



Remote community stores —getting the basics right

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs' next public hearing, the third for its inquiry into remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait community stores, will investigate the effect on community stores of the Northern Territory Emergency Response.

In 2007 the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) Act introduced licensing of community stores to support income management in the 73 prescribed communities. The licensing program, administered by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), required systematic assessment of a store's capacity to meet three fundamental requirements:

- to sell and promote a reasonable range of healthy groceries and quality goods;
- to support and deliver income management processes; and
- to have sound financial structures, retail and governance practices.

The Committee will first hear from Stanton's International, consultants to FaHCSIA, who have visited 30 remote communities across the Northern Territory to determine compliance capacity and to provide risk treatment plans, training and post implementation reviews to assessed stores.

Income management was introduced so that Aboriginal families in prescribed communities would spend more on essential foods and goods. The Department of Human Services leads implementation of Income management. In September 2008 it introduced the BasicsCard, which functions like an EFTPOS card, to address identified problems by consumers and stores.

The Department of Health and Ageing coordinates health services for Indigenous Australians through the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH). Department officers will advise on the fundamental relationship between the limited availability of fresh fruits and vegetables in remote communities and the 17 year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non indigenous Australians.

Public hearing: Thursday 19 March 2009 Venue: Committee Room 1R2

12.10pm Stanton's International, Accountants and Advisers

12.45pm The Department of Human Services

1.20pm The Department of Health and Ageing

For media comment, please contact the Committee Chair Mr Richard Marles on (02) 62774330.

For background information, contact the Committee Secretariat on (02) 62774559 or atsia.reps@aph.gov.au