

**Submission  
No 42**

## **INQUIRY INTO OVERCOMING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE**

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**Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000**

The Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Standing Committee on Social Issue's Inquiry into Closing the Gap – Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage.

**About the Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group**

The Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group represent a range of Aboriginal community care service providers delivering aged care and disability services in the Metropolitan, La Perouse, Gadangara and Tharawal Land Council Areas. The primary aim of the Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group is to support the development and delivery of quality aged care and disability services in response to identified community need.

Aboriginal community care services play a significant role in supporting Aboriginal people in their communities and when needed linking them to the appropriate community and health services. Many Aboriginal people that services work with have complex and high support needs. This may include care and health needs related to ageing and frailty, dementia, chronic illness, multiple diagnoses and mental health. Many clients also live in poverty, are transient, or are at risk of homelessness and are reliant on access to a range of community care, health and housing services. At the same time, many Aboriginal people are less likely to gain equitable access to services for reasons that include a lack of culturally appropriate services, shortage of Aboriginal workers, lack of access to transport, ineligibility for service based on age and an inability to pay for services.

**1. That the Standing Committee on Social Issues inquire into and report on:**

*(a) policies and programs being implemented both within Australia (States/Territories/Federal) and internationally aimed at closing the gap between the lifetime expectancy between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people (currently estimated at 17 years), with the assessment of policies and programs including but not limited to: New Zealand, Canada, North America, South America, and also considering available reports and information from key NGOs and community organizations*

There are a number of government initiatives and policy reforms that are likely to impact on Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal aged care and disability service providers in the Sydney region. Some of these include:

- NSW Two Ways Together Plan 2003 – 2012
- NSW Better Together and Stronger Together Disability Plans
- NSW Carers Action Plan 2007–2012

- NSW Human Services Accord
  - NSW 2030 Aged Care Plan
  - Redfern Waterloo Authority Human Services Plan
  - Commonwealth Government's Community Care Reforms - The Way Forward
- There is a need to ensure that government services co-ordinate policy initiatives and work with non-government services to ensure effective, feasible and sustainable solutions to meet the health care needs of Aboriginal people.
  - Aboriginal service provider networks such as the Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group provide a place to work with government services to develop sustainable solutions

**Recommendations:**

- To develop clear processes to support joint planning between NSW government departments with the aim of improving information flow and to ensure work is prioritized and not duplicated
- NSW government departments could implement strategies to regularly consult and work with non-government providers through interagency networks, such as the NSW Gathering and the Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group
- The NSW Two Ways Together Plan should include aged care strategies and these should be linked to the NSW Ageing 2030 plan
- NSW government implementation plans should include a funding component where the delivery of more service is expected
- Adequate funding should be provided to support and invest in the Aboriginal community care service system as a whole. This would include a commitment to develop and support information, advocacy and community development services.

**(b) the impact of the following factors on the current lifetime expectancy gap:**

- (i) environmental health (water, sewerage, waste, other)
- (ii) health and wellbeing
- (iii) education
- (iv) employment
- (v) housing
- (vi) incarceration and the criminal justice system
- (vii) other infrastructure,

**(i) N/A**

**(ii) health and wellbeing**

- Aboriginal organisations often provide services to clients with complex care needs. This includes clients with needs related to ageing and frailty, mental health, dementia, chronic illness, multiple diagnosis, homelessness, poverty and young people with disability and complex care needs.

- Assisting clients with complex needs requires wholistic and culturally appropriate assessment, assisted referral, care co-ordination and or case management. This work may involve negotiating and working with a range of other service providers to assist clients with housing, health, Centerlink, bill paying, family support and financial assistance. This can be time consuming, especially if these other specialist services are unable to respond in a timely manner.
- There is not enough assistance from specialist mental health services. Community services are not equipped to deal with the levels of health care and expertise needed to deal with mental health issues and this places enormous pressure on staff
- There is a substantial population of people who are transient. There is not enough out of hours service to support transient people, especially for those in need of crisis housing and food.
- There is a lack of carer support and services, including information and advocacy. Many Aboriginal people care for others in their family and if they do not get enough support then the carers health is also at risk. Many carers would benefit from readily available and flexible respite services, including out of hours, overnight respite and healing services.

**Recommendations:**

- Aboriginal community services require adequate resources for core functions of service delivery such as culturally appropriate assessment, information, referral, networking and care co-ordination
- Include mental health support as a priority area within the NSW Two Ways Together State Plan
- Increase resources for Aboriginal specific out of hours service
- In partnership with the Commonwealth departments investigate barriers, including between different programs, to the delivery of flexible respite models
- Resource community health services to provide community outreach information and awareness sessions on topics such as diabetes, nutrition, cancer support, dementia support and diet.

**(iii) Education and iv) Employment**

- Proposed Community Development Employment Project (CDEP) closures are likely to impact on a range of services for Aboriginal people as many organizations utilize CDEP funds to subsidize other support services. The closure or reduction of CDEP services is also likely to place pressure on other Aboriginal organizations to meet this demand.
- Recruiting, maintaining and supporting an Aboriginal workforce is a major issue for community care services and underpins many service delivery challenges.

Some of these challenges include:

- Community workers are under a lot of pressure as they are responding to complex needs such as mental health issues and it is not always easy to refer clients to more appropriate services. Workers are not necessarily equipped to deal with these complex issues

- There may also be an expectation that workers provide support out of hours
- Workers are constantly dealing with grief and loss with little support
- The SACs Award is poorly paid and is not keeping pace with living costs and competing sectors, especially in the Sydney Metro region where the cost of housing is high
- Funding restrictions mean that many staff work on a casual or part time basis, receiving low wages that may not meet other costs such as child care

#### Employment in mainstream services

- Aboriginal service providers are concerned that limited workforce resources are stretched across too many services. This may result in high staff turnover and vacancies in key health and community positions, placing pressure on Aboriginal organizations to meet the demand. There is also concern that some staff in mainstream services may not get appropriate cultural support and are often under pressure to meet overwhelming levels of need without this support.
- There is a lack of ongoing culturally appropriate training for mainstream services.

#### **Recommendations:**

- NSW Government to advocate to maintain the CDEP
- To develop a NSW workforce framework to inform local strategies and ensure resources are made available to implement strategies at the local level. Workforce strategies could include:
  - support programs for people in pre-employment
  - support for small business enterprises
  - acknowledgement and positive promotion of the depth of knowledge, skill and expertise that Aboriginal people bring to the workforce to encourage new workers
  - Training resources made available to support new workers and provide skill development opportunities for all workers, including in specialized areas such as dementia and mental health
  - Cultural awareness training resources are made available to provide local training on an ongoing basis

#### **b v) Housing**

- The shortage of affordable housing options has a major impact on Aboriginal people and communities. Many people are homeless or forced to live in unhealthy conditions that do not meet their needs such as in overcrowded homes.
- Community care services report the following issues in relation to the NSW Housing reforms:
  - There is concern that the introduction of short term tenures is likely to impact on Aboriginal residents and increase eviction notices, especially as there are racist attitudes in some areas
  - Housing allocations are sometimes inappropriate

- The NSW Human Services Accord lacks clarity about the process for establishing partnerships and communication with non government services
- The Joint Guarantee of Service between mental health services and NSW Housing is not always working well. This creates difficulty for community services to support tenants at the Consumer Tenancy & Trading Tribunal (CTTT) because many people have not received the support they needed.

#### Supported Accommodation and residential respite

- There is a chronic shortage of supported accommodation and residential respite services

#### Residential Aged Care

- The need for a specific Aboriginal Aged Care facility in the Sydney basement area has been identified as a high priority at a number of community consultations by government services such as the Redfern Waterloo Authority. Most Aboriginal people, residing in the Sydney metropolitan region, have little option in respect to culturally appropriate residential aged care when the need is required. Instead, they are placed in mainstream facilities or they must travel to specific Aboriginal facilities located on the North Coast and South Coast of NSW. This creates many obstacles for family members who find it difficult to visit their loved ones on a regular basis.
- The establishment of a specific Aboriginal Residential Age Care facility in the Sydney basement area would assist with the training and skill development of the Aboriginal community care workforce. The model may also include options for residential respite.
- The Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group is writing a submission for funding to undertake a comprehensive feasibility study for an Aged Care facility for Aboriginal people residing in Sydney.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Develop a NSW State housing plan and include strategies that support the development of a range of housing options for Aboriginal people
- NSW Housing to clarify the process for non-government services to partner under the NSW Human Services Accord. This would involve consulting with Aboriginal service networks
- Adequately resource and develop strategies for improved response and partnering of mental health services with other government and non - government services
- Increase the number of residential respite and supported accommodation places
- Support the establishment of a specific Aboriginal Aged Care facility in the Sydney basement area by funding a comprehensive feasibility study.

**(vi) N/A**

### **(vii) other infrastructure**

#### Community Transport

- There is a lack of community transport services. Many community transport providers have a high demand for medical transport services. Services are concerned that this is detracting from their ability to provide community and social access.
- Home & Community Care Guidelines for data reporting indicate that carers are unable to access transport without the client accompanying them.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Implement the recommendations set out in the report 'No Transport No Treatment, Community transport to health services in NSW'
- Increase funding for Aboriginal community transport services
- Ensure carers access to Home and Community Care transport is supported without the need to have the client accompany them

#### Supporting Aboriginal Organisations

- Aboriginal organisations often provide a broad range of service in comparison to many mainstream services, including after hours and emergency relief. This is because many Aboriginal people present to services in crisis and may not have local support from families and networks. Continuing to have a flexible and responsive approach is increasingly difficult as services have not been adequately funded for an extended period of time. This places pressure on workers and management committees who are reluctant to turn people away in need.
- There are not always appropriate services to refer clients to, especially emergency relief which is mainly provided by mainstream services. Aboriginal services report that many clients continue to seek support from the referring Aboriginal services as the mainstream services do not have the expertise, skill and knowledge to provide a service that is culturally appropriate.
- Sometimes gaps in service delivery occur because of difficulty in recruiting workers
- Aboriginal service providers are often expected to help mainstream services with the implementation of services for Aboriginal people or to help them consult with Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal service providers do not receive funding to provide this assistance even though it has a cost and can be time consuming.
- There is concern that competitive funding processes disadvantage small Aboriginal services. Tender documentation is not user friendly and undermines an Aboriginal cultural perspective.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Provide adequate funding to support Aboriginal community services to carry out core functions of service delivery, such as culturally appropriate assessment, information, referral, staff support and training, networking and care co-ordination.

- Provide adequate funding to support the Aboriginal community care service system as a whole. This should include a commitment to develop and support information, advocacy and community development services
- Government tenders for Aboriginal service provision should include criteria that gives primary consideration to connection with Aboriginal communities and networks

***(c) previous Social Issues committee reports containing reference to Aboriginal people – and assess the progress of government in implementing adopted report recommendations,***

See comments under 1a)

**(d) N/A**

**(e) opportunities for strengthening cultural resilience within Aboriginal communities in New South Wales with a focus on language, cultural identity, economic development and self determination**

- The Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group believes that the principles of self-determination and autonomy in the delivery and planning of services for and by Aboriginal people is fundamental to strengthening cultural resilience within Aboriginal communities in New South Wales.
- The Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group supports the principles and recommendations of the NSW Aboriginal Community Care Gathering Committee as set out in '*Leading Our Way in Community Care Policy Position April 2007*'

**Recommendations:**

- NSW Government to commit to the principles of self-determination and autonomy in the delivery and planning of services for and by Aboriginal people, ensuring these principles inform policy initiatives
- Support the principles and recommendations of the NSW Aboriginal Community Care Gathering Committee as set out in '*Leading Our Way in Community Care Policy Position April 2007*' available from <http://www.ncoss.org.au>
- Also see supporting Aboriginal organisations under 1b) (vii)

If you have any queries or seek further information please do not hesitate to contact, Chris Bath, on 02) 9698 7784, or [haccco@inet.net.au](mailto:haccco@inet.net.au), and the request will be passed on to the Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group.

Yours sincerely

Chris Bath

On behalf of the Koori Aged and Disability Services Advisory Group