

Submission
No 82

INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE

Organisation: Men's Health Information and Resource Centre, University of
Western Sydney

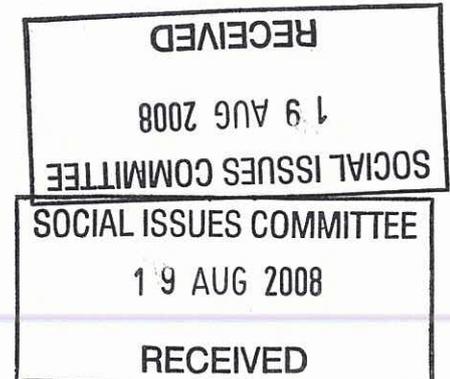
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Date received: 19/08/2008

The Chairperson
Social Issues Committee
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000



06 August 2008

Submission to the NSW Legislative Inquiry into Closing the Gap – overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage

Dear Committee Members,

This submission is concerned primarily with the area of health & well-being, although it is also relevant for other areas such as the problem of incarceration, and education and employment. It focuses primarily on Indigenous men. This is not meant to exclude consideration of Indigenous women, but simply to acknowledge that the gender of Indigenous people has a considerable effect on the nature of disadvantage experienced, and so on potential actions designed to overcome this disadvantage.

The DVD accompanying this submission as an attachment was only recently completed, and is intended as a celebration of the important work conducted by the 35 Aboriginal Men's groups around NSW. It illustrates the range of actions undertaken by the men's groups in addressing issues of physical & mental health, drug & alcohol abuse, incarceration and family relations. The importance of these groups is that they show a way for working with Aboriginal men and boys that is culturally appropriate, effective, and which requires only a small investment of resources to address issues that are often extremely challenging for

government departments and other large service delivery agencies. The failures of government departments over many years in dealing with such problems, contrasted with the successes of these groups over a very short time (and with very few resources) highlights their potential to contribute in Closing the Gap.

The challenge for government is to find ways to support such community driven activities to become more effective. Over the past few years, the only government resources devoted to these groups was a small grant from the NSW Department of Health which employed one man to assist all of these groups to develop their capacity. This funding ended two months ago. A few organizations, such as the Men's Health Information & Resource Centre at the University of Western Sydney, and the School of Public Health at La Trobe University, have found funding through research grants and private philanthropists to offer a modicum of support to some of the Aboriginal men's groups in the absence of funding through government departments.

In light of the above, I would like to make the following recommendations for the consideration of the Committee's members:

1. That Aboriginal men's groups be recognised as one important element in attempts to close the gap for Aboriginal men and boys.
2. That the voluntary nature & community based operation of these groups be supported & not subsumed into a government agency. However, government agencies (Health, DoCS, Corrective Services, Juvenile Justice, etc) should be encouraged to develop partnerships with these groups to assist in targeting areas of need and delivering services.
3. That a small unit of Aboriginal male workers be employed to develop the capacity of these groups to better deliver current services and compete for funds for projects

relevant to local issues. This unit would also conduct evaluations of projects and groups to assist them to better develop and maintain optimal functioning.

4. That small grants be made available for these groups to be established in areas where they don't exist, and to become sustainable in areas where they do exist. These grants would only be for helping with meeting and operating costs (mail outs, contribution to phone costs, venue hire, etc), so that the voluntary nature of these groups is maintained.
5. That funding for specific projects be made available for groups activities and training to develop the expertise of group members.
6. Funding for partnerships/projects between these groups and relevant government departments & community organisations. For example, Corrective Services & Aboriginal Men's Groups could cooperate in assisting Aboriginal men transition from prison back to the community; Aboriginal Medical Services can provide health screening to men and boys.
7. That both Regional Engagement Groups & Community Engagement Groups under "Two Ways Together" invite local Aboriginal Men's groups to provide representatives to participate in deliberations & decision making.

Yours sincerely,



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P.S. Please note that the
DVD pack contains 3 items:
1 DVD1 - edited interviews
(main disk) app. 48 mins.
2 DVD2 - full interviews with
all men
3 Directory of Aboriginal
Men's Groups in NSW.