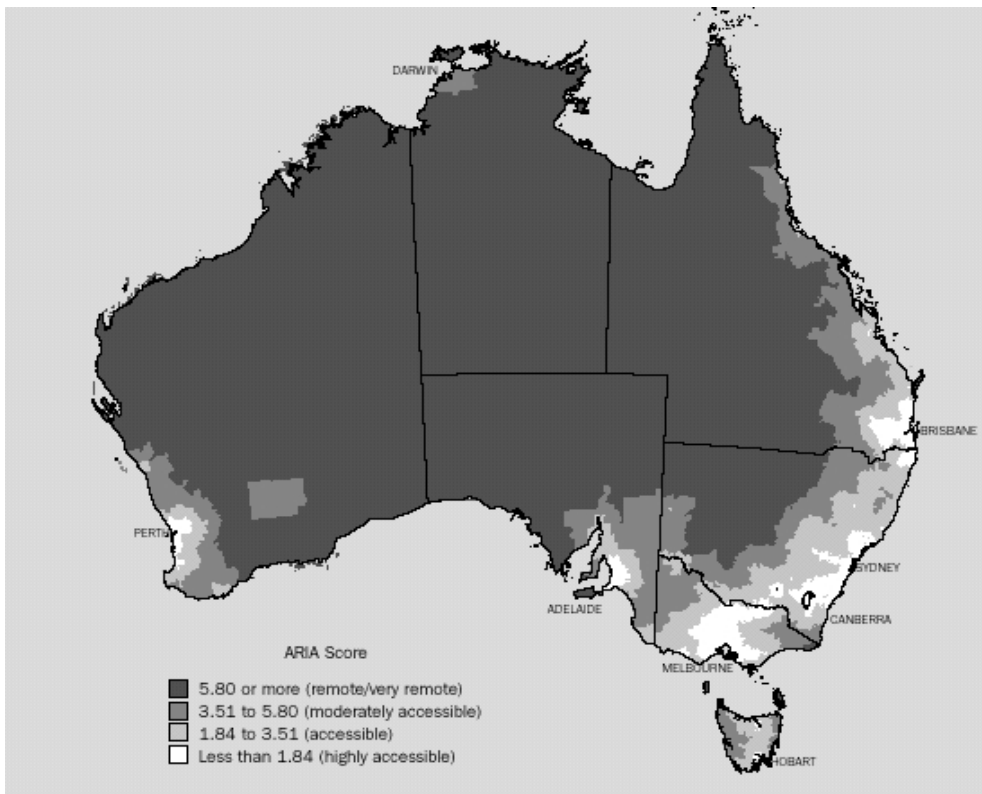
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9 Commonwealth Grants Commission (CGC), 2001, *Report on Indigenous Funding 2001*, Canberra, p. 175.

10 Reconciliation Australia, Submission 55, p. 7.

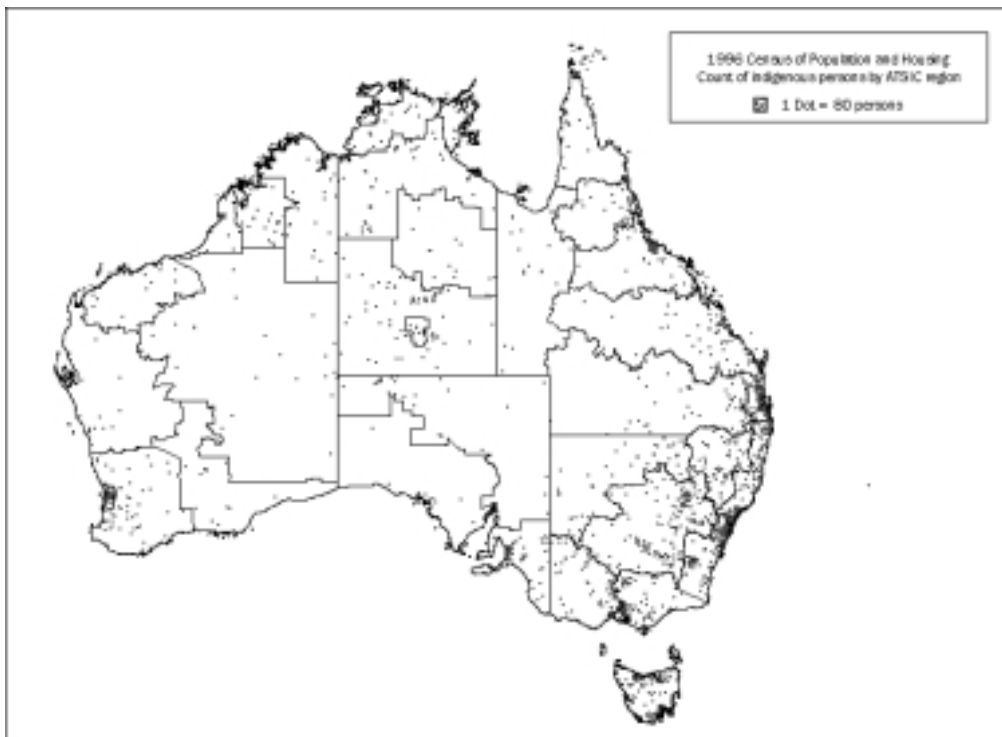
11 ARIA is the Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia and measures the remoteness of populated localities in relation to road distances to service centres of various sizes using Geographic Information System (GIS) technology. The categories range from Highly Accessible (relatively unrestricted accessibility to a wide range of goods and services and opportunities for social interaction) to Very Remote (very little accessibility of goods, services and opportunities for social interaction). Department of Health and Aged Care, and the National Key Centre for Social Applications of Geographical Information Systems at the University of Adelaide, 2001, *Measuring Remoteness: Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA)*, Occasional Papers: New Series Number 14, p. 22.

**Figure 1** Accessible and remote areas of Australia.



Source *Australian Social Trends, 2000 (4102.0)*

**Figure 2** Distribution of Indigenous people across Australia.



Source *ABS Indigenous ERPs, Census 1996. 1 dot = 80 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people*

## Education

2.11 Participation and attainment in formal education are significantly lower in the Indigenous population than in the general population.

2.12 The *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training* (2001) found that differing participation and attainment are related to a number of factors including wider social and economic disadvantage, the geographic distribution of Indigenous people across Australia, significantly poorer health, and language differences.<sup>12</sup> The Committee was told that:

Despite some progress over recent years, educational outcomes for Indigenous people remain poor, and the scale of educational disadvantage large.<sup>13</sup>

2.13 While the percentage of Indigenous people aged 5-14 attending an educational institution in 2002 was 87 per cent, the non-Indigenous attendance rate was 95 per cent.<sup>14</sup> From Years 9-12, the apparent retention rate of Indigenous students disproportionately decreased, with the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous retention increasing from 2.0 per cent in Year 9 (97.8 per cent Indigenous attendance, compared to 99.8 per cent non-Indigenous), to 38.3 per cent in Year 12 (38.0 per cent Indigenous attendance, compared to 76.3 per cent non-Indigenous attendance).<sup>15</sup> Aggregate nationwide figures do not represent regional differences which can be significant. For example, the percentage of Indigenous students aged 5 to 14 years attending an education institution in the Northern Territory in 2001 was 76 per cent compared to 93 per cent in the Australian Capital Territory.<sup>16</sup>

2.14 In 2001, one in four Indigenous students undertook some form of Vocational Education and Training (VET), with the majority of courses located in regional and remote areas.<sup>17</sup> This amounts to over-

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12 Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), 2002, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2001*, Canberra, pp. 7-15.

13 DEST, Submission 20, p. 1.

14 DEST, 2002, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2001*, Canberra, p. 30.

15 Apparent Retention Rates (a) Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. ABS, 2002, *Schools, 4221.0*, p. 21.

16 DEST, 2002, *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training 2001*, Canberra, p.30.

17 *ibid*, pp. 69-72.

representative participation, with an overall Indigenous population of 2.2 per cent and an Indigenous participation in VET of 3.3 per cent.<sup>18</sup>

- 2.15 In Higher Education, Indigenous students are underrepresented in bachelor degrees and postgraduate courses, and are much more likely than other students to enrol in enabling courses as pathways to make up for educational disadvantage.<sup>19</sup>
- 2.16 Deficiencies in data collection (such as recording participation rather than demonstrated ability) yield little indication of the quality of education.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, enrolment rates for courses do not indicate regular attendance, finishing courses or attaining qualifications. Thus, participation and attainment may be lower than enrolment figures indicate. The Committee has heard evidence which outlined some of the factors which mitigate against more positive educational participation and outcomes for Indigenous people.<sup>21</sup>

## Health

- 2.17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have the worst health of any group in Australia, yet experience lower levels of access to health services than the general population.<sup>22</sup> Indigenous people are disadvantaged across a wide range of socioeconomic factors that impact upon health outcomes, are more likely to experience disability and reduced quality of life due to ill health, and to die at younger ages than other Australians.<sup>23</sup>
- 2.18 The following sections on health measures are extracted from the report of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Health 2002* unless otherwise stated.

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18 *ibid*, p. 69.

19 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Taskforce on Indigenous Education, 2001, *Exploring Multiple Pathways for Indigenous Students*, Discussion Paper, Darwin, pp. 33-34.

20 Collins, B. & Lea, T., 1999, *Learning lessons: An independent review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory*, Northern Territory Department of Education, Darwin, p. 155.

21 DIMIA, Submission 42, p. 4.

22 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2004, *Indigenous Health Overview* <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/indigenous/health/index.html>> (accessed 21.04.04).

23 AIHW, 2002, *Australia's Health 2002*, Canberra.

## Fertility and mortality

- 2.19 The Indigenous population is much younger than the general population.<sup>24</sup> Fertility is higher and Indigenous women give birth at younger ages than other Australian women.<sup>25</sup>
- 2.20 Babies of Indigenous mothers were twice as likely to die at birth and during the early post-natal phase than babies born to other Australian mothers<sup>26</sup> and were nearly twice as likely to be of low birth weight.<sup>27</sup>
- 2.21 The estimated life expectancy at birth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and females is 19–20 years lower than for other Australians.<sup>28</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a lower life expectancy than internationally comparable Indigenous populations.<sup>29</sup>
- 2.22 Death rates were higher for Indigenous people than for Australians as a whole for almost all causes of death.<sup>30</sup>

## Hospitalisation and serious illness

- 2.23 Indigenous people in every age group were more likely than other people to be hospitalised for most diseases and conditions, indicating a higher occurrence of illness at more acute levels.<sup>31</sup>
- 2.24 Kidney disease is more prevalent among Indigenous people than among other Australians. Deaths from kidney failure are eight times greater for Indigenous males and five times greater for Indigenous females than for the general population.<sup>32</sup>

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24 *ibid*, p. 199.

25 *ibid*, p. 199.

26 *ibid*, p. 199.

27 *ibid*, p. 206.

28 *ibid*, 2002, p. 199.

29 In New Zealand the gap between Māori and other New Zealanders is 5-6 years, in Canada the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous is 7 years and in the United States of America the gap between Native Americans and others is 3.5 years. CGC, 2001, *Report on Indigenous Funding 2001*, Canberra, p. 105.

30 Including diseases of the circulatory system, deaths resulting from external causes (predominantly accidents, self-harm and assault), neoplasms (cancers), respiratory diseases, and endocrine/metabolic diseases. AIHW, 2002, *Australia's Health 2002*, Canberra, p. 199.

31 *ibid*, p. 201.

32 *ibid*, p. 202.

- 2.25 The reported rate of diabetes was four times higher among Indigenous people than for the general population<sup>33</sup> and the death rate was also higher than in the general population.<sup>34</sup> The number of deaths associated with diabetes provides an indication of the differential burden of the disease in the Indigenous population.<sup>35</sup>

### **Mental health**

- 2.26 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were hospitalised for conditions classified as ‘mental and behavioural disorders’ at a higher rate than that experienced by the general population.<sup>36</sup>
- 2.27 The rate of hospitalisation for Indigenous people diagnosed with mental disorders due to psychoactive substance use and organic disorders such as dementia was three times higher than the rate for the Australian population.<sup>37</sup>

### **Assault and suicide**

- 2.28 The rate of hospitalisation for Indigenous males due to assault was six times higher than the general population, and for Indigenous females almost 19 times higher.<sup>38</sup> There were five times more deaths from assault for Indigenous males, and ten times as many for Indigenous females, than the general population.<sup>39</sup>
- 2.29 The rate of hospitalisation due to self-harm for both Indigenous males and females was twice as high as that for the general population<sup>40</sup> and suicide accounted for almost three times as many deaths for Indigenous males and twice as many deaths for Indigenous females than for the general population.<sup>41</sup>

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33 Aged 15 years and over living in metropolitan and rural areas. ABS, 1999, *National health survey: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander results 1995*. Cat. No. 4806.0, cited in AIHW, 2002, *Australia's Health 2002*, Canberra, p. 203.

34 *ibid*, p. 204.

35 *ibid*, p. 204.

36 *ibid*, p. 205.

37 *ibid*, p. 205.

38 *ibid*, p. 205.

39 *ibid*, p. 205.

40 *ibid*, p. 205.

41 *ibid*, p. 205.



## Alcohol and substance misuse

- 2.30 Indigenous people are less likely than other people to drink alcohol, but those who do so are more likely to consume it at hazardous levels.<sup>42</sup> It was found that 20 per cent of Indigenous people drank at levels that were risky or high risk for long-term harm, compared with 10 per cent of other Australians.<sup>43</sup>
- 2.31 There was a high prevalence of smoking recorded among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, approximately twice that for other Australians.<sup>44</sup>
- 2.32 Indigenous people are at risk of ill health through the use of illicit substances such as marijuana, heroin, amphetamines and inhalants (petrol, glue, aerosols).<sup>45</sup> Rates of recent illicit drug use among Indigenous people were higher than for other Australians.<sup>46</sup>

## Housing

- 2.33 The most recent nationwide data comprising Indigenous housing statistics are the 2001 Census of Population and Housing (the Census), and the 2001 Community Housing Infrastructure Needs Survey (the CHIN Survey), and, to a lesser extent, the 2001 National Health Survey (the NHS). These sources give some indication of Indigenous housing across Australia, though all have shortcomings in gaining an accurate understanding, both as stand alone assessments, and together. For example, the Census offers a nationwide picture, but is acknowledged to be inaccurate (though improving) in the collection of Indigenous data.<sup>47</sup> Conversely, the CHIN Survey only covered discrete Indigenous communities, which are mostly located in remote areas, and therefore does not offer a complete nationwide picture of Indigenous housing, while the 2001 NHS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Results paper stated:

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42 ABS & AIHW, 2001, *The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, 2001. Cat. No. 4704.0*, cited in AIHW, 2002, *Australia's Health 2002*, Canberra, p. 207.

43 AIHW, 2002, *2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: Detailed findings*, Canberra, cited in AIHW, 2002, *Australia's Health 2002*, Canberra, p. 207.

44 AIHW, 2002, *2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey: detailed findings*, Canberra, cited in AIHW, 2002, *Australia's Health 2002*, Canberra, p. 208.

45 *ibid*, p. 208.

46 *ibid*, p. 208.

47 Inaccuracies occur as a result of 'unknown Indigenous status', 'imputed records', or 'undercount'. For further explanation, see ABS, 2002, *4705.0 Population Distribution, Indigenous Australians, Explanatory Notes*.

For the first time, NHS results are presented for Indigenous Australians living in remote areas. This information is limited to those items for which data are of acceptable quality.<sup>48</sup>

2.34 A synthesis of these three data sources indicates:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are less likely than other Australians to own their homes.
- Less than a third of households with Indigenous person(s) (32 per cent) were home owners compared with more than two-thirds (69 per cent) of Other households.
- Households with Indigenous person(s) (63 per cent) were more than twice as likely as Other households (27 per cent) to be living in rented accommodation.
- Using the Canadian National Occupancy Standard definition of overcrowding, 15 per cent of households with Indigenous person(s) were considered overcrowded (i.e. requiring at least one extra bedroom), compared to 4 per cent of Other households.
- In households with Indigenous person(s), overcrowding increased with remoteness. In Major Cities, about 11 per cent of all households with Indigenous person(s) require at least one extra bedroom, compared with 42 per cent of households with Indigenous person(s) in Very Remote areas of Australia. In Other households, overcrowding varied only slightly with the level of remoteness, fluctuating between 3 per cent to 4 per cent.
- Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially those living in remote communities, do not have adequate quality housing, reliable supplies of water and electricity or adequate sewerage and drainage systems, all of which are relevant to health.<sup>49</sup>

2.35 A further report interpreting the results of the 2001 Census found the following in relation to overcrowding:

Households with Indigenous person(s) tended to be larger than Other households (an average of 3.5 persons per household, compared with 2.6, respectively). The major factor contributing to this difference was the higher number of dependent children in households with Indigenous person(s). The largest households were those with two or more families (multi-family households). Multi-family households with Indigenous person(s) had an

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48 ABS, 2002, *4715.0 National Health Survey: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Results, Australia*.

49 ABS, 2003, *4704.0 The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*.

average of 7.7 persons, compared with 5.4 persons in Other such households.<sup>50</sup>

- 2.36 The Committee notes that these are averages and do not give an indication of the acute levels of overcrowding in some communities, and do not give a good indication of regional differences. The Committee also acknowledges the negative flow-on effects of overcrowding on quality of life and factors such as health.
- 2.37 The Committee notes the *National Housing Data Agreement*, a multilateral agreement between signatories to the *Commonwealth State Housing Agreement* and national statistical agencies, which provides the framework for a cooperative approach to national housing information development. The Agreement arose from provisions of the *Commonwealth State Housing Agreement*, operative from 1 July 1999.<sup>51</sup> The Agreement commits parties to produce nationally consistent housing data suitable for outcome measurement.<sup>52</sup> The Agreement involved a three year plan of implementation. The Committee looks forward to the provision of nationally consistent housing data.

## Crime and justice

- 2.38 In 2001, the Indigenous imprisonment rate was 13 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous imprisonment, with Indigenous people comprising 20 per cent of the total prison population.<sup>53</sup>
- 2.39 The incarceration rate for Indigenous juveniles was 17 times higher than for non-Indigenous juveniles, comprising 45 per cent of the total number of persons detained in juvenile corrective institutions.<sup>54</sup>
- 2.40 The Indigenous community corrections rate was seven times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous offenders.<sup>55</sup>

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50 ABS, 2003, *4713.0 Population Characteristics, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians*.

51 AIHW, *National Housing Data Agreement: A subsidiary agreement to the 1999–2003 Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement*, p. 7.  
<<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/hou/nhda/nhda.pdf>> (accessed 28.05.04).

52 AIHW, *National Housing Data Agreement: A subsidiary agreement to the 1999–2003 Commonwealth–State Housing Agreement*, p.7.  
<<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/hou/nhda/nhda.pdf>> (accessed 28.05.04).

53 Australian Institute of Criminology, 2002, *Australian Crime: Facts and Figures 2002*, Canberra p. 65.

54 *ibid*, p. 71.

55 *ibid*, p. 69.

- 2.41 Imprisoned Indigenous people are overrepresented in almost all crime categories involving violence, breaking and entering, breaches of justice procedures and driving offences (driving without a licence or driving while under the influence), while being underrepresented in fraud and drug offences.<sup>56</sup>

## Employment

- 2.42 Indigenous Australians have lower levels of labour force participation and higher levels of unemployment compared with the general population.
- 2.43 Indigenous people are less likely than non-Indigenous people to be in paid employment, due to lower levels of general education and relevant work skills, and being more likely to live where jobs are fewer.<sup>57</sup>
- 2.44 The unemployment rate of Indigenous Australians in 2001 was 23.0 per cent, more than triple the 7.4 per cent unemployment rate for non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>58</sup> The Indigenous unemployment rate would be as high as 40 per cent if Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) participants were classed as unemployed.<sup>59</sup>
- 2.45 CDEP employment represents almost one third of the total Indigenous employment and Indigenous community organisations also provide a large share of Indigenous employment, resulting in up to 70 per cent of Indigenous employment relying on public funding.<sup>60</sup>

## Data collection

- 2.46 The Committee received evidence emphasising the importance of accurate and current population data:

[A] good understanding of population dynamics and their associated social indicators are clearly essential to any informed analysis of service delivery and capacity building in Indigenous communities.<sup>61</sup>

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56 Australian Institute of Criminology, 1995, *The Over-Representation of Indigenous People in Custody in Australia*, Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice Paper No. 47, Walker, J. & McDonald, D.

57 CGC, 2001, *Report on Indigenous Funding 2001*, Canberra, p. 237.

58 ABS, *Special Article 2002*, Canberra.

59 CGC, 2001, *Report on Indigenous Funding 2001*, Canberra, p. 236.

60 *ibid*, p. 237.

61 Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy and Research (CAEPR), Australian National University (ANU), Submission 25, p. 5.

- 2.47 The Committee notes three main forms of available data: the Census, administrative data collected by service providers, and survey data. The Census (though acknowledged to be inaccurate, particularly in remote areas and in relation to Indigenous Australians) can be useful for regional, generalised comparisons. Administrative data can lack comparability within and between States due to different collection methods, and in-confidence or privacy considerations can limit data availability.<sup>62</sup> Survey data can be useful as a snapshot, but may be inconsistent over time due to methodology developments and changing priorities.
- 2.48 Numerous submissions to the inquiry indicated the importance of accurate, comparable (both over time and between jurisdictions) data in order to appropriately measure, fund and address Indigenous disadvantage.
- 2.49 Similarly, the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003* report emphasised the need to collect data to provide policy makers with a broad overview of the current state of Indigenous disadvantage and to highlight the areas which require action.<sup>63</sup> The report involves an Indicators Framework and, in order to measure progress against these benchmarks, accurate data collection is essential. The report indicates priority areas for data collection.<sup>64</sup>
- 2.50 The Committee supports the indicator framework of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report and endorses the data collection recommendations made by the Steering Committee of that report. The framework outlining the Priority Outcomes Headline Indicators and Strategic Areas for Action can be found in chapter three of this report.
- 2.51 Accurate data is particularly important for funding allocation if Indigenous service needs are to be met appropriately.

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62 CGC, 2001, *Report on Indigenous Funding 2001*, Canberra, p. xx.

63 SCRGSP, 2003, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2003*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, p. I.

64 *ibid*, p. LII.

## Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that:

- (a) **the Commonwealth Government, in consultation with the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, take a lead role in the establishment of an agreement with State and Territory governments on the collection of uniform data in relation to Indigenous Australians; and**
- (b) **the process be given the highest priority.**

## Service provision and funding

2.52 In the late 1960s and early 1970s social policy relating to Indigenous Australians was fundamentally reassessed<sup>65</sup> and the 1967 referendum came to be seen as a marker of this change:

Indeed, the referendum has come to act as a form of historical shorthand for a decade of change in the area of Aboriginal Affairs... which, to some extent, foreshadowed the increased Commonwealth involvement in other policy areas previously the sole province of the States.<sup>66</sup>

2.53 The 1967 referendum changed the Australian Constitution with regard to Aboriginal people by:

- removing the impediment in section 51 (xxvi) to the Commonwealth Government making special laws with respect to Aborigines; and
- removing the impediment in section 127 to counting Aboriginal people in the Census.<sup>67</sup>

2.54 The referendum did not seek to give the Commonwealth explicit or exclusive responsibility for Aboriginal affairs. The responsibility for

65 CAEPR, ANU, 1993, *Rethinking the fundamentals of social policy towards Indigenous Australians: Block grants, mainstreaming and the multiplicity of agencies and programs*, Discussion Paper 46, Canberra, p. 1.

66 Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, Background Paper 11 1996-97, *The Origin of Commonwealth Involvement in Indigenous Affairs and the 1967 Referendum*, Social Policy Group, Gardiner-Garden, J., p. 16.

67 *ibid*, p. i.

Aboriginal affairs remains primarily with the States.<sup>68</sup> It did, however, enable the Commonwealth to have a role in dealing with the special needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

2.55 The following sections on the roles and obligations of the different levels of government in providing services to Indigenous Australians have been summarised from the Commonwealth Grants Commission *Report on Indigenous Funding*, unless otherwise stated.

## The role of the Commonwealth

2.56 The Commonwealth is responsible for providing a wide range of citizenship services to all Australian people. The Commonwealth also meets its responsibilities towards Indigenous people by directly funding services through own-purpose outlays, such as:

- expenditure on mainstream programs (such as income support payments, the Job Network, Medicare, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) and rent assistance), which provide citizenship services to all Australians, including Indigenous Australians, who meet eligibility criteria;
- funding ATSIC and other Commonwealth agencies to provide supplementary services to Indigenous people — examples include housing and infrastructure provision, Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and the Indigenous Employment Program;<sup>69</sup> and
- funding non-government bodies, such as community controlled health services, to provide services for Indigenous people.<sup>70</sup>

2.57 The Commonwealth provides Specific Purpose Payments (SPPs) (tied grants) to the States and Territories to fund services where the States and Territories are the main providers, but where the Commonwealth sees a national interest, with these SPPs taking the form of:

- mainstream payments (such as those under the Australian Health Care Agreements, the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement and grants for schools), which help fund

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68 *ibid*, p. 14.

69 As a consequence of its decision to abolish the ATSIC Board of Commissioners, the Government has announced that specialist Indigenous programs would be retained but those delivered by ATSIC and ATSIIS would be devolved to mainstream departments. Details of the proposed devolutions can be found at: Senator Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Reconciliation, *New Service Delivery Arrangements for Indigenous Affairs* <<http://www.atsia.gov.au/media/media04/v04012.htm>> (accessed 10.05.04).

70 CGC, 2001, *Report on Indigenous Funding 2001*, Canberra, pp. 54-55.

mainstream services the States [and Territories] provide to all eligible people, including Indigenous people; or

- supplementary Indigenous-specific SPPs (such as those under the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program) which fund services specifically for Indigenous people.<sup>71</sup>

- 2.58 The Commonwealth provides general revenue assistance to the States, Territories, and, to a lesser extent, local governments in the form of General Purpose Payments (untied grants) to help them meet their responsibilities — the States, Territories and local governments can spend these funds according to their own budget priorities.<sup>72</sup>
- 2.59 Finally, the Commonwealth provides leadership in all areas by developing, negotiating and promoting national policies and promoting understanding of new or different ways of providing services.<sup>73</sup>

## The role of the States and Territories

- 2.60 The States and Territories are the primary providers of a wide range of government services. Apart from employment services, they provide most of the services in the areas of education, infrastructure, health and housing, and incur about 70 per cent of the expenditure, which is partly funded by SPPs.<sup>74</sup>
- 2.61 Indigenous specific programs compete for funding with mainstream services provided to the general population. The challenge for the States and Territories, with respect to Indigenous people, is to provide effective services, within their mainstream provision, to a relatively small sub-population that has distinctive characteristics and which requires special approaches to service delivery.<sup>75</sup>

## The role of local government

- 2.62 Australia's local governing authorities have primary responsibility for the provision of local roads, civic planning, garbage collection and maintenance of community amenities. They fund their services from property-based rate revenue, user charges and government grants.<sup>76</sup>

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71 *ibid*, pp. 54-55.

72 *ibid*, pp. 54-55.

73 *ibid*, pp. 54-55.

74 *ibid*, p. 55.

75 *ibid*, pp. 55-56.

76 *ibid*, p. 56.



- 2.63 The Commonwealth's general revenue contribution to local government (which averages about \$68 per person) represents about 12 per cent of total revenues available to that sphere of government.<sup>77</sup>
- 2.64 In chapter three the Committee comments on the role of local authorities in service delivery and the need for funding equalisation and compensation for Indigenous populations within the jurisdiction of local authorities where revenue could not be raised through rates and other payments.

## Conclusions

- 2.65 The Report of the Review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, *In the Hands of the Regions – A New ATSIC* (the ATSIC Review), concluded that current funding and service provision to Indigenous Australians was complex, confusing, and ineffective:
- This mix of funding and program delivery is often confused, illogical, not effectively coordinated, blurs responsibility, creates duplication and produces sub-optimal outcomes.<sup>78</sup>
- 2.66 The report recommended that a roundtable be convened between Australian, State and Territory governments with the involvement of ATSIC, to discuss and reach agreement on the most effective delivery of coordinated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>79</sup>
- 2.67 The Committee supports the recommendation for a national summit on intergovernmental relations in order to address the outstanding problems around current funding arrangements. The Committee believes that local government could play a more significant role in Indigenous service delivery if funded appropriately.
- 2.68 The Committee concluded that the complexity in regard to funding service delivery could be improved through bilateral agreements between the Commonwealth and States, based on outcomes in key service delivery areas. These outcomes could be measured against national priority indicators such as those established by the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report.

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77 *ibid*, pp. 54-56.

78 Hannaford, J., Huggins, J. & Collins, R., 2003, *In the Hands of the Regions - A New ATSIC: Report of the Review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission*, Canberra, p. 60.

79 *ibid*, p. 11 and p. 60.

## ATSIC / ATSI's role in service provision

- 2.69 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was established in 1989 and was tasked, in part, to be the primary deliverer of Indigenous specific programs at the Commonwealth level.<sup>80</sup> Over the years ATSIC's structure, program responsibility and status changed. As at the commencement of 2004, ATSIC's key functions involved:
- developing policy proposals for consideration by government;
  - assisting, advising and cooperating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and individuals;
  - advocating Indigenous interests to all spheres of government, especially the Minister responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs; and
  - formulating and implementing programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>81</sup>
- 2.70 In April 2003, the then Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Philip Ruddock, announced a series of changes to the funding arrangements of ATSIC. The changes included the establishment of a new agency—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSI) to administer ATSIC's programs and make decisions about the allocation of ATSIC grants,<sup>82</sup> thus separating the political and financial arms of ATSIC in order to address perceived issues of conflict of interest and to enhance accountability.
- 2.71 Towards the end of this inquiry, however, both the Government and the Opposition made significant announcements concerning the future of ATSIC.
- 2.72 On 15 April 2004 the Government announced its intention to abolish the ATSIC Board of Commissioners and implement new service delivery arrangements for Indigenous Affairs.
- 2.73 The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Amendment Bill 2004 was presented in the House of Representatives on 27 May 2004. The Bill's purpose is to implement the Government's decision to abolish ATSIC. The Bill also contains a range of consequential and transitional provisions arising from the proposed abolition, including the transfer of ATSIC's assets and liabilities to other agencies, the establishment of a new

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80 Review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, 2001, *Public Discussion Paper*, p. 12.

81 ATSIC, *ATSIC Corporate Plan 2001-2004*, Canberra, p. 7.

82 Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, Current Issues Brief no. 29 2002-03, *Make or Break? A Background to the ATSIC Changes and the ATSIC Review, 2003*, Social Policy Group, Pratt, A, p. 1.

housing fund to be administered by Indigenous Business Australia and the abolition of ATSIC's regional councils from 1 July 2005.

- 2.74 Following the introduction of the Bill, the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, Senator the Hon. Amanda Vanstone, announced Government proposals to:
- replace the regional councils with an alternative structure to be developed in consultation with the States and Territories and Indigenous people;
  - retain and quarantine the funding for Indigenous specific programs but to devolve the programs to mainstream departments;
  - establish a Ministerial task force on Indigenous affairs to provide whole of government leadership on Indigenous issues supported by a departmental secretaries group which would report annually on outcomes;
  - hold departmental secretaries directly accountable for outcomes of Indigenous specific services and this would be reflected in their performance agreements;
  - establish a National Indigenous Council (a non statutory body comprised of Indigenous people with expertise and experience on a range of Indigenous issues) to provide policy advice to Government and directly advise the Ministerial task force; and
  - establish an Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination in DIMIA to provide advice, coordinate policy development and service delivery and oversee relationships with State and Territory governments.<sup>83</sup>
- 2.75 On 30 March 2004, the Opposition released a policy statement outlining proposals to abolish ATSIC and ATSIIS and establish a new directly-elected national Indigenous body to advise and monitor Government. The announcement stated that ATSIC was no longer capable of addressing endemic problems in Indigenous communities and had lost the confidence of much of its own constituency and the wider community. The announcement also set out principles upon which a framework for Indigenous self governance and program delivery with a focus on regional partnerships would be based and made a commitment to comprehensive

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83 Senator Amanda Vanstone, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, *Legislation to Abolish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Commission*, Media Release, 27 May 2004 <<http://www.atsia.gov.au/media/media04/v040203.htm>> (accessed 28.05.04).

consultation and negotiation on the final form of the proposed governance and program delivery framework.<sup>84</sup>

- 2.76 Within the Committee there are divergent views on the Government's legislative proposals, as well as on the issue of whether or not the Government failed to adequately consult and engage with Indigenous people on its proposals. The Committee does, however, agree on the need for effective consultation with Indigenous people on future directions in Indigenous representation and the provision of advice to government and Indigenous roles in service delivery arrangements.

### ATSIC's funding and allocation

- 2.77 ATSIC's budget in 2002-03 was \$1.132 billion,<sup>85</sup> with expenditure dominated by two large programs which accounted for more than half of the Commission's expenditure:

- the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) – approximately \$484m in 2002-03; and,
- the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) – \$255m in 2002-03.<sup>86</sup>

- 2.78 The next tier of ATSIC's expenditure was focused on native title and land rights; legal aid and prevention and diversion; commercial development; and a self funding home loans scheme, with funding ranging from \$30m to \$60m for these programs.<sup>87</sup> Smaller programs supported Indigenous broadcasting and other media; language maintenance; arts and crafts and other cultural activities; heritage and environmental protection; sport and recreation; and family reunion services for the Stolen Generations (Link Up).<sup>88</sup>

- 2.79 The Commonwealth Government required that approximately two thirds of ATSIC's budget be spent on CDEP, CHIP and Native Title, with the remaining third spent at the discretion of ATSIC's elected

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84 Mark Latham, Leader of the Opposition and Kerry O'Brien, Shadow Minister for Reconciliation and Indigenous Affairs, *Opportunity and Responsibility for Indigenous Australians*, ALP News Statements, Policy Statement, 30 March 2002, <http://www.alp.org.au/media/0304/20007157.html> (Accessed, 26 May 2004).

85 ATSIC, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Budget*, Media Backgrounder, <[http://www.atsic.gov.au/About\\_ATSIC/Budget/2002\\_2003/budget02-03-background.doc](http://www.atsic.gov.au/About_ATSIC/Budget/2002_2003/budget02-03-background.doc)> p. 1.

86 *ibid*, p. 1.

87 *ibid*, p. 1.

88 *ibid*, p. 1.

representatives.<sup>89</sup> It should be noted that in many instances, ATSIC's role was to provide programs to supplement, rather than substitute for, the provision of mainstream services available to all citizens of Australia, and which are the responsibility of other government agencies. ATSIC's programs were intended to complement government Indigenous specific programs.

- 2.80 ATSIC's budget represented less than half of the Commonwealth's allocation for Indigenous specific programs. The other half was largely administered by the Department of Education, Science and Training (for ABSTUDY and other Indigenous education programs), the Department of Health and Aged Care (for primary health care, substance abuse, mental health and aged care services), the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (for an Indigenous Employment Policy) and the Department of Family and Community Services (for some public housing via the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program). As previously mentioned, State, Territory and local government also receive funding and have responsibilities for providing services.<sup>90</sup>

### Public perceptions of ATSIC's responsibilities

- 2.81 The Committee is aware of arguments that ATSIC has been a scapegoat for failures in Indigenous programs, and has been held accountable for programs which it no longer administered.<sup>91</sup> The Commonwealth Grants Commission Report on Indigenous Funding found that the failure of mainstream programs to meet the needs of Indigenous people placed a burden on ATSIC funds to deliver services for which it had no primary responsibility.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, the Report argued that ATSIC had difficulty fulfilling its role as a supplementary funder as, in a number of cases, ATSIC had to operate as a primary funder of services where other agencies had failed to fulfil their obligations due to blurred roles and responsibilities.<sup>93</sup>

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89 *ibid*, p. 1.

90 *ibid*, p. 2.

91 Opinions have been expressed by a variety of figures, notably, Dr William Jonas AM (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner) and Commissioner Lionel Quartermaine (Acting ATSIC Chairman). See Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Media Release *Statement on ATSIC: Dr William Jonas AM, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, HREOC*, and ATSIC Media Release *Indigenous suffering demands meaningful solutions from national political leaders*, both dated 16.04.04.

92 CGC, 2001, *Report on Indigenous Funding 2001*, Canberra, p. 57.

93 *ibid*, p. 57.

## Findings of the ATSIC Review

2.82 In November 2003 the report of the review of ATSIC was released, titled *In the hands of the Regions – A new ATSIC*. It proposed a package of reforms to give greater control of ATSIC to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the regional level. The Committee commends the review panel on the report and sees merit in a number of the recommendations proposed. Certain of these recommendations have relevance to this inquiry into service delivery and capacity building in Indigenous communities and are drawn upon throughout this report.

## Indigenous community organisations

2.83 Indigenous organisations and councils are responsible for much of the service delivery in discrete Indigenous communities and to Indigenous populations in regional urban centres. These organisations range from small local groups relying on voluntary labour to very large national organisations.

2.84 The Committee heard that Indigenous people can prefer and be more comfortable with Indigenous organisations providing services for Indigenous people.<sup>94</sup> These services have a high level of Indigenous consumer focus.<sup>95</sup>

The need goes right down to the individual person, to their basic consumer rights... This is something that for far too long has not been recognised, and Tangentyere takes the consumer voice very seriously.<sup>96</sup>

## A different response towards service delivery

2.85 The need to deliver appropriate and effective services to Indigenous people has been acknowledged for over a decade. Data on Indigenous disadvantage, as discussed earlier in this chapter, indicate that there is some distance to go between the rhetoric of improved service delivery and improved outcomes for Indigenous people.

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94 Mr Paul Briggs, First Nations Australian Credit Union, Rumbalara Football/Netball Club, and Common Fate Endorsed Program, Transcript of evidence (17.02.03), p. 337.

95 Tangentyere Council Inc., Submission 32, p. 2.

96 Mr William Tilmouth, Tangentyere Council, Transcript (25.09.03), pp. 1291-1292.

- 2.86 Clearly there is a tangible shift in the way governments and Indigenous people envisage the way services should be delivered, both a changing attitude and a changing mode of engagement and agreement making.

There is a clearly articulated, and nationally supported, need for systemic change in the way the wider Australian community (including government) works with Indigenous peoples.... The current trend of program and community service delivery approaches falls short of recognising the value of Indigenous participation. Indeed it constrains the ability for Indigenous peoples to influence outcomes too often set outside of effective consultation and engagement.<sup>97</sup>

What is needed is a paradigm shift — one that supports Aboriginal community leaders and Elders and their call for a reform agenda. Central to the reform agenda is personal and community empowerment, the right of Aboriginal communities to take responsibility for their own affairs and the obligation on governments to change the way they engage with Aboriginal communities in the provision of services.<sup>98</sup>

- 2.87 The current modes of service delivery which reinforce passive acceptance of these services are questioned by a number of government agencies and community organisations.<sup>99</sup> Indigenous leaders, such as Noel Pearson in Cape York, articulate this position.<sup>100</sup>
- 2.88 The Committee has heard that government agencies at both the Commonwealth and State/Territory levels are actively pursuing genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people.<sup>101</sup>

## Commonwealth Government

- 2.89 The Commonwealth Government is articulating a greater emphasis on forming partnerships with Indigenous communities. The Committee believes that the Commonwealth plays a vital leadership role in pushing

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97 Government of Western Australia, Submission 57, p. 4.

98 Aboriginal Services Division, Department of Human Services South Australia, Submission 49, p. 2.

99 For example, DIMIA, Submission 42, p. 10.

100 See Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Dr. William Jonas AM, 2002, *Social Justice Report 2001*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, pp. 58-61 for an indication of Noel Pearson's views.

101 See the *Partnerships* section of chapter three.

this change in service delivery engagement, and should ensure that Commonwealth initiatives continue to support this partnerships agenda.

- 2.90 The Commonwealth, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has committed itself to a partnership approach with Indigenous communities and State and Territory governments. DIMIA told the Committee that:

These developments marked an increasing recognition by government and communities of the importance of building partnerships of shared responsibility for improving the circumstances of Indigenous people.<sup>102</sup>

- 2.91 In April 2002 COAG committed itself to implement a whole of government cooperative approach in up to ten Indigenous communities or regions throughout Australia. The initiative takes a three to five year approach to outcomes and emphasises the substantial investment in building the capacity of communities to be able to engage with governments as equal partners. The Committee heard evidence from the Indigenous Community Coordinating Taskforce (ICCT) which was established by COAG to coordinate and facilitate the initiative:

The Commonwealth Government has agreed to work closely with State and Territory Governments in a number of Indigenous communities and regions to provide programmes and services in a more coordinated and flexible way based on priorities agreed with communities.<sup>103</sup>

- 2.92 The Committee visited a number of the COAG initiative sites and saw at first hand differences in both the capacity of communities to deal with governments and in the issues which communities wished to address. The Committee commends this long-term approach to capacity building and the establishment of partnerships between governments and communities. The Western Australian Government told the Committee that:

... [The] COAG pilot is an action learning process. It is not a program... [or] something we are going to duplicate everywhere... It is designed to inform a broader application of policy and a broader set of initiatives that is more equitable in the way that it delivers a service. So the relationship between the Commonwealth and the State is very important. I think it would be very exciting to see the Commonwealth shift its perspective to

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102 DIMIA, Submission 42, p. 18.

103 Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce (ICCT), Submission 40, p. 3.



be more responsive and less proactive... it would be beneficial if it stepped back and waited and was able to respond and put the community in the driving seat to outline how it wanted the government to respond—and that is the same for our own State government as well. This action learning research is about empowering that community.<sup>104</sup>

- 2.93 The Committee believes that the COAG initiative should be maintained and that the findings from these trials should be implemented in a manner which continues to build the capacity of governments and Indigenous communities. The Committee believes that the COAG agreements have elevated Indigenous affairs to a more prominent position on the political agenda. It will be at the highest levels of government that Indigenous disadvantage will most effectively be addressed.
- 2.94 This does not mean, however, that the Committee does not have serious concerns regarding the Trials. The Committee notes that there has been limited, if any, coordinated reporting on their implementation and, to date, no tangible evidence has emerged on their progress. The Committee has concerns regarding accountability matters, and believes that an effective audit process needs to be put in place and a regular report made on their progress in achieving outcomes.

## Recommendation 2

**The Committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs a permanent agenda item at future COAG meetings.**

## State and Territory Government initiatives

### New South Wales

- 2.95 In 2001 the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs created a plan of action called *Two Ways Together. Partnerships: A New Way of Doing Business with Aboriginal People*, that acknowledges past problems, builds on successes and works to strengthen Aboriginal leadership and economic

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<sup>104</sup> Ms Benita Cattalini, Department of Indigenous Affairs, Western Australian Government, Transcript (05.08.03), p. 914.

independence, building a partnership between Aboriginal people and the NSW Government.<sup>105</sup> The Committee was told:

What this new approach will seek to do is address localised needs by supporting solutions which are developed and driven by Aboriginal people in their communities. The framework of Two Ways Together has two core elements. The first is making services work, which establishes what business needs to be done, and the second is new ways of doing business with Aboriginal people, which establishes how business will be done.<sup>106</sup>

- 2.96 In 2002 the NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs also signed a *Service Delivery Partnership Agreement* with ATSIC and the NSW Aboriginal Land Council intended to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through greater collaboration and cooperation.<sup>107</sup>

The Service Delivery Partnerships Agreement ensures that our Commonwealth partners are more readily able to align their strategies with local priorities and aspirations... It is focused on developing greater sensitivities, flexibilities and responsiveness within agencies in the way in which they work and deliver services to Aboriginal people.<sup>108</sup>

## Northern Territory

- 2.97 Representatives of the Northern Territory Government told the Committee that:

The current government has articulated a substantial agenda in Indigenous affairs and is actively exploring ways of building more effective partnerships with Indigenous communities and governments to address the chronic issues facing most Indigenous communities.<sup>109</sup>

- 2.98 As part of this approach, the Northern Territory Government established an Office on Indigenous Policy, within the Chief Minister's Office, in July

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105 Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), New South Wales Government, *Partnerships: A New Way of Doing Business with Aboriginal People*,

<<http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/policies/policy.html>> (accessed 08.11.03).

106 Mr Andrew Cappie-Wood, DAA, NSW Government, Transcript (08.04.03), p. 659.

107 DAA, NSW Government, *NSW Service Delivery Partnership Agreement*

<<http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/policies/agreement.html>> (accessed 08.11.03).

108 Mr Andrew Cappie-Wood, DAA, NSW Government, Transcript (08.04.03), pp. 659-660.

109 Mr Neil Westbury, Office of Indigenous Policy, Department of the Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government, Transcript (27.11.02), p. 176.

2002. The Office provides whole of government advice on Indigenous affairs policy issues.

## Queensland

2.99 The Queensland Government has developed a framework which aims to reduce the levels of bureaucracy between communities and decision makers. Queensland has adopted a *negotiation table* model where communities are provided the facility to identify, develop and present their priorities to government, and government is able to respond in a timely and coordinated way. This community involvement directly with government is supported at the highest level of the bureaucracy through the *Champions* program where Indigenous communities are ‘championed’ by CEOs of government departments, so that the communities have a direct link with the highest level of bureaucracy.<sup>110</sup>

The Partnership is built on the premise that government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should work together, through partnering, to improve the economic, physical, social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders....Our approach to partnerships is community driven. We recognise that continued reliance on “top — down” models would only serve to increase dependency on the welfare economy.<sup>111</sup>

2.100 Officials from the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy articulated the policy direction to form partnerships, not only with Indigenous people, but equally with the Commonwealth Government.<sup>112</sup>

## South Australia

2.101 The South Australian Government told the Committee that there:

...[is] the need to develop genuine partnerships between the government and community, that is a partnership that provides autonomy of decision making for the community with expert advice provided from other stakeholders when requested. In other words Government should assist, not direct, communities.<sup>113</sup>

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110 Queensland Government, Submission 56, p. 5.

111 Queensland Government, Submission 56, p. 2.

112 Mr Tony Dreise, Strategic Partnership Office, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy Queensland, Transcript (09.07.03), p. 865.

113 Government of South Australia, Submission 51, p. 3.

- 2.102 The model proposes that governments provide resources, together with some skill based experience, as well as support, and that the community provide local knowledge and experiences. Critically, the South Australian Government suggests that both parties must bring a desire for success and an understanding and respect for the other party's contributions.<sup>114</sup>

## Tasmania

- 2.103 The Tasmanian Government is currently negotiating a formal Partnership Agreement between the State government, Tasmania's Aboriginal people and ATSIC. This follows on from a Communiqué signed by ATSIC's Chairman and Tasmania's Premier in 2001, and aims to build on the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders (1992)*.<sup>115</sup> The proposed partnership will:

recognise the need for a partnership with Aboriginal people in Tasmania and the imperative for a multi-agency approach to achieving priority outcomes. Initiatives will be implemented cooperatively by relevant Commonwealth, State and Local Government agencies and ATSIC. Specific issues identified under these initiatives will be further developed by Partnership Agreement Issues Working Groups.<sup>116</sup>

## Victoria

- 2.104 The Victorian Government Indigenous Affairs Report released in October 2002 sets out the priority to build a new partnership between the government and Indigenous Victorians. The report notes that the Victorian Government has put in place:

The building blocks...to rebuild and recast the relationship between government and Indigenous communities. In particular, the development of the Premier's Aboriginal Advisory Council ...

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114 Government of South Australia, Submission 51, p. 3.

115 Details of the *National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islanders (1992)* can be found at <<http://www.alga.asn.au/policy/indigenous/nationalCommitment.php>> (accessed 21.04.04).

116 Government of Tasmania and ATSIC, 2001, <[http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/policy/partnerships/documents/ATSIC\\_communique.pdf](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/policy/partnerships/documents/ATSIC_communique.pdf)> Communiqué, (accessed 21.04.04).

has provided an important new link between the government and Indigenous Victorians.<sup>117</sup>

- 2.105 The Committee was told by representatives from the Department of Aboriginal Affairs Victoria that the Victorian Government was committed to forming new partnerships with Indigenous communities.

I would conclude on the point that the government believes that the way to be fair dinkum... in partnership is not to stipulate what a community needs or what we think is appropriate to develop that capacity, but to have them identify the best way and to come to us with what they regard as something that will develop a sustainable approach to enable that community to increase its capacity to achieve its objectives and to work with government.<sup>118</sup>

## Western Australia

- 2.106 The Western Australian Government noted that current trends of program and community service delivery approaches fall short of recognising the value of Indigenous participation.<sup>119</sup> It articulated a new response to service delivery which requires government agencies to work with Indigenous people in a meaningful way.

- 2.107 In 2001 the WA Government made a formal commitment to build a new relationship with the Aboriginal people of Western Australia based upon a Statement of Commitment. The Statement set out a partnership framework based on decentralising decision making by developing regional and local agreements, and laid the foundation for a new partnership between Government and Indigenous communities.<sup>120</sup> In relation to identified changes in service delivery the Committee was told:

You have to identify the particular community you are going to work with and you have to engage them and spend time getting to know them before you can actually work out the delivery style. I think that is the key: getting to know them, engaging them, working with them and asking them what they actually want. I think that, previously, in government agencies—I have been with government for a while—we made all these assumptions and we did not believe there were strengths in the areas to which we

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117 Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Victorian Government, *The Victorian government Indigenous affairs report November 1999 - October 2002*, p. iii.

118 Mr Anthony Cahir, Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, Transcript of evidence (19.02.03), p. 436.

119 Government of Western Australia, Submission 57, p. 4.

120 Government of Western Australia, Submission 57, p. 24.

provided services. I think things are changing in government in Western Australia whereby we are working with communities and asking them what they want.<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusions

2.108 The Committee is encouraged by the efforts of all levels of government to reconsider conventional methods of service delivery which reinforce dependence upon governments and continue to disempower Indigenous people. The Committee suggests that all levels of government should continue to pursue genuine partnerships with Indigenous people and that Indigenous people should engage with governments at the highest level.

2.109 The Committee acknowledges suggestions in evidence that the Commonwealth take a less proactive and more reactive role and respond to requests from Indigenous communities.<sup>122</sup> The critical challenge for all levels of government is to move from the rhetoric of partnership to a position of genuine partnership and engagement to allow Indigenous people to achieve Indigenous objectives. Professor Stephen Cornell of the Harvard Project told the Committee:

It is... like the government moving out of the driver's seat but remaining very much in the vehicle as a resource.<sup>123</sup>

2.110 The critical challenge for Indigenous people and Indigenous leaders is to engage in the debate, to enhance the governance of Indigenous organisations so that Indigenous people can invest in, take ownership for and find solutions to problems, and to work in partnership with the wider Australian community. ATSI Commissioner Quartermaine argued:

... good governance is about – honestly facing up to problems and dealing with them ourselves. Not leaving it to others. Taking control of our own lives and our own affairs means taking ownership of the mistakes and responsibility for fixing them, as well as taking credit for achievements. We have to learn from experience and adjust accordingly.<sup>124</sup>

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121 Mrs Jennifer Collard, Indigenous Policy Directorate, Department for Community Development, Government of Western Australia, Transcript (05.08.03), pp. 908-909.

122 Ms Benita Cattalini, Western Australian Government, Transcript (05.08.03), p. 914.

123 Professor Stephen Cornell, Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, University of Arizona, Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Transcript (03.11.03), p. 1370.

124 Commissioner Lionel Quartermaine, Acting Chairman, ATSI, *Indigenous Research: What's It About?* Keynote Address to open the Indigenous Researchers' Forum, 01.10.03 <[http://www.atsic.gov.au/news\\_room/speeches\\_transcripts/default.asp?id=2926](http://www.atsic.gov.au/news_room/speeches_transcripts/default.asp?id=2926)> (accessed 08.12.03).

- 2.111 In this chapter the Committee has explored the current socio economic status of Indigenous Australians, the current service delivery environment and the emerging direction of government-Indigenous relations. The next chapter explores how the capacity of governments can be developed to help address the disadvantage of Indigenous people.