



**Australian Government**

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**Department of Families, Housing,  
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

**SUBMISSION OF BACKGROUND MATERIAL TO THE  
NORTHERN TERRITORY EMERGENCY RESPONSE  
REVIEW BOARD**

August 2008

## Foreword

This submission provides background information on the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and a description of the governance, funding arrangements and the measures and sub-measures through which the NTER was implemented in remote Northern Territory communities up to 30 June 2008.

The material is provided to assist the NTER Review Board in its consideration of the implementation of the NTER and in preparing its report in accordance with its terms of reference.

For a brief description of the NTER see the publication *Northern Territory Emergency Response – One Year On*.<sup>1</sup> Some figures differ between these documents because of the different dates on which information was reported.

August 2008

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, (2008), *Northern Territory Emergency Response – One Year On*, Canberra, <[http://www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/reports/one\\_year\\_on.htm](http://www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/reports/one_year_on.htm)>.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

AACAP	Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program
ACC	Australian Crime Commission
ACCHOs	Aboriginal community controlled health organisations
AFP	Australian Federal Police
ADF	Australian Defence Force
AGD	Attorney-General's Department (Commonwealth)
AIS	Aboriginal Interpreter Service
ALRA	<i>Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976</i>
CCU	Community Clean-Up program
CDEP	Community Development Employment Projects program
CEB	Community Employment Broker
CEO	Catholic Education Office (NT)
CHC	Child Health Check
CIU	Cabinet Implementation Unit
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Commonwealth)
DHCS	Department of Health and Community Services (NT) now Department of Health and Families
DoHA	Department of Health and Ageing (Commonwealth)
FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth)
FaHCSIA Minister	Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth)
FRC	Families Responsibilities Commission
GBM	Government Business Manager
ICC	Indigenous Coordination Centre

IEDS	Indigenous Economic Development Strategy
IEO	Indigenous Engagement Officer
LCS	<i>Ampe Akelyernemane Mele Mekarle, Little Children are Sacred: Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse</i> report
NIITF	National Indigenous Violence and Child Abuse Intelligence Taskforce
NT	Northern Territory
NTG	Northern Territory Government
NTER	Northern Territory Emergency Response
NTNER	Northern Territory National Emergency Response
NTSO	Northern Territory State Office of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Commonwealth)
RAE	Remote Area Exemption
SNP	School Nutrition Program
TH	Territory Housing
WfD	Work for the Dole

## **Section 1                      Overview of the Northern Territory Emergency Response**

This section provides an overview of the first twelve months of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) from its announcement on 21 June 2007 until 30 June 2008.

On 21 June 2007, the then Prime Minister, the Hon John Howard MP, and the then Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Mal Brough MP, announced national emergency measures aimed at protecting Aboriginal children in the Northern Territory (NT) from abuse and to give them a better, safer future. The then Leader of the Opposition offered bi-partisan in-principle support.

The immediate nature of the Australian Government response reflected the first part of the first recommendation of the *Little Children are Sacred* (LCS) report into the protection of Aboriginal children from sexual abuse in the NT<sup>2</sup>. The LCS report recommended “That Aboriginal child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory be designated as an issue of urgent national significance by both the Australian and Northern Territory Governments ...”<sup>3</sup>

The Australian Government’s measures were an urgent response to the problems highlighted by the LCS report; however, they were not a response directed at addressing the specific recommendations in the LCS report. The response aimed to protect children and make communities safe in the first instance, and then to lay the basis for a sustainable future for Indigenous people in the NT.

The LCS report emphasised that child abuse and neglect in Indigenous communities throughout the NT was at crisis levels.

“A disaster is looming for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory unless steps are taken forthwith.” (LCS report, p.6)

“The Inquiry is positively convinced that unless prompt and firm decisions are made and leadership shown at ALL levels of society, real disaster faces Australia within a generation.” (LCS report, p. 82)

As with numerous previous reports, the LCS report underlined:

- the strong connections between alcohol abuse, violence and the sexual abuse of children
- the destructive effects of alcohol for Aboriginal communities
- that many children were not protected and nurtured, and many children were not attending school
- the important contribution of schools and schooling in keeping children safe and its potential for positive influences in their lives.

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<sup>2</sup> Wild, R & Anderson P, (2007) *Ampe Akelyernemane Mele Mekarle, Little Children are Sacred: Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse*, Darwin, NT: Northern Territory Government.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

As the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, when in Opposition noted:

“This report follows more than a dozen or so reports over the last 30 years which have illuminated the often appalling conditions in which First Australians live and the toll that that takes on their health, their well-being and, often, their ability to survive.”<sup>4</sup>

These earlier reports include the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Taskforce on Violence Report<sup>5</sup> in 2000, the Gordon Report<sup>6</sup> in Western Australia in 2002, the Victorian Law Reform Commission report (2004)<sup>7</sup>, and the NSW Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce report in 2006.<sup>8</sup>

Further, in 2006 the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare published a report on family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which indicated that the rate of reported violence among Indigenous Australians was similar in remote and non-remote areas, but the rate of family violence reported as a neighbourhood problem in remote areas was almost three times that in urban areas (41 per cent compared to 14 per cent)<sup>9</sup>. In 2003-04, there were 4,500 hospitalisations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to assault in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory combined.<sup>10</sup>

In reflecting on the history of and rationale for the NTER, it is important to recall that many of the issues raised in the LCS report had already been highlighted and additional funding had been committed by the Australian Government. The previous Australian Government had been trying to deal with many of these issues through strategic interventions, funding additional police and funding programs. The previous Government had also consistently raised the issue of violence in Indigenous communities with the States and Territories.

While the Australian Government funds a range of programs to address Indigenous family violence and abuse, responsibility for delivery of services, legislation, enforcement and child protection rests for the most part with the States and Territories.

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<sup>4</sup> Australian Parliament, House of Representatives, 7 August 2007, p. 68.

<sup>5</sup> Robertson, B (2000), *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Taskforce on Violence Report*, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, Queensland, <<http://www.women.qld.gov.au/resources/indigenous/>>.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon, S Hallahan, K Henry, D (2002), *Putting the picture together, Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities*, Department of Premier and Cabinet, Western Australia.

<sup>7</sup>Victorian Law Reform Commission (2004), *Sexual Offences Final Report*, Melbourne. <<http://www.lawreform.vic.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/Law+Reform/Home/Completed+Projects/Sexual+Offences/LAWREFORM+-+Sexual+Offences+-+Final+Report>>.

<sup>8</sup> Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce (2006), *Breaking the Silence: Creating the Future, Addressing Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities in NSW*, Attorney-General’s Department, <<http://www.lawlink.nsw.gov.au/acsat>>.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare: Al-Yaman F, Van Doeland M & Wallis M (2006), *Family Violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, Cat IHW17, Canberra:AIHW, <<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10372>>., p.42.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp 52-55.

## **The policy context**

In July 2003, the then Prime Minister called a national meeting with Indigenous leaders on violence in Indigenous communities and committed extra funding.

In June 2004, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to the National Framework on Indigenous Family Violence and Child Protection (National Framework).

On 15 May 2006, the Crown Prosecutor in Alice Springs, Dr Nanette Rogers, aired reports and allegations about longstanding issues of violence and child abuse in NT Aboriginal communities on the ABC.<sup>11</sup>

The media, through journalists such as Tony Koch, Nicolas Rothwell and Suzanne Smith, had over almost a decade recorded accounts of assault, murder and suicide in Indigenous communities in northern and remote Australia.

In June 2006, the Australian Government through the auspices of COAG convened the Intergovernmental Summit on Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities (the Summit), involving ministers from all States and Territories. The Australian Government provided \$130 million over four years to support an Action Strategy developed at the Summit, including \$40 million for additional police resources in Indigenous communities.

Following a resolution by the Australasian Police Ministers' Council which was supported by COAG, the Australian Crime Commission (ACC) Board authorised the National Indigenous Violence and Intelligence Task Force on 13 July 2006, to address issues raised by the Intergovernmental Summit. The Taskforce, led by the ACC, is jointly resourced by the Commonwealth and states and territories and includes involvement of the AFP, state and territory jurisdictions and other relevant agencies.

COAG had agreed to provide more resources for policing in very remote areas where necessary and to establish joint strike teams on a bilateral basis, to work in remote Indigenous communities where there is evidence of endemic child abuse or violence. COAG also agreed to invest in community legal education for Indigenous people to ensure they were informed about their legal rights, understood how to access assistance and were encouraged to report incidents of violence and abuse.

COAG had also agreed that governments should work together to fund and administer complementary measures that address key contributing factors to violence and child abuse in Indigenous communities. Alcohol and substance misuse were identified as major contributing factors. COAG agreed to further support communities seeking to control access to alcohol and illicit substances at a local level. States and Territories agreed to encourage magistrates to make attendance at drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes mandatory as part of bail conditions or sentencing. COAG also agreed to provide additional resourcing for drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services in regional and remote areas.

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<sup>11</sup> [www.abc.net.au/lateline/](http://www.abc.net.au/lateline/)



Acknowledging the contribution of poor child health and education to an intergenerational cycle of social dysfunction, COAG had agreed to an early intervention measure to improve the health and wellbeing of Indigenous children living in remote areas by trialling an accelerated rollout of the Indigenous child health checks in high need regions with locations to be agreed on a bilateral basis. COAG also agreed that jurisdictions work together on addressing low rates of school attendance in Indigenous communities to increase the future life chances of Indigenous children.

The Outcomes of the Summit in the 2006 COAG Communiqué and these other developments provide a backdrop to the measures adopted in the NTER announced one year later. The Communiqué is available at:

<http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/140706/index.htm>.<sup>12</sup>

Following on from the Summit, and as a result of advocacy by the Australian Government and others, the NT Government appointed the Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse (Board of Inquiry) on 8 August 2006. The LCS report was released by the NT Chief Minister on 16 June 2007.

The Australian Government had also been exploring the potential of land reform to deliver economic activity and benefits. A program of strategic interventions was being undertaken in individual communities in the NT and elsewhere to improve infrastructure and housing, improve school attendance and increase economic participation. In November 2006, Mr Brough announced that options for income management would be explored and discussed with States and Territories as one tool in tackling alcohol and substance misuse and child protection issues in communities.

Ultimately the NTER would draw these various lines of policy development together into a comprehensive strategy.

The Australian Government had also offered logistical and other support to the Western Australian (WA) Government to help tackle child abuse in WA and had been working closely with the Queensland Government and Indigenous leaders in Cape York to address welfare dependency and social dysfunction.

Since the LCS report, three further reports have been published which again traverse issues about living conditions in remote communities and child abuse and violence. These reports are the WA Coroner's report into deaths in the Kimberley area<sup>13</sup>, the Mullighan report in South Australia (SA)<sup>14</sup> and the WA Coroner's report into deaths at Oombulgurri.<sup>15</sup>

The Australian Government is providing assistance in response to these reports. In WA, the Australian Government is providing assistance with income management arrangements in cases of identified child neglect in Kimberley communities and the

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<sup>12</sup> Council of Australian Governments' Meeting, (2006), *14 July 2006 Communiqué*, Canberra, <http://www.coag.gov.au/meetings/140706/index.htm>.

<sup>13</sup> Hope AN (2008), WA Coroner, *Record of Investigation into Death, Kimberley area*.

<sup>14</sup> Mullighan QC, Hon E P (2008), *Commission of Inquiry Report, Children on the APY Lands*, [http://www.service.sa.gov.au/ContentPages/sagovt/mullighaninquiry\\_apy.aspx](http://www.service.sa.gov.au/ContentPages/sagovt/mullighaninquiry_apy.aspx).

<sup>15</sup> Hope AN (2008), WA Coroner, *Record of Investigation into Death, Oombulgurri*.

Cannington area of Perth and, in SA additional funds have been provided for police and housing in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands.

### **Northern Territory Emergency Response**

The LCS report indicated that in all 45 communities visited by the NT Board of Inquiry, child abuse and potential neglect of children had been reported. There was evidence of a strong connection between family abuse and child neglect and violence and alcohol and substance abuse.

The report reiterated other issues identified in previous reports: people without meaningful things to do, failure of service methodologies, dysfunctional governance and overcrowded houses.

The previous Government judged that a response was needed that was immediate, urgent and different from past responses in terms of scale and comprehensiveness.

Fast pace, comprehensiveness and sustained whole-of-government working are the features of the NTER.

Immediately following the announcement, police and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) were mobilised to facilitate implementation. Doctors, professionals and public servants were invited to volunteer and many did.

The ADF was involved in planning and through NORFORCE, in the first six months of the response by assisting with transport, communications equipment and logistics. This was not the first involvement of the ADF in Indigenous communities. The ADF has been providing assistance to individual communities through the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program (AACAP) since 1996 and in 2008 is assisting the Kalumburu community in WA.<sup>16</sup>

### **Key phases**

The previous Government intended that the NTER had three key phases:

- stabilisation – the first year to 30 June 2008
- normalisation of services and infrastructure
- longer term support to close the gaps between these communities and standards of services and outcomes enjoyed by the rest of Australia.

### **Cooperation with the NT Government**

The approach involved working cooperatively with the NT Government on terms indicated by the then Prime Minister and the then Minister, which were to emphasise action, and to proceed rapidly but in a structured, orderly and considered way, and with respect for the people affected.

There has been a very close working relationship with the NT Government across a range of measures.

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<sup>16</sup> Australian Defence Force, Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program, *Information Brief*, 2 May 2008, <[http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/080502\\_AACAP.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/publications/080502_AACAP.pdf)>.

In parallel to the Australian Government initiatives, the NT Government had been developing its own reform agenda, resulting in the establishment from 1 July 2008 of shire councils amalgamating many of the small community organisations running municipal services. On 20 August 2007 the then NT Chief Minister announced the NT Government's formal response to the LCS report. The response involved a twenty year Indigenous Generational Plan titled *Closing the Gap*.

### **Coverage**

The NTER covers 73 communities and associated outstations, and a number of town camps across the NT.

Based on an NT Government analysis of 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data, there were 41,130 people living in the NTER communities in 2006.<sup>17</sup> It was estimated that 35,929, or about 87 per cent, were Indigenous Australians.

The Department of Health and Ageing estimates the population of children under 16 in the NTER communities and town camps at around 17,000.

### **Key measures**

The initial measures included:

- increases in policing levels, including secondments of officers from other jurisdictions to supplement NT resources
- non-compulsory, comprehensive health checks for Indigenous children under 16 years of age, to identify and treat health problems, including identifying follow-up and ongoing health care requirements
- clean up and repair of communities to make them safer and healthier with local people encouraged to participate through Work for the Dole (WfD)
- widespread alcohol restrictions
- welfare reforms to reduce the flow of money into alcohol and substance abuse and to ensure funds intended for children's welfare and development are used for children
- improving school attendance indirectly through the provision of school meals
- compulsory five year leases to the Commonwealth over land in 64 communities including provisions to pay reasonable compensation to relevant land owners if those leases constitute an acquisition of property within the meaning of the Constitution
- improvements to essential infrastructure in communities

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<sup>17</sup> Population figures for the town camps are not available from ABS data.

- banning possession or supply of X 18+ films, restricted publications, Refused Classification material, and unclassified material that would be classified at these levels
- auditing of publicly funded computers to identify prohibited material
- changes to the permit system for access to ‘Aboriginal land’ under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* including in relation to government officials, common areas of major communities and road corridors
- improved governance through the appointment of Government Business Managers (GBMs) to remote communities.

Funding for the NTER measures was secured by the *Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Act (No. 1) 2007-2008* and *Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Act (No.2) 2007-2008*. **Table 1** below shows the seven measures and the agencies responsible for implementation of the NTER measures.

**Table 1 NTER measures and responsible Australian Government agencies**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Agencies responsible for implementation</b>
Promoting Law and Order	Attorney-General’s Department; Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA); Australian Crime Commission; Australian Federal Police
Improving Child and Family Health	Department of Health and Ageing
Supporting Families	FaHCSIA and Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR)
Enhancing Education	DEEWR and Centrelink
Welfare Reform and Employment	Department of Human Services; Centrelink; DEEWR; FaHCSIA
Housing and Land Reform	FaHCSIA and DEEWR
Coordination	FaHCSIA; Commonwealth Ombudsman; Australian Defence Force

The aim was to do and achieve more than ‘business as usual’ and to lay down a platform from which to work towards sustained improvements in outcomes in the medium and longer term.

Significantly the NTER adopted a multi-sectoral approach to address multi-faceted and deep-seated problems. **Appendix 1** lists each measure and sub-measure and provides a report against individual sub-measures. However, it needs to be kept in mind that the measures and sub-measures are interlinked and are intended to work in combination.

These measures have been brought together and implemented through the Northern Territory Emergency Response Project Implementation Plan under the stewardship of the NTER Project Management Board (PMB).

For the most part, the information in this submission provides detail on the scope of activities planned from 1 October 2007 to 30 June 2008 in relation to each measure. It also includes information on some measures such as increased police numbers and child health checks which commenced in July 2007.

A chronology of the rollout of measures by community is provided in **Appendix 2**.

### **Governance and oversight**

The then Government appointed the NT Emergency Response Taskforce (NTERT), chaired by Dr Sue Gordon AM, to advise the Government on implementation and an Operational Group under the operational command of Major General Dave Chalmers to coordinate effort on the ground.

A sub-group of the Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs was established to oversee the effort of government agencies on policy reform, legislation and service delivery.

FaHCSIA is responsible for co-ordination, and strategies for supporting families, housing and land reform, and aspects of welfare reform and employment.

The pace and breadth of working in a whole-of-government way, across levels of government, and government-volunteer-non-government organisation working and cooperative arrangements was new in Indigenous affairs.

More detail on governance arrangements is provided in **Section 2**.

### **Legislation**

On 7 August 2007, the then Government introduced the three emergency response Bills into the Parliament to give effect to key NTER measures. The Bills were passed by the Parliament on 17 August 2007 after being referred to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. No amendments were made to the Bills during their passage through the Parliament. The Bills received Royal Assent on 17 August 2007.

The legislation package included:

- the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* (NTNER Act)
- the *Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payment Reform) Act 2007* (Welfare Payment Reform Act)
- the *Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Northern Territory National Emergency Response and Other Measures) Act 2007* (National Emergency Response and Other Measures Act).

The pornography restrictions came into effect on 14 September and the alcohol restrictions commenced on 15 September 2007.

An additional Bill was introduced into the Parliament to make amendments to consolidate the alcohol measures in the NTNER Act. This Bill was passed and is now the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Amendment (Alcohol) Act 2007* (the Alcohol Act).

A further Bill, the Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Emergency Response Consolidation) Bill 2007 was introduced into the Parliament in September 2007 but it lapsed when the election was called.

The Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Other Legislation Amendment (Emergency Response Consolidation) Bill 2008 (2008 NTER Consolidation Bill) was introduced into the Parliament on 21 February 2008. The Bill reintroduces some measures from the lapsed Bill, albeit in a modified way (for example, the R18+ pay television restrictions measure). The 2008 NTER Consolidation Bill includes amendments to repeal the changes to the permit system that took effect on 17 February 2008.

## **Funding**

\$587 million was provided in two Appropriation Bills passed in August 2007. Since coming to office in November 2007, the Government has committed around \$666 million to the NT. This includes election commitments and NTER 2008-09 Budget initiatives. Overall, almost \$1.4 billion has been made available in specific NTER funding by the Commonwealth. More information on funding is provided in **Section 5**.

## **Implementation**

The implementation built on concepts and strategies that were already being developed in some individual communities and through the COAG initiatives outlined earlier in this section. The NTER moved quickly to put initiatives in place in several key areas:

- law and order
- health
- sewerage
- water supply
- service delivery.

Major reforms to the Community Housing and Infrastructure Program were also underway with a focus on a significant increase in housing supply.

## **Early challenges**

There were some challenges early in the implementation. Communications, always a challenge, could have been more effective in the early days. Communication has improved during the course of the response. More detail on communications is

provided in **Section 4** which outlines implementation issues across the emergency response.

Another challenge was recruiting GBMs and Community Employment Brokers (CEBs), providing staff accommodation, information technology, communications and other logistical support.

From the outset there was potential for GBMs to play an important role in the organisation of government services in communities, helping to rollout the alcohol restrictions, pornography bans and other measures. More detail on GBMs and other institutional arrangements is provided in **Section 2** on Governance and in **Appendix 1** under the Coordination measure.

### **Change of Government**

In September 2007, three months into the response, the federal election was called. Following the change of government, the new Ministry commenced on 3 December 2007. The Hon Jenny Macklin MP was appointed Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA Minister).

In December 2007, the Government established an advisory group of 25 NT Aboriginal leaders to discuss the implementation of the NTER measures and to provide feedback to the FaHCSIA Minister. The Prime Minister and FaHCSIA Minister met with this group on 16 December 2007 and the FaHCSIA Minister met this group again in March and July 2008.

On 17 January 2008, the FaHCSIA Minister met for the first time with the NTERT.

The Government indicated that it remained committed to the response but wanted to place a stronger emphasis on consultation and engagement with communities and on identifying opportunities for economic development.

Three main areas where the Government is taking a different approach to the previous Government are:

- **Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program.** On 10 December 2007, the Government put a moratorium on the dismantling of CDEP in the NT commenced by the previous government.
  - On 30 April 2008, there was a joint ministerial announcement outlining the timetable for CDEP reforms, funding arrangements for 2008-09 and changes to CDEP in the NT.
  - The Government is committed to the effective reform of CDEP, and consultations commenced on 19 May 2008 as part of broader reforms of Indigenous employment services and the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy.
  - As an interim arrangement, pending the broader reform agenda, CDEP is being restored in the NT communities from 1 July 2008 where the program had been removed. FaHCSIA has written to all CDEP providers and

providers of 'transitional' activities in the NT to inform them of the process for negotiating 2008-09 funding.

- **Permits.** A commitment to reinstate many of the permit system changes is being implemented via the Bill currently before the Parliament.
- **Racial discrimination legislation.** The 2008 NTER Consolidation Bill contains no new provisions which exclude the operation of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA). The 2008 NTER Consolidation Bill contains some amendments to the previous Government's measures which continue to be covered by the RDA provisions in the NTER legislation.

### **Situation at 30 June 2008**

Fifty-one additional police had been deployed. There was a new police presence in 18 communities. Nine out of ten new custodial facilities were operational.

Night patrols were operational in 31 NTER communities and community consultations were underway to establish night patrols in the remaining 42 NTER communities.

The first audit had been undertaken to detect illegal material on publicly funded computers in NTER communities.

Health checks had occurred in 70 communities and ten town camp regions. At the end of June 2008, 9,428 child health checks had been completed directly under the NTER, covering an estimated 55 per cent of eligible children.

Additional alcohol outreach workers are now working in Darwin, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Tennant Creek.

Mobile outreach counselling and support services for children and families affected by child abuse and trauma were being delivered from Darwin, Arnhem, Katherine and Tennant Creek.

At 30 June 2008, income management (IM) was operating in 53 communities and their associated outstations and 8 town camp regions. There were 13,305 people on IM at 30 June 2008. Fifty per cent of certain welfare payments and family payments are managed in a way that ensures it is spent on essentials such as food for children and families, rent, utilities, clothing and education expenses. IM funds cannot be used to purchase the excluded goods of alcohol, tobacco, pornography or gambling services.

At June 30 2008, there were 55 communities and 8 town camps providing School Nutrition Program breakfast and lunch programs to school aged children. At 1 August 2008, the SNP was operating in 61 communities and 8 town camp areas.

Food quality and reliability reportedly had improved with 62 stores licensed with 12 stores operating under corporate licenses to Outback Stores Pty Ltd at 30 June 2008. By August 2008, 68 stores had been licensed, with 15 operating under a corporate licence to Outback Stores Pty Ltd.



Financial literacy information and training support was being provided.

In 2007 - 08 three crèche upgrades were completed and one upgrade underway. Payments were made for the construction of eight new crèches and upgrade to an additional five crèches. In 2008 – 09 a further three crèche upgrades and one new crèche are under development. The first new crèche commenced operations in August 2008.

A total of 3,046 properties had been surveyed to assess their condition and need for repair. In all of these properties, urgent repairs have been undertaken. The next level of repair work, 'minor vital repairs', had been completed in 2,995 properties. The repairs work has been undertaken in 68 communities.

CDEP, which had been transferred from DEEWR to FaHCSIA following the change of government, was being reintroduced from 1 July 2008 in around 30 communities in the NT.

All Remote Area Exemptions (RAEs)<sup>18</sup> applying to jobseekers in NTER communities had been removed.

Under the NT Jobs Package, 1,300 jobs had been created, with the majority filled. In addition, 982 job outcomes had been brokered with the assistance of Job Network providers. There are 8,119 jobseekers receiving Job Network services.

There have been 261 Structured Training and Employment Program (STEP) and 924 STEP- Employment Related Services (ERS) commencements. Both programs help to assist employers to provide ongoing employment for Indigenous Australians, particularly in the private sector.

There have been 80 Work for the Dole activities delivered across the NTER. Of these, 55 have been delivered to 42 of the NTER communities, 23 to town camps and two to outstations. There have been a total of 1,373 Work for the Dole commencements.

There have been 1189 jobseekers engaged in specialist programs including Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS), Personal Support Program (PSP), Disability Employment Network (DEN) and Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET).

There have been 809 referrals to the Language Literacy and Numeracy program (LLNP). Over 138 people had commenced in the Workplace English Language and Literacy program.

Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) providers in the NTER teams undertook 798 JCAs in remote Indigenous communities to support the removal of RAEs commencing 19 July 2007 and finishing 23 November 2007. Another 5,830 JCAs were triggered by the removal of RAEs in these remote Indigenous communities and completed to 30 June 2008.

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<sup>18</sup> A person with an RAE is not required to satisfy the activity test in return for their income support payment (i.e. they do not have to look for work or participate in services and programs).

Eighty-six per cent of JCAs recommended a referral to a DEEWR funded employment service. Of the JCAs that recommended a referral, 48.3 per cent were to Job Network, 7.5 per cent to the DEN, 10.2 per cent to VRS, 30.6 per cent to the PSP, and 3.5 per cent to JPET services.

There were 55 GBMs employed and servicing 72 NTER communities.<sup>19</sup> There were 33 CEBs employed providing service to 65 NTER communities.

### **Outputs and outcomes**

One year on, there are some positive signs though it is still early days in terms of outcomes information and being able to see signs of sustained improvement:

- GBMs report that IM has been particularly well received by women, particularly mothers and grandmothers, as more money is available for essentials and there has been a reduction in humbugging
- a survey of NTER licensed stores has found that more healthy food has been purchased and more money has been spent on the needs of children as a result of IM measures
- customers are also saving for the purchase of whitegoods, such as fridges, so that they can store perishables at home<sup>20</sup>
- access to health services has increased and many children who received CHCs have been referred to specialists and received treatment.

Getting GBMs, police, CEBs and liaison officers into communities has been very important in providing a government presence in communities where there has never been a presence, or there has not been a presence for decades.

The NTER has also focussed public attention on the poor level of infrastructure and services in NT remote communities and committed very significant taxpayer funding and public resources to NT remote communities. Information on results and impacts is provided in the NTER monitoring report which has been provided to the Review Board separately.

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<sup>19</sup> The community of Acacia Larrakia is an NTER community temporarily not serviced by a GBM.

<sup>20</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008), *Northern Territory National Emergency Response (NTER) Stores Post-Licensing Monitoring Report – Early Indications of Impact of Income Management in Stores, First 20 Stores*, Canberra, <[http://www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/reports/monitoring\\_report.htm](http://www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/reports/monitoring_report.htm)>.



## **Section 2                    Governance**

This section outlines the NTER governance arrangements.

The early governance arrangements were focused on:

- enabling swift mobilisation of resources and activities
- establishing initial organisational and logistical support arrangements
- arranging for police, volunteer doctors and GBMs to be working in communities as quickly as possible
- rolling-out programs and preparing legislation.

As the NTER proceeded through the stabilisation phase, the governance arrangements were refined and adjusted to sharpen the focus on the delivery of measures.

### **Key elements of the initial governance arrangements**

Key elements of the governance arrangements up to 30 June 2008 included:

#### *NTER Taskforce (NTERT)*

- The NTERT provided advice to the Government on a range of issues and oversaw the management by the Operations Centre of the day-to-day activities and rollout of measures. More detail on the NTERT is provided below.

#### *NTER Sub-group of the Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs*

- This committee of relevant portfolio Secretaries coordinated policy advice to the Government, and promoted cross-agency collaboration in delivery of the measures. This committee was supported by a working group of Senior Executive Service officers from relevant agencies. In the early stages, NTER coordination weekly meetings involving all relevant agencies and FaHCSIA policy and steering Committees were convened. The groups were disbanded when they had completed their tasks.

#### *Inter-departmental committees*

- At the start there were also two interdepartmental committees (IDCs) established, each led by Deputy Secretaries from the then Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. One IDC was concerned with the development of the two Appropriation Bills and the other was concerned with the three emergency response enabling Bills. The IDCs were disbanded on completion of this work.

#### *NTER Operations Centre*

- The NTER Operations Centre coordinates on-the-ground implementation of the various measures. The Operations Centre in the NTER includes staff seconded from the agencies involved.

#### *Government Business Managers*

- GBMs manage Australian Government activities and assets in NTER communities in a whole-of-government way, and work with the NT

Government and local government bodies to achieve integrated service outcomes. The GBM duty statement is provided at **Appendix 3**.

### **NTER Taskforce**

The previous Government established the NTERT, its terms of reference and appointed the original Taskforce members. The NTERT was established to operate for at least one year. It ceased on 30 June 2008.

#### *Terms of Reference*

The NTERT's Terms of Reference were to:

1. Provide expert advice to the Australian Government on the implementation of the emergency response.
2. Provide oversight of the NTERT Operational Group.
3. Promote public understanding of the issues involved.
4. Alert Government to current and emerging issues that relate directly to the implementation of the response.
5. Report to the Prime Minister and the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs on the progress of the response.

Members were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise in Indigenous affairs, medical care, education, government, business and the law.

At 30 June 2008, the membership of the NTERT was:

- Dr Sue Gordon AM (Chair)
- Major General Dave Chalmers AO, CSC (Operational Commander)
- Dr Bill Glasson AO
- Mr Roger Corbett AO
- Mrs Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann AM
- Mr Terry Moran AO
- Mr Mike Burgess.

Previous members of the NTERT were:

- Mr John Reeves QC, from 25 June 2007 until October 2007, when he resigned on his appointment as a Judge of the Federal Court of Australia. Mr Reeves was not replaced on the Taskforce.
- Dr Peter Shergold AC, from 25 June 2007 until 8 February 2008, when he ceased as the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Dr Shergold's position on the Taskforce was filled by Mr Terry Moran AO.
- Mr Paul Tyrrell, from 25 June 2007 until 31 January 2008, when he retired as Chief Executive of the Northern Territory Chief Minister's Department. Mr Tyrrell's position on the Taskforce was filled by Mr Mike Burgess.

The Operational Commander kept the Minister and NTERT members informed about the implementation of the NTER by distributing a weekly situation report, providing an update at each NTERT meeting and briefing the NTERT Chair and the Minister.

The NTERT presented its Final Report to Government on 19 June 2008 and made several recommendations including:

- health checks for all children on an annual basis which will require adequate resourcing of the primary health care system
- additional investment to alleviate overcrowding in remote communities in the NT, ensuring that the design and location of new housing is economically viable as well as culturally and environmentally appropriate
- government-funded mediators to work with communities to find resolutions for internal issues
- the ongoing creation of “real jobs” in communities
- a community store in each viable community
- increasing the number of police in communities so that every community is adequately serviced.<sup>21</sup>

### **NTER Operations Centre**

The NTER Operations Centre coordinates engagement with communities and ensures the following:

- that sufficient opportunity has been provided for people to meet with Centrelink staff to discuss their priority needs and establish payment deductions
- that GBM support is in place
- community store(s) are licensed and signed up to a Centrelink IM contract, or store cards available to people living in towns
- other local third party organisations are contracted, for example, for making deductions for the School Nutrition Program (SNP), rent, fuel
- there is police coverage in the community/region to ensure stability, and
- an analysis is undertaken to identify customers and outstations affected by IM.

Liaison officers from Australian Government departments and agencies are working with the Operations Centre in Darwin and are representing their respective agencies to assist with their particular NTER measures and to ensure their home agencies are well-informed of progress on each measure and sub-measure.

### **Government Business Managers**

GBMs are FaHCSIA employees who are deployed into remote communities and are ‘the face of the Australian Government’s Emergency Response’ at the community level. GBMs supplement the role performed by Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) in each ICC region in the NT.

### **FaHCSIA**

In relation to the NTER governance and implementation arrangements, the role of the Secretary of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs is to:

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<sup>21</sup> Northern Territory Emergency Response Taskforce (2008), *Final Report to Government*, June 2008, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Canberra, <[http://www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/reports/taskforce\\_report.htm](http://www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/reports/taskforce_report.htm)>.

- ensure that program implementation is meeting government objectives through structured and regular comprehensive performance reporting
- ensure consideration of whole-of-government and cross-agency issues in policy development and program delivery
- oversee effective design, implementation and evaluation across all NTER measures
- ensure that a transparent and robust budgeting and financial planning system across all measures is in place
- ensure a structured, detailed and integrated approach to risk management is in place.

The vehicle for meeting these responsibilities is NTER Project Implementation Plan (the plan).

### **NT Indigenous advisory body**

In December 2007, the Government established an advisory body of 25 NT Aboriginal leaders to ensure the Government is engaging with and listening to Aboriginal people.

### **NTER Project Implementation Plan**

Toward the end of 2007, a Project Implementation Plan was developed to provide a strategic framework to guide the implementation of the NTER to the end of the stabilisation phase, until 30 June 2008. FaHCSIA is responsible for the overall coordination and support for this plan. The plan is complemented by more detailed department and agency work plans.

The plan comprehensively draws together the work across all agencies, measures and sub-measures and sets out reporting and accountability arrangements.

The plan developed for the stabilisation phase captured in detail the measures funded through the *Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Acts (No.1) and (No.2) 2007-2008*. The plan has been amended to reflect continuing 2007-08 measures and the new measures funded under the 2008-09 Budget.

This plan requires that each government agency responsible for implementing NTER measures has their own internal governance arrangements in place, including committees and working groups, as well as associated plans, monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

### **NTER Project Management Board**

The NTER Project Management Board (PMB) was established to oversee and drive the plan. PMB usually meets, on average, monthly and is chaired by a FaHCSIA Deputy Secretary.

The terms of reference for the PMB are to:

- advise the Government on current and emerging issues and comprehensive problems that relate directly to the implementation of the response
- report to the FaHCSIA Minister on the progress of the response (including an annual public report related to the outcomes of the program)
- provide advice to the FaHCSIA Minister on NTER issues
- resolve all cross-agency coordination issues
- liaise with all organisations involved with the NTER to ensure a complete report is presented to the Cabinet Implementation Unit (CIU)
- translate overarching administrative arrangements to on-the-ground service delivery
- facilitate the implementation of whole-of-government risk management strategies
- monitor whole-of-government accountability arrangements including budgeting and reporting.

### **PMB Membership**

In addition to FaHCSIA, the membership includes nominees from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), Centrelink, the Department of Human Services (DHS), the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), the Attorney-General's Department (AGD), the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and Treasury, as well as the Operational Commander of the NTER Operations Centre, and the FaHCSIA NT State Manager.

Each agency involved with the NTER measures is required to report to the PMB each month.

### **Observations**

The governance arrangements provided stewardship to drive and steer implementation, and architecture and processes for ordered and considered implementation within very tight timeframes while enabling working across organisational boundaries.

Significantly the governance structures and processes were flexible and were adjusted as the NTER progressed through the first year. Committees such as the Secretaries' Sub-group, the SES working groups and legislation IDCs lasted only as long as necessary for the tasks to be completed. The NTERT ceased after one year and new structures such as PMB have been established.

These governance arrangements have facilitated decision-making, coordination, accountability, achieving closure on key steps and milestones, and policy learning. There has however been some unavoidable duplication in whole-of-government monitoring and reporting.

See also Coordination in **Section 4** and Funding in **Section 5**.



### Section 3 Policy implementation issues

Implementation and the challenges involved in the implementation of each sub-measure are described in **Appendix 1**. **Appendix 2** provides a chronology of NTER measures as they were rolled-out in each community.

The NTER Review Board has sought further background information on the following topics:

- income management (IM), food security and stores and money management
- town camps
- outstations
- viable communities.

This section provides that information.

#### **Income management in the NT**

IM is a key part of the NTER, and a new approach to how people receive welfare payments. At a basic level, IM works by holding back or ‘quarantining’ half, or all, of certain welfare payments. Centrelink directs amounts of an income managed person’s ‘quarantined’ welfare towards agreed priority needs. This process ensures that at least half of a person’s welfare payments are directed towards essentials, such as food, clothing and rent and is not spent on the excluded goods of alcohol, tobacco, pornography, or gambling services.

IM aims to:

- ensure that money paid by government for the benefit of children is directed to the needs of children
- provide better financial security to women and elderly community members who are vulnerable to ‘humberging’<sup>22</sup>
- reduce the amount of cash in communities where substance abuse, gambling and other anti-social behaviours are problems that can lead to child abuse and community dysfunction.

IM has not cut people’s welfare entitlements and people continue to receive their full entitlement while on IM. In fact, feedback from Centrelink teams visiting communities to establish IM arrangements, is that staff sometimes find that people are not claiming the full amount of welfare they are entitled to under the social security system. IM does mean that people have less cash available for discretionary purchases because income managed funds are not paid as cash. Most importantly, income managed funds cannot be used to purchase the excluded items of alcohol, tobacco, pornography or gambling products and services.

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<sup>22</sup> The definition of humbugging in English is to deceive or to fraud. Wikipedia provides a definition of the Aboriginal meaning of humbugging which is “a term applied to various forms of begging and domestic violence in rural and remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. The term refers primarily to the practice of demanding money from relatives, often violently. A report in *The Australian* [Simon Kearny, 15 August 2007] described the practice as a regular occurrence, “deeply ingrained in Aboriginal communities.” Humbugging typically takes the form of demands for cash, with wives and the elderly being particular targets”.  
<[>](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/humbug... (Aboriginal)).

### *How IM is applied*

IM is applied on a whole-of-community basis to community members receiving certain welfare payments (including social security benefits or pensions, or student payments).

### *Rollout in communities*

IM has been progressively rolled out in major NT Aboriginal communities, their associated outstations and town camp regions. In preparing for the rollout, community engagement is planned so that clusters of communities (usually 3 or 4 major communities and associated outstations) commence IM at the same time. A staged approach to implementation is necessary to allow for certain preconditions set out below to be met in each community prior to commencing IM. This approach recognises that IM involves changes to people's daily affairs, and as such, communities need to be prepared and supported in making these changes. In the weeks leading up to IM commencing, teams of Centrelink staff stay in communities to conduct interviews with individuals, families or household groups to discuss household expenses and needs. Centrelink then determines with the customer the regular payments that should be set up to meet these expenses, providing that the expenses are in line with IM policy.

The NTER Operations Centre coordinates engagement with communities and ensures the following preconditions are in place:

- that sufficient opportunity has been provided for people to meet with Centrelink staff to discuss their priority needs and establish payment deductions
- that GBM support is in place
- community store(s) are licensed and signed up to a Centrelink IM contract, or store cards are available to people living in towns
- other local third party organisations are contracted, for example, for making deductions for the School Nutrition Program (SNP), rent, and fuel
- there is a police presence in the community or region to ensure stability
- an analysis is undertaken to identify customers and outstations affected by IM.

Once the necessary preconditions are met in a community, the NTER Operations Centre and FaHCSIA recommends to the Minister that IM commence in the community. After having regard to the factors outlined in subsection 123TE (1) of *Social Security (Administration) Act 1999*, the Minister makes a determination to commence IM. Ministerial determinations can be made for up to 12 months and it is open to the Minister to extend IM beyond 12 months or to cease IM sooner.

IM was rolled-out initially in four communities south of Alice Springs, and then in both the southern and northern parts of the NT. There was some concern that information about IM was confusing during the initial stages of rollout. Improvements were made to the process to allow a longer lead time for community engagement and for Centrelink to establish arrangements for customers in each community. As rollout progressed, there have been relatively fewer concerns raised about IM arrangements.

### *How people access their income managed funds*

There is sufficient flexibility under IM policy for people to meet their priority needs and expenses. For example, in a remote community most people use their income managed funds to purchase food at the local community store. These customers will have arranged with Centrelink for a certain amount of their income managed funds to be transferred to the store on a fortnightly or weekly basis. The money is held by the store until the person is ready to purchase food and other essential items. However, people from remote communities have often also chosen to hold aside part of their funds in their IM account until they visit town, where they pick up a store card from the Centrelink office in order to do a bulk shop at a larger retailer offering a larger range of goods.

People are able to change their deductions or organise new deductions at any time by contacting Centrelink either in person, at an office, or by phoning the Indigenous Call Centre. Centrelink Service Agents in communities can assist in this process. For example, where a person has a telephone or electricity bill, Centrelink can make that payment on behalf of the person using income managed funds. Providing a person has enough funds in their IM account, Centrelink can transfer funds directly to a trader, for example, to purchase a fridge or motor vehicle.

Centrelink has increased the hours of work and number of Centrelink Service Agents in communities to facilitate communication with community members, and has introduced longer operating hours for some Centrelink Service Centres to provide increased servicing for people on IM.

At priority agent sites, the infrastructure has been upgraded including the installation of additional phone lines. Centrelink social work support has also been an integral component of Centrelink's NTER remote servicing regime. It has been very important in identifying and servicing unmet customer needs, for example, assessment of previously unrecognised customer circumstance, both vulnerability and strengths, in addressing the correct income support payments, appropriate participation agreements and referral to other services where possible. IM has provided many opportunities for customers to be linked with increased Centrelink servicing, including intensive social work servicing, resulting in increased access to a range of increased support pathways, especially for the most vulnerable of these remote customers.

While Centrelink customers have for some time had access to voluntary deductions through the Centrepay system, the compulsory nature of IM requires that people make budgetary decisions for at least half of their total welfare income. Significantly for some people, especially women and the elderly, this is the first time they have exercised control over their entitlements. Another benefit of IM is that it requires a person to consider the full range of their priority needs, whereas under Centrepay a person might only set up one or two regular deductions for things that may or may not be directly related to their or their family's priority needs, for example, for TV subscription services, or car loan repayments.

By the end of an IM interview with Centrelink, each person is required to consider, and in most cases establish, regular deductions for at least the following needs: food, clothing, housing, utilities, and the SNP (where a person has school aged children). This process does not prevent a person from establishing additional IM deductions for other priority needs, or from establishing voluntary Centrepay deductions for other

expenses using their funds that are not income managed. It does however ensure that priority and essential needs are being met first.

### **Key service delivery challenges and responses**

By 30 June IM had commenced in 53 NTER communities and 8 town camps and there were 13,305 people on income management. At this stage seventy per cent of managed income has been spent on food or groceries, thirteen per cent on housing and three per cent has been spent on the SNP.

#### *Increasing choice and providing greater flexibility for people*

The current IM system requires people to arrange, through Centrelink, for deductions to be made to certain organisations such as the local community store to purchase food, or to the service station to purchase petrol. Although the current system allows for people to change their deductions at any time by contacting Centrelink, it is manually driven and work intensive for both the customer and Centrelink. People may also feel restricted to only those outlets where they have established deductions in place. Recognising these limitations the Government is introducing the BasicsCard to provide a form of portable income managed funds to meet everyday expenses.

The BasicsCard will be rolled out progressively in the latter part of 2008. It is a PIN-protected card that allows customers to use their income managed funds to purchase priority goods and services at a range of approved merchants using existing EFTPOS infrastructure. An agreed amount of a person's income managed funds will be credited to the card. Like all other forms of income managed funds, people will not be able to purchase alcohol, tobacco, pornography or gambling products and services with the card. The card will not permit customers to withdraw cash from EFTPOS terminals or from automatic teller machines.

#### *Ensuring access to food and other essentials*

There have been longstanding concerns that many stores in Indigenous communities were poorly managed, provided low quality or overpriced goods. High freight costs and poor operating practises can compound the logistical challenge of delivering a good range of food and other items at a reasonable price.

Following on from, and now complementary to, the IM implementation associated with the NTER, the way community stores operate and the quality of the food that they provide is critical to efforts to improve the lives of Indigenous people in the NT.

The *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* (NTNER Act) established licensing arrangements for community stores. Intensive technical support from Income Management Officers supports these licensing arrangements during the period when IM commences in a community. Income Management Officers are contractors with business and accounting expertise who assist with upgrades to the point of sale and accounting systems in stores. Financial assistance is also provided to improve point of sale systems. Additionally, stores involved enter into an Income Management Contract with Centrelink. The contract establishes conditions regarding the administration of income managed funds.

Licences are issued when stores are able to demonstrate a capacity to participate in the requirements of IM. This capacity is demonstrated by having a reasonable quality, quantity and range of groceries and consumer items, including healthy food and drink,

which is available and promoted at the store; and having sound financial structures and retail and governance practices. The total number of community stores licensed at 6 August 2008 is 68.

Where a store still does not meet licensing requirements it could be issued with an interim license, licensed with additional conditions, given more time to meet the requirements, or, as a last resort, government may compulsorily acquire the store and put in an operator who can meet the required standards.

Stores are generally licensed for a period of six months, or for a shorter time where issuing an interim licence is more appropriate. The way stores are operating is monitored by FaHCSIA staff and through feedback from regulatory agencies and GBMs.

A store's operations will be formally reviewed around the time its licence expires. Issues taken into consideration include compliance with licensing conditions.

Stores in large communities or servicing large regions are being provided with assistance to ensure that income managed funds are made available to the intended people. This is generally in the form of photograph based store identity cards.

Where there is no store, or where stores are of a very low standard or for other reasons cannot be licensed, government has assisted with the implementation of bush order deliveries to ensure the reliable supply of affordable, good quality food.

Outback Stores Pty Ltd is a commercial business unit of Indigenous Business Australia (IBA). IBA is expanding Outback Stores to more NT communities to ensure they have access to well-managed stores and provide healthy and reasonably priced food. Additional funding has been provided to Outback Stores Pty Ltd to accelerate the rollout of Outback Stores in the NT.

Station stores and other remote stores not on prescribed land (except for roadhouses which are excluded in the legislation) can participate in IM arrangements. Under this policy, these stores agree to undergoing licensing assessments in order to participate, ensuring a high standard across the NT.

Arnhem Land Progress Association Inc (ALPA) operates stores under a corporate licence and also operates individual stores under consultancy agreement.

The NTNER Act explicitly prevents roadhouses from being licensed. Legislation currently before the Parliament would remove this exemption. Once the exemption is removed, roadhouses will be treated in the same way as station stores.

These licensing and contract mechanisms are fundamental for ensuring that community stores are accountable in their handling of people's welfare entitlements. While FaHCSIA acknowledges that the introduction of IM has been difficult for some stores with limited IT capacity or manual point of sales systems, the additional administrative burden has been necessary to ensure income managed funds are protected while they are held by a store. These mechanisms also ensure that where people on IM are being encouraged to shop at specific outlets, that these stores provide a quality service and good range of products. The introduction of the BasicsCard should reduce the administrative burdens on business as Centrelink will

no longer need to transfer income managed funds to store accounts, except in limited circumstances.

Ensuring that people on IM have reliable options for accessing food and other essentials has been a key implementation challenge. Identifying new food access options in remote areas and bringing existing outlets up to the required standard is intensive work that has contributed to delays to the rollout schedule. IM has brought improvement to people's daily lives through healthier and more reasonably priced food options. This issue now has a high level of visibility and IM has provided impetus for continued reform to deliver improvements.

Some information on community responses to improvements in community stores is provided in the stores survey.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Use of store cards to access income managed funds*

The urgency of the NTER required using available options for providing customers with access to their income managed funds. One mechanism for delivering income managed funds is through store cards that are purchased from the Coles-Myer and Woolworths corporations to use in some of their retail outlets. Store cards, which work like vouchers, are suitable for people either living near metropolitan areas, for example, in town camps, or for people visiting town. The cards meet the policy needs of IM as they do not allow customers to purchase excluded items. Some charitable organisations also use these cards to provide assistance to their clients.

Take up of the store cards has been fairly high near metropolitan areas, but people have usually had a choice between using a store card or having a portion of their income managed funds directed to a local trader. Traders can apply to participate in IM, however, they must meet a number of conditions relating to reporting, governance arrangements, financial capacity and strict adherence to the condition that they do not sell excluded items to customers using income managed funds. In some communities, the implementation of IM was delayed due to difficulties in ensuring that traders met these conditions.

Some traders have been concerned that IM has impacted on their businesses. While FaHCSIA acknowledges these concerns, it has been necessary to ensure that flexibility for customers and the interests of traders are balanced with the need for IM to be introduced quickly. The introduction of the BasicsCard should reduce administrative burden on businesses.

People's access to store cards has periodically been an issue. Centrelink can only issue store cards during business hours, however, Centrelink office hours have been lengthened in some cases to cope with customer demand.

There have been some reports that customers are trading store cards for cash, gambling their cards, or throwing away cards that still contain unspent funds. It is regrettable that people would choose to use their welfare entitlements in this way,

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<sup>23</sup> Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2008), *Northern Territory National Emergency Response (NTER) Stores Post-Licensing Monitoring Report – Early Indications of Impact of Income Management in Stores, First 20 Stores*, Canberra, [http://www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/reports/monitoring\\_report.htm](http://www.facsia.gov.au/nter/docs/reports/monitoring_report.htm).

however Centrelink and GBMs are carefully monitoring such reports which have proven difficult to substantiate. The introduction of the BasicsCard should help to address the potential to misuse store cards. When issuing a store card to a person on IM, Centrelink explains to the person how the card functions, where it can be used and how to redeem the full balance of the card's value. Centrelink has also met with retailers in towns where these cards are used to discuss ways that check-out staff can assist people using these store cards.

#### *IM clients who move locations*

As people in NT communities can move often, Centrelink has designed considerable flexibility into its service delivery arrangements to accommodate high mobility whether it be short-term or long-term. Centrelink customers who are travelling to a different location away from where they normally live, contact Centrelink to organise new IM deductions. Centrelink can quickly direct a customer's funds to a relevant third party organisation in the area to which they are travelling. In relation to people moving permanently to new locations to live, Centrelink may exercise discretion to exempt a person from IM in either a specific NT area, or from all NT areas. When considering applications for exemptions, Centrelink assesses the likelihood of whether the person is moving to another community in order to avoid IM.

Although there have been claims of people moving or leaving the NT to avoid IM, it is difficult to establish whether IM would be the cause of any movement. It is unlikely that people would be motivated to move to avoid IM since it continues to apply to a person for the period it applies to the community they moved from, unless an exemption is granted.

#### *SNP*

The SNP has also been introduced as an indirect way to improve school attendance and engagement by providing breakfast and/or lunch to school-aged children. The Australian Government provides funding for employment, infrastructure and professional development and parents are expected to contribute to the costs of the food, primarily through income managed deductions. At 1 August 2008, the SNP was operating in 61 communities and 8 town camp areas.

#### *Improving money management skills*

Some people have welcomed IM from the perspective that it provides better financial security, budgeting opportunities and a bank-type service to save for larger purchases.

During 2007-08, contracted service providers conducted money management workshops prior to the introduction of IM where it has not already commenced, and again after IM has commenced. Money management workshops are tailored to the communities and provide basic budgeting support, and where necessary refer people to crisis support including emergency relief and financial counselling. Participation in the workshops is voluntary and open to all members of the community.

Fifteen service providers (including three existing MoneyBusiness providers) were engaged to support income managed communities between February 2008 and June 2008 by delivering community education workshops. There are four MoneyBusiness Workshop Kit topics: *Making the money last until payday*, *Planning for the future*, *How can banks help?* and *Credit can be a hazard*.

Workshops have been delivered to people from approximately 40 communities. Delivery to some communities (in Cluster 2 North and Cluster 7 South) ceased prior to 30 June 2008 due to factors such as difficulties engaging staff, community engagement issues and transition to shire arrangements. Procuring qualified service providers willing to deliver the service within the timeframe proved challenging. Ten providers have been extended until 30 September 2008 to enable sufficient time to engage with communities and deliver workshops.

It is important to ensure that IM is a step towards improved money management skills and does not lead to people becoming dependant on the assistance that Centrelink is offering through IM. To address this issue, the Government announced as part of the 2008-09 Budget that integrated money management services would be introduced alongside IM.

### **Future opportunities**

At 30 June 2008, IM had been in place for almost one year. An ambitious schedule for the introduction of IM in communities limited the amount of time available for planning and systems design. All the agencies involved in implementing IM, especially Centrelink, have demonstrated sustained effort and commitment to providing a quality service to people on IM. Should the Government decide to continue IM following the outcome of the NTER Review, the next phase of implementation would allow for people to further adapt IM to their individual or family needs. Strategies to enhance people's understanding of IM and the choices it provides are also planned. It is anticipated that the introduction of the BasicsCard will also ease the pressures around store administration, customer choice and mobility.

The proportion of Indigenous people receiving welfare payments as their main form of income is high. If IM is to change the welfare paradigm in these communities, and this will take time, then it must be combined with economic opportunities for communities and pathways to employment. By itself, IM can only treat some of the immediate symptoms of passive welfare dependence by ensuring people use at least 50 per cent of their welfare payments for the benefit of their families. IM cannot fix substance abuse problems, chronic gambling or teach new parenting skills, but it has the potential to change incentives and individual behaviour with positive implications for children and families.

### **Town camps**

The Australian Government is committed to improving housing and other conditions in Aboriginal living areas located in or on the fringes of towns and cities (sometimes known as town camps).

Negotiations with Tangentyere Council in Alice Springs and Julalikari Council in Tennant Creek in relation to housing and infrastructure in the town camps were in train prior to the announcement of the NTER. The outcomes pursued were in line with key NTER objectives, in particular, securing land tenure arrangements to ensure better management of housing for Indigenous people and longer life span of houses. By the commencement of the NTER, negotiations in relation to Alice Springs town camps with Tangentyere Council had foundered, while negotiations with Julalikari Council regarding Tennant Creek were ongoing.



On 7 August 2007, Julalikari Council signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreeing to sublease the town camps to the NT Government for 99 years in return for \$30 million (comprising \$20 million Australian Government and \$10 million NT Government funding) for infrastructure and housing. The purpose of the Tennant Creek agreement was to see the town camps integrated as standard suburbs. Essential and municipal services were to be delivered by the NT Government and the relevant local government authority. Public housing was to be managed under the same principles as all public housing in the NT and home ownership opportunities were to be provided for individuals. Although the proposed term of the sublease was reduced to a 20:20:20 (total 60) year arrangement by agreement in May 2008, other aspects of the MOU remain current.

Discussions with Tangentyere Council regarding housing and infrastructure recommenced in early 2008. On 10 July 2008, an agreement was signed between the Australian and NT Governments and Tangentyere Council providing for an up to \$50 million investment in Alice Springs town camps under 40-year government held subleases and \$5.3 million transitional funding for housing upgrades in the town camps to be paid through Tangentyere Council.

Funding for both the Tennant Creek and Alice Springs agreements is included in a \$793 million MOU signed by the Australian and NT governments on 18 September 2007. Under this agreement, the NT Government has agreed to take responsibility for the ongoing delivery of services in town camps.

Although the NTER legislation package confers significant powers on the FaHCSIA Minister to resume or acquire town camp leases, these powers have not been exercised to date.

NTER measures such as IM, alcohol and pornography restrictions were applied in the town camps. Town camps were not subject to all NTER measures and sub-measures, for example, night patrols and Community Clean-Up.

## **Outstations**

Outstations, also known as homelands, exist in various places throughout the NT. These small communities typically comprise traditional owner family groups which were established during the 1970s and 1980s. Since 1996, the Australian Government had been cautious about investment in new outstations or homelands.

While certain outstations are subject to some elements of the NTER such as IM, alcohol and pornography restrictions, where they are located within the 'prescribed areas' defined in the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* they have not been the subject of substantial infrastructure or Community Clean-Up activity. Responsibility for outstations in the NT passed to the NT Government on 1 July 2008 under the \$793 million housing and infrastructure MOU signed in September 2007. The MOU included \$60 million over three years for outstation servicing.

## **Viable Communities**

While some communities, typically larger ones, are more economically sustainable than others, all of the 73 NTER communities require substantial government assistance to function. While few outstations have access to market-based economic activity, there are instances, particularly in Arnhem Land, where outstations are engaged in the market economy.

## **Section 4      Supporting implementation and working                          across boundaries**

This section describes the activities which underpinned and supported the implementation and whole-of-government working arrangements.

### **Communications**

Communication has been a critical factor for implementation. The NTER Taskforce (NTERT) consistently identified communication as a priority issue.

The NTER has brought into sharp focus the intrinsic difficulties of communicating a series of complex and controversial measures across cultures.

Other factors impacting on communications included the sudden commencement of the NTER and accelerated implementation, which allowed no advance materials to be prepared. The caretaker period and change of government in late 2007 also affected communications activities.

#### *Strategies and products*

FaHCSIA developed two communications strategies, for the periods July-December 2007 and January-June 2008 respectively. A range of communications materials were produced including print and radio advertising; a four-page information magazine which also appeared as a newspaper advertorial; fact sheets; posters and postcards; and a flipchart and Powerpoint presentation for use by GBMs. Printed information for communities was distributed to GBMs and key stakeholder and community organisations through the Operations Centre.

Radio was the main focus of paid advertising. Advertisements were broadcast in English and selected Indigenous languages.

An NTER information line (1800 333 995), serviced by Centrelink, was established soon after the response was announced. An NTER page on FaHCSIA's website ([www.fahcsia.gov.au/nter](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/nter)) provides access to fact sheets, progress updates and images.

NTERT leadership also undertook an active program of community visits, as well as regular engagements on Indigenous radio and other media. The NTER received wide media coverage in the NT, nationally and internationally.

Centrelink and the former Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) were active in communicating the measures for which they were responsible.

#### *Administration and coordination*

Responsibility for in-community communications and support for GBMs was devolved to the Operations Centre following an NTERT decision in November 2007. FaHCSIA's Communication and Media Branch assisted the Operations Centre and convened the NTER sub-group of the Communications Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (CWGIA) which met fortnightly in 2007 and has met monthly in 2008.

### *Research*

In the period January 2008 to May 2008, elements of the communications strategies were reviewed in a project jointly funded by FaHCSIA and Centrelink. The research found that in general the NTER measures had not been communicated effectively and that face-to-face communications from a trusted source was preferred by people on the ground.

### *Future strategies*

The research raised issues for the way policy is developed and implemented within remote Indigenous communities. The researchers recommend a more intensive and consultative community development approach, with more resources devoted to ongoing face-to-face communications. Improved consultation and engagement with communities would create a better fit between national priorities and local realities and assist in making communications meaningful to local people. These issues have been presented to the NTER Project Management Board (PMB).

An Indigenous Communications Coordination Group (replacing the CWGIA) has been approved by the NTER PMB to strengthen coordination on the ground.

### **Community engagement and leadership**

In the early months of the NTER there was comment from community members that government had not engaged with communities, that people felt that changes were being imposed on them, and that they had not been involved in shaping changes that would affect them.

In response to these comments and with a genuine desire to effectively involve individuals and communities, the Indigenous Leadership and Engagement Group (ILEG) in FaHCSIA delivered engagement workshops to 300 Indigenous leaders drawn from each of the communities involved in the NTER. The workshops conducted during the 2007-08 financial year were part of the NTER coordination measure.

The workshops were designed to provide participants with the opportunity to consider and discuss each of the NTER measures, as well as receive leadership development training to support their leadership roles in their communities.

The first phase (July 2007 to December 2007) targeted past and present participants from FaHCSIA's Indigenous Leadership Program and included regional workshops with the chairpersons and/or local community council members and other leaders in the NTER communities.

The second phase focused on established and emerging leaders from clusters of communities within each of the proposed new NT local government shires and included an additional emphasis on personal and community leadership.

The feedback from the workshops was positive, with widespread support for many of the specific NTER measures. However, concern was raised at every workshop about the manner in which the NTER was announced and implemented and the lack of consultation with, and involvement of, community members.

Specific information to come out of the workshops included:

- more communication and explanation about the emergency response and its measures would be welcome so people can understand what is happening and what is expected of them
- many participants raised concern about the lack of proper engagement with Indigenous communities over the design and implementation of the NTER
- there was a growing awareness and understanding amongst leaders of the importance of the community coming together and engaging in community planning - many participants sought support for this process
- the workshops highlighted a demand for leadership development particularly around vision setting and planning at both the individual and community levels.

This feedback has subsequently informed processes associated with consultation on the proposed Indigenous Representative Body, to ensure that the timeframe for consultation with Indigenous communities is sufficient to allow people adequate time to consider a broad set of options.

Additionally, the workshops identified the need for a greater investment in local input and effective engagement of local people in the design and delivery of NTER measures. The Australian Government has provided \$3.8 million in 2008-09 as part of a new Community Engagement measure to facilitate greater engagement with, and involvement, of Indigenous people in the rollout of the NTER.

This measure will enable the employment of up to 20 Indigenous community members to act as full-time Indigenous Engagement Officers (IEOs). Their role will be to:

- provide feedback about NTER measures to communities and government
- promote the community's role in defining needs, setting goals, and formulating policies and plans
- work with community groups to bring about greater community input into government decision-making.

This measure also includes funds to improve interpreter services, which will facilitate Indigenous community members engaging with government in community meetings on complex issues, and promote understanding of the NTER measures.

## **Coordination**

As outlined in **Section 2**, the NTER has adopted a whole-of-government approach to ensure effective implementation of measures both immediately and in the medium term. The coordination arrangements supported this approach.

The NTER involved cross-jurisdictional coordination and working, for example, through use of interstate police to increase police numbers in remote communities. The NTER has also involved extensive coordination between Australian Government and NT Government agencies. It has progressively involved liaison, coordination and consultation with non-government organisations and Aboriginal community organisations.

Coordination occurred at several levels: policy development, planning, implementation and delivery. Intensity and high pace were features of policy coordination in the early stages to develop budget and legislation proposals. The Secretaries' Group on Indigenous Affairs established a sub-group to resolve policy coordination, tasking and synchronisation questions through discussion at several meetings in the first days and weeks after the NTER was announced. Over time, the policy development issues were addressed and policy development gave way fully to implementation.

Implementation of initial activities, logistics and subsequently the formalised measures and sub-measures was directed from the outset through the NTER Operations Centre. The calling of an 'emergency response' established a clear focus on and shared understanding of the NTER's primary purpose of protection of children and families, and a 'bias for action' which energised the many formal and informal task groups and networks supporting the NTER. In the early months, the Operations Centre drove implementation but as stabilisation was achieved, rollout of some measures was transferred to normal delivery structures and processes managed through agencies' NT offices and the Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs).

The weekly situation reports provided by the Operational Commander to the NTERT were an important and effective tool for keeping senior staff across all agencies and the NT Government informed of developments regularly, consistently and quickly. The situation reports, GBM re-calls, teleconferences and meetings were important in connecting people across agencies involved in the rollout.

While the NTERT and Operations Centre coordinated effort on measures, there was also a range of information coming back from communities; through visits, GBM surveys and quarterly monitoring reports and from service providers. Sharing information is essential to coordination but developing systems to capture this information is challenging. The NTER has provided an impetus to develop more systematic ways of collecting, capturing and analysing performance information including through the National Indigenous Information System being developed by FaHCSIA.

Information and communications technology and infrastructure was an enabler for cooperation, connectedness and coordination. Ensuring early and reliable access to these technologies in the field was a focus of early implementation.

The coordination arrangements for the first twelve months could be described as simultaneously centralised and decentralised. They were centralised in the early policy coordination and planning stages and through NTERT, the Operational Commander and the Operations Centre. They were decentralised in the field, that is, at the community level. This complexity of NTER coordination arrangements is similar to arrangements in emergency humanitarian assistance. They enabled fast paced implementation and quick local problem solving in the early stages.

The successful rollout of the NTER measures is due to a large extent to cross-agency, cross-jurisdictional and cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation.

## Workforce

From the beginning of the rollout of the NTER, the availability of people with relevant and appropriate skills and qualifications was recognised as a critical factor to the success of the response. There were also tensions between the need to mobilise a workforce quickly to meet the urgency of the response and also to ensure the implementation was conducted in a structured, orderly and considered manner. A key workforce management challenge for the NTER was to successfully balance these tensions.

Initially, workforce management focused on policing and this involved cooperation between federal, state and territory police organisations. In the first week of NTER operations, small teams were assembled to commence community engagement and area surveys in a number of communities across the southern half of the NT. The teams comprised FaHCSIA, DEEWR and Centrelink with logistical support from the ADF.

Early in the response, there was a call for staff across the Australian Public Service and for volunteers from the community. On 22 June 2007, a hotline was announced for people with relevant skills, such as medical or law enforcement skills, who were willing to volunteer their services. DoHA subsequently established a system for the registration of health professionals and provided a direct line for those health professionals seeking to assist in the delivery of CHCs. At the end of June 2008, this register included 1,050 health professionals.

FaHCSIA assisted with the staffing of the NTER Operations Centre by providing staff on the ground in Alice Springs very soon after the initial announcement. Staff were seconded from across Australian Government agencies in areas such as health, employment, education, social services and defence, and from the NT Government. Agencies also pulled teams together quickly to focus on NTER policy development and implementation.

Selection and deployment of GBMs on the ground proved slow in some instances due to the need to find candidates who fitted the demanding requirements of these jobs and because the rollout of accommodation was slower than anticipated. DEEWR faced the same issues in appointing CEBs.

Additional information on the role and responsibilities of GBMs and CEBs is provided in **Appendix 3**.

Due to the complexity of the NTER implementation, agencies sought experienced and resilient staff for NTER work particularly in the field. Centrelink, for example, did not recruit new staff but recruited internally and sought out staff who were experienced in working with people in remote Indigenous communities.

Care in recruitment and selection processes and attention to induction and orientation programs has minimised turnover. For example, only two of the 55 GBMs left their roles in the period to 30 June 2008.

In planning and monitoring the implementation of measures under the NTER Project Implementation Plan, workforce issues, and specifically recruitment and retention, have been identified as significant risks to success. Australian Government agencies

are not alone in managing this risk. It is likely this risk is faced by the NT Government, NGOs and community organisations responsible for the bulk of front-line service delivery, for example, police, teachers, medical staff, and child protection workers in remote areas.

Continuing to effectively develop GBMs, CEBs and other field staff living in communities is an important factor in supporting remote communities. Further consideration is being given to how people in these roles are supported personally and developed professionally.

Personal safety and security in communities, availability of suitable and secure housing, and safety of vehicles and equipment are consistently reported as concerns to staff in the field.

As mentioned above, arrangements were put in place to register volunteers and some paid volunteers undertook work in communities, for example, doctors conducting child health checks. However, there were logistical and duty of care issues which could not be resolved satisfactorily and therefore engagement of other volunteers to work with communities has not been progressed.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and reporting**

The Australian Government is committed to ongoing whole-of-government monitoring, evaluation, and reporting of the NTER led by FaHCSIA. The NTER draft evaluation strategy provides ongoing assessment of NTER through a staged approach that reflects the phases of the NTER, captures whole-of-government effort, and builds an incremental picture of progress against NTER outcomes.<sup>24</sup>

In the stabilisation phase, quarterly monitoring and progress reports were used to assess progress. Monitoring in the first year included use of short-term measurable quantitative indicators to assess progress on the implementation of each measure.

Reporting within the NTER Project Implementation Plan framework is important to ensuring accountability and good management for each funded measure. Agencies report monthly to the NTER PMB which oversees the plan.

The NTER reporting arrangements are integrated with the quarterly reports to the CIU in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. These reports inform the Government of progress on implementation and the 'traffic light' system signals if there are emerging implementation problems.

It is too early to say whether these supporting arrangements have helped in tackling the 'wicked' (that is, complicated) public policy challenges that the NTER was aimed at addressing.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The draft NTER evaluation strategy has not yet been endorsed by the Government.

<sup>25</sup> Australian Public Service Commission, 2007, *Tackling wicked problems: A public policy perspective*, Canberra <<http://www.apsc.gov.au/publications07/wickedproblems.htm>>.



## **Section 5            Funding**

### **Context**

Commonwealth resources used in the NTER have come from a number of sources:

- specific NTER funding provided by the Commonwealth for the 2007-08 and 2008-09 years. A limited range of measures have had funding committed for future years. Overall almost \$1.4 billion has been made available in specific NTER funding by the Commonwealth
- existing funding streams or resources of the Commonwealth that have been deployed as part of the NTER, for example, approximately \$39.5 million in Community Housing and Infrastructure Program (CHIP) funds were used to support the NTER. A quantification of the total existing resources used is not available.

While the NTER has been underway, normal government funding arrangements have continued to operate, providing services and resources to communities, for example, funding for health and municipal services and childcare centres.

Other new funding has also been committed to the NT by the Commonwealth to improve Indigenous outcomes, for example, \$547 million over four years for the Australian Remote Indigenous Accommodation (ARIA) program for construction and upgrades of Indigenous housing and infrastructure and \$28.9 million for new school boarding facilities over four years.

The NT Government has committed funding to a range of NTER associated activities as part of its *Closing the Gap* strategy. It has also diverted existing resources to support NTER measures in some cases.

### **Commonwealth NTER-specific funding provided**

The *Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Act (No.1) 2007-2008* and *Appropriation (Northern Territory National Emergency Response) Act (No. 2) 2007-2008* were introduced into the Parliament and subsequently enacted. These Acts provided approximately \$587 million in supplementary appropriations to Commonwealth agencies in support of the NTER in 2007-08.

Timing from decision and announcement of the NTER through to appropriation of the funds by Parliament was very short, only a matter of weeks. In light of this short time frame, funding was provided on a no win/no loss basis to agencies. It could be used only for the NTER with any unspent funds at the end of 2007-08 being returned to the Commonwealth Budget.

The Appropriation Acts provided funding for activities in 2007-08 that were being undertaken within the NT largely as part of the stabilisation phase. The need was identified as urgent and immediate and therefore funding was provided in this special legislation, outside of normal Commonwealth budget processes, to ensure that agencies had sufficient funds for necessary activities to be undertaken quickly to address the crisis.

While the Appropriation Acts contained some funding for activities linked to the normalisation phase it was recognised that further funding would be required to address the longer term issues.

In early 2008, the Commonwealth provided \$313 million additional funding over five years for additional Australian Federal Police (2008-09 and 2009-10 only), additional teachers, employment measures and health measures (2008-09 and 2009-10). This funding to the AFP only paid for the officers' allowances and did not provide for the NT Police costs to support the deployment.

The 2008-09 Commonwealth Budget included \$495.1 million in funding to extend the NTER measures for a further year. Longer term funding for the NTER measures has largely not been agreed by the Commonwealth. Further funding decisions are largely awaiting the outcomes of the NTER Review to provide input into the longer-term policy.

**Table 2** at the end of this section summarises NTER-specific funding provided by the Commonwealth to date.

Commonwealth agencies were provided with up to three types of funding depending on the activities being undertaken within each measure:

- departmental funding – covered the operating costs of the agencies themselves, for example, costs of GBMs, cost of AFP deployment to NT
- program (or administered) funding – this is used for service provision and for costs of activities that impact on communities directly, for example, costs of establishing safe houses or operating night patrols in communities
- capital funding – for the purchase or construction of assets used by agencies in delivering the NTER, for example, temporary housing using demountables or containers for use by GBMs.

### **Commonwealth expenditure on the NTER to date**

Expenditure over the 2007-08 financial year had a strong bias towards the second half of the year. This was due to the need to identify resources and deploy infrastructure before some measures could be ramped up.

For the seven months to 31 January 2008, total expenditure was \$169 million or 28.7 per cent of the funds available. Actual expenditure at 30 June 2008 totals \$466.63 million in expenditure or 79.5 per cent of NTER specific funds available. (Note: final year expenditure figures may change due to audit or other financial statements adjustments).

This has largely resulted from:

- an over-estimate of the costs of rolling out some of the NTER measures in light of the condensed time frame in which estimates were derived
- delays in implementation of the NTER measures including identification and deployment of workforce and lack of infrastructure in remote environments
- changes in government policy over the course of the NTER.

A summary of expenditure by measure by agency for the 2007-08 financial year is at **Table 3**.

Table 3 does not include costs absorbed by the Commonwealth from existing appropriations. These would include utilisation of existing agency staff to work on the NTER, most costs associated with community clean-ups which were funded from the CHIP and salary costs of the AFP.

### **Northern Territory Government funding**

The NT Government has committed \$286.43 million towards five year actions to implement its *Closing the Gap* strategy. This commitment includes:

- \$79.36 million for child protection
- \$38.61 million to implement the Remote Area Policing Strategy, community justice and other safety measures
- \$10.11 million for alcohol and drug management
- \$23.4 million to achieve better health outcomes
- \$42.32 million for housing in Indigenous communities
- \$70.68 million towards education
- \$13 million to improve Indigenous employment and economic development
- \$8.95 million towards better cross-cultural understanding and engagement in service delivery.

**Table 2**

The figures included in the tables represent the resourcing amounts and may differ from the published Portfolio Budget Statements for each agency that reflect the fiscal balances.

NTER BUDGET 2007-08 TO 2011-12 \$m									
Measure in 2007-08 Supplementary Appropriation	2008/09 Measures	Agency	2007-08 \$m	2008-09 \$m	2009 - 2010 \$m	2010 - 2011 \$m	2011 - 2012 \$m	5 Year Total	
Supporting Families	Creches	DEEWR	32.7	2.3				2.3	
	Early Childhood Programs	FaHCSIA		0.4				0.4	
	Playgroups	FaHCSIA		0.7				0.7	
	Family Support Package	FaHCSIA		9.8				9.8	
	Youth Alcohol Diversion	FaHCSIA		9.5				9.5	
	Sub-total			32.7	22.7				55.4
Enhancing Education	Enhancing Education	DEEWR	24.4	19.1				19.1	
	School Nutrition	DEEWR		7.4				7.4	
	Greater Enrolment+ 200 Teachers (1)	DEEWR		3.8	11.6	20.0	29.0	34.4	98.8
	Sub-total			28.2	38.2	20.0	29.0	34.4	149.8
Employment and Welfare Reform	Further Welfare & Employment Reform	DEEWR	255.0	66.4				66.4	
	Income Management - FaHCSIA	FaHCSIA		9.6				9.6	
	Income Management - Centrelink	DHS		52.0				52.0	
	Income Management -Debit Card Set Up	DHS		3.6				3.6	
	Centrelink services and activities	DHS		6.1				6.1	
	NTER - Flexible Funding -Special A/C	FaHCSIA		46.5	76.0	76.1			198.6
	Sub-total			301.5	213.7	76.1	0.0	0.0	591.3
Improving Child and Family Health	Follow Up Health Care	DoHA	83.1	13.6				13.6	
	Improve Child and Family Health (1)	DoHA		45.5	54.2			99.7	
	Sub-total			83.1	59.1	54.2	0.0	0.0	196.4
Promoting Law and Order	Indigenous Legal Aid	AGD	64.6	2.0				2.0	
	Aboriginal Interpreter service	AGD		0.8				0.8	
	Violence and Child Abuse Taskforce	ACC		4.2				4.2	
	Night Patrol services	AGD		17.7				17.7	
	Promoting Law & Order	FaHCSIA		11.6				11.6	
	NTER - Promoting Law & Order (1)	AFP		0.0	9.2	9.3			18.5
	NTER - Night Patrol equipment (1)	AGD		3.9					3.9
	Sub-total			68.5	45.4	9.3			123.2
Coordination	Government Business Managers	FaHCSIA	77.6	36.5				36.5	
	Leadership and Coordination Activities	FaHCSIA		33.4				33.4	
	Community Engagement	FaHCSIA		3.8				3.8	
	Accommodation in Remote communities	FaHCSIA		7.0				7.0	
	Commonwealth Ombudsman Support	Omb Office		0.2				0.2	
	Sub-total			77.6	80.9				158.5
Housing and Land Reform (2)	Housing & Land Reform (2)		85.0		-	-	-	--	
	Sub-total		85.0	0.0				85.0	
<b>Total Funding</b>			<b>676.6</b>	<b>460.1</b>	<b>159.6</b>	<b>29.0</b>	<b>34.4</b>	<b>1359.6</b>	
(1) Funding approved at Additional Estimates									
(2) Funding in 2008-09 for this Measure is provided via NTER Special Appropriation.									
<b>Agency Acronyms</b>									
ACC	Australian Crime Commission		DHS	Department of Human Services					
AGD	Auditor Generals Department		DoHA	Department of Health and Ageing					
AFP	Australian Federal Police		FaHCSIA	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs					
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations		Omb Office	Office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman					

Table 3

**Northern Territory Emergency Intervention  
Cross Agency Finance Report  
As at 30 June 2008**

Agency	Measure	Employment and Welfare Reform \$m	Promoting Law and Order \$m	Enhancing Education \$m	Supporting Families \$m	Improving Child and Family Health \$m	Housing and Land Reform \$m	Co-ordination \$m	TOTAL \$m
Prime Minister & Cabinet	Original Approp (including capital)	-	0.30					0.60	0.90
Department Ombudsman			0.77					0.65	0.65
Defence	Original Approp (including capital)	-	15.50						15.50
Department			12.30						12.30
Education, Employment & Training	Original Approp (including capital)	104.00		24.40	4.20			-	132.60
Centrelink Department		4.97		21.40	4.10				4.97
		56.30							81.80
Health & Ageing	Original Approp (including capital)	-				82.90			82.90
Department						54.28			54.28
Human Services	Original Approp (including capital)	32.90				0.20			33.10
Department		3.76							3.76
Centrelink Medicare		12.77				0.18			12.77
									0.18
Attorney-General	Original Approp (including capital)	-	23.10						23.10
Department			14.60						14.60
AFP			5.20						5.20
ACC			5.37						5.37
Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Original Approp (including capital)	83.00	25.70		28.50		85.00	77.00	299.20
Department		6.56	30.10		24.27		75.99	53.15	190.07
Centrelink		50.80							50.80
IBA		29.11							29.11
<b>Total Appropriation (full year)</b>		<b>219.90</b>	<b>64.60</b>	<b>24.40</b>	<b>32.70</b>	<b>83.10</b>	<b>85.00</b>	<b>77.60</b>	<b>587.30</b>
<b>Total Expenditure @ 30 June 2008</b>		<b>164.45</b>	<b>68.34</b>	<b>21.40</b>	<b>28.37</b>	<b>54.46</b>	<b>75.99</b>	<b>53.80</b>	<b>466.63</b>
								Exp	79.5%

Caveat: Figures are subject to final audit clearance processes

## **Section 6                      Impact and results**

The NTER is just over a year old and a number of the measures are yet to be fully implemented. In addition, in assessing the outcomes of the NTER there is a need to be clear about what can be expected and when. Medium and longer-term results on many indicators are unlikely to be seen at this point in implementation.

While some policy interventions can have a significant effect in a year, this is the exception rather than the rule. Changing aspects of community functioning takes considerable time and is both complex and difficult to measure. The other key factor is that much data are not available at this time. For example, the results of the school literacy and numeracy tests undertaken in the NT since the NTER began are not yet available, nor is there any new Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data on employment for Indigenous Australians in the NT since the NTER.

The first year of the NTER sought to protect children and make communities safe. Although all measures contribute to achieving this objective, some measures in this first year were directly targeted to this outcome. These include IM, licensing of stores, nutrition programs, community clean-up and housing repairs and law and order measures such as additional police, night patrols, safe houses, and alcohol and pornography restrictions.

While it is generally difficult to say much about outcomes at this stage, some outcome data are available, such as increases in employment and job opportunities. Other intermediate outcome data, such as school attendance and hospital separations, are also available. It has been possible to look at incidences of reported crime although it should be noted that these data are limited both because crime can be under-reported and because factors such as increasing the number of police can result in an increase in reported crime while the actual incidence of crime may have remained unchanged or have fallen. The conclusions from the available data are outlined in the monitoring report which is prepared by FaHCSIA with input from other Australian Government agencies and the NT Government.

Further information is available through the Government Business Manager (GBM) Survey available on the FaHCSIA website at [www.fahcsia.gov.au](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au). The GBM survey complements available data. The survey was designed and analysed by a survey design specialist, TNS.

As part of developing a longer-term strategy for evaluating the NTER, FaHCSIA has commissioned the ABS to identify key outcome variables for the assessment of NTER impact on outcomes over a longer time frame.

## **Section 7      Looking to the future – developments in the policy context**

To assist the NTER Review Board in its thinking around the NTER and directions for the future, this section briefly outlines some key developments that are shaping the Indigenous Affairs policy landscape in the NT and more broadly.

### **Council of Australian Governments: Closing the Gap and the building blocks**

In December 2007 the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) established a Working Group on Indigenous Reform (WGIR). The WGIR is chaired by the FaHCSIA Minister, with Deputy Chairs from the ACT and the NT. The focus of the WGIR is on the achievement of a number of objectives aimed at closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. The six Closing the Gap targets are:

- close the 17 year life expectancy gap within a generation
- halve the gap in child mortality (children under 5) within a decade
- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade
- halve the gap in Indigenous attainment of Year 12 education (or equivalent level) by 2020
- halve the gap in employment outcomes within a decade
- provide all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities with a quality preschool program within five years.

The WGIR is working with other COAG working groups to ensure that the new Commonwealth/State agreements, national partnerships and reform proposals help to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. The Government has asked all COAG working groups to ensure that their proposals reduce the Indigenous disadvantage gap.

At its 3 July 2008 meeting, COAG agreed in principle to a National Partnership with joint funding of around \$547.2 million over six years to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years. COAG further agreed to consider in mid 2009 a progress report and advice about the contribution of COAG's broader reform agenda to overcoming Indigenous children's disadvantage. COAG also requested that the WGIR, in conjunction with other working groups, report to COAG in December 2008 on how COAG's broader reform agenda will deliver an integrated strategy on closing the gap for all Indigenous people.

The WGIR is developing the following reform proposals at the request of COAG for consideration at the 2 October 2008 meeting:

- basic protective security from violence for Indigenous parents and children
- remote service delivery and workforce planning
- economic participation and active welfare.

In order to meet these targets, the WGIR has developed a reform model comprising seven strategic platforms, or 'building blocks,' to be pursued:

- **Early childhood:** Substantial investment in early childhood services is needed so that children are capable of learning and developing. To perform well at school, children need early learning, development and socialisation opportunities that

enable them to begin school with the mental and attitudinal capabilities to learn. Pre-school access, parenting skills and adult literacy and numeracy are key.

- **Schooling:** Ensuring that Indigenous youth meet basic literacy and numeracy standards, and promoting improvements in the overall levels of literacy and numeracy, are essential to Indigenous young people successfully transitioning from school to work and/or further study.
- **Health:** Improved health outcomes are needed to support educational attainment and workforce participation. Children need access to primary health services from birth (and before). It is more difficult to bridge the health outcomes gap for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children if action is delayed.
- **Economic participation:** Parents and other adults need to have real jobs to the extent possible, creating positive role models and building the capacity to invest in their children's future. Also, welfare needs to promote healthy environments, enhanced capability and positive social norms. Incentive structures need to be embraced by individuals; encourage engagement; reward success, active participation and investment in own skills and children's future; and remove/reduce perverse incentives that sustain dependency and hinder mobility.
- **Healthy homes:** Children's living environments need to support learning. Children who are living with their families need quality accommodation free of overcrowding, with 'space' for homework/study. Children who have to live away from home need suitably supportive boarding or other accommodation arrangements.
- **Safe communities:** Children cannot develop in their early years or subsequently perform at school if their home and community environments are not safe. Therefore, Indigenous mothers and children, in particular, need to be protected from violence, abuse and neglect. This will involve improving community safety (in areas such as justice, victim support and child protection) and addressing the underlying causes of violence (for example, alcohol).
- **Governance and leadership:** Strong local leadership is needed to champion education. Community leadership needs to legitimise aspirations by children and by parents for their children. In many communities this will mean legitimising the role of women as leaders, while also building the self esteem of men to avoid destructive behaviours.

In working to achieve the goals that it has set, COAG has called for reform proposals, drawn from the seven building blocks, to create the environment necessary in Indigenous communities to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

The collection of measures undertaken as part of the NTER provides a clear link to the building blocks for Indigenous reform. In the short-term, the measures are aimed at securing the safety and well-being of Indigenous children. In the longer-term, the measures implemented will focus on improvements to community safety and improving health, education and employment outcomes.

For example, the improving child and family health measure that has provided child health checks and medical follow-up and treatment provides a practical approach to contribute to the health and early childhood development building blocks.



The Expanding Health Service Delivery Initiative (EHSDI) will assist in closing the life expectancy gap by increasing the delivery of primary health care services to remote NT Indigenous communities. The Australian Government has committed \$99.7 million to expand health service delivery in remote NT Indigenous communities over the next two years from July 2008.

This initiative is expected to impact on the level of ill-health and disease in NT remote Indigenous communities by delivering long term, sustainable improvements in the NT primary health care system. Implementation is being done in collaboration with Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance NT (AMSANT) and the NT Department of Health and Families (DHF). It will provide for the delivery of expanded regionally based primary health care services in remote NT Indigenous communities, to support more efficient and comprehensive primary health care.

To assist the delivery of increased primary health care services a Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) is being established as part of this initiative, to supplement the recruitment efforts of Aboriginal Medical Services and DHF. The RAHC agency will have a strong focus on the recruitment of urban-based health professionals to provide increased primary health care through job sharing, fly-in/fly-out and other outreach arrangements targeting priority health needs for Indigenous people of all ages.

Another example is the crèche component of the Supporting Families Measure. This initiative will have positive impacts on disadvantaged Indigenous children and families in the Northern Territory by increasing access to and engagement in early childhood education and care. Access to early childhood programs will contribute to improved whole of life outcomes generally as young children who are exposed to early learning opportunities have a smoother transition to school and employment related activities and better outcomes. Additional outcomes for children and families are facilitated through linkages and referrals to other programs through the child care platform.

The commitment by COAG to pursue the building blocks reform framework means that future investment in the NT will be built around these strategic platforms in order to reach the COAG closing the gap targets.

### **Social Inclusion Agenda**

On 21 May 2008, the Social Inclusion Board met for the first time. The Board's role is to provide advice to the Government on effective, practical solutions at the level of government, local communities of service providers, employers, families and individuals themselves and to make recommendations on policy that could change the lifetime circumstances of jobless families and children at risk.

The Prime Minister spoke at the Board's first meeting on the need for and significance of the Government's social inclusion agenda, including that the Government wants to act on causes, not symptoms, to achieve concrete measurable outcomes, through programs and services that work and make a difference. In particular the Prime Minister identified the potential to work through early intervention, building and adapting services to meet individual needs, no more one size fits all; building capability and lifting skills through education and training, and building partnerships with business, communities and local organisations to foster ground-up solutions.

The Government has identified closing the gap for Indigenous Australians as one of the early priorities for the social inclusion agenda. FaHCSIA is leading the Australian Government's work on closing the gap.

### **Child protection framework**

As part of its election commitment the Australian Government has taken the lead in developing a National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. Recognising the importance of this issue, the Commonwealth has moved quickly, working in partnership with State and Territory Governments and community sector. The Commonwealth developed a discussion paper, *Australia's children: safe and well – A national framework for protecting Australia's children*, which was released by Minister Macklin on 25 May 2008. The discussion paper identified six key areas of focus, one of which was improving responses for Indigenous children in the child protection system.

The discussion paper has also been used to develop and guide intensive consultations on the potential shape of a national framework for protecting Australia's children, and on possible actions by governments and the community sector organisations which would contribute to the framework. Specific consultations have focussed on how to improve responses to Indigenous children. These consultations have involved State and Territory governments, Indigenous groups, non-government organisations working with Indigenous children and families, out-of-home care systems and Indigenous kinship carers. Young Indigenous people who have left the out-of-home care system have also been consulted.

FaHCSIA has received over 200 written responses to the discussion paper, coming from State and Territory Governments, the community sector, academics and the general public.

The framework will be practical and based on partnership with State and Territory Governments and the non-government sector to protect all children. FaHCSIA will use the learnings from the review of the NTER to inform the development of the framework. COAG has asked that Community and Disability Services Ministers provide the national framework for their consideration in December 2008.

### **State developments – Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia**

#### *Queensland*

The NTER Review Board has requested information on the operation of the Family Responsibilities Commission (FRC) which has been established as part of the Cape York Welfare Reforms.

The FRC has responsibility for issuing income management notices (IM notices) to Centrelink in Cape York. IM is only one of a range of actions that the FRC may use to intervene early to encourage members of the welfare reform communities to adopt more socially responsible standards of behaviour.

The *Family Responsibilities Commission Act 2008* (FRC Act) (Qld), which is a Queensland law, sets out the legislative parameters for the FRC. The Act provides for FRC decisions to be the result of conferences involving three commissioners (the

Commissioner and two local commissioners). The decisions of conferences are based on the majority vote of two members.

Community members may be notified to the FRC for issues regarding school attendance and enrolment, child safety and wellbeing, unlawful activity and tenancy breaches. The aim of the FRC is to assist and encourage community members to take action to address the issues that have led to their notification. Community support services regarding alcohol and drug abuse, mental health issues, family violence, gambling, parenting and family budgeting will be available to assist community members in this regard.

When considered necessary, the FRC will attempt to come to an agreement with relevant community members about attending support services to assist them to address their issues. However, if a person is unwilling to come to such an agreement, the FRC may direct the person to attend services. Where the safety and wellbeing of a person's family is of concern, the FRC may direct that the person's income be managed by Centrelink to ensure that the priority needs of their family, such as food, clothing and shelter, are met. It is intended that the FRC will only make decisions to subject a community member to IM as a last resort.

IM notices issued by the FRC will contain information about the name and address of the person to be income managed and the period for which IM applies (at least 3 months and no more than one year) and may contain directions or recommendations about the proportion of the person's welfare payments to be income managed.

The FRC has the discretion to issue IM notices for part or all of a person's entitlement. The FRC Commissioner, Mr David Glasgow, has indicated that he intends to issue IM notices for either 60 per cent of fortnightly payments and 100 per cent of lump sum payments, or 75 per cent of fortnightly payments and 100 per cent of lump sum payments, depending on the circumstances in which the notice is issued. In line with legislation, the FRC Commissioner has authority to vary the percentage in consultation with local commissioners.

A person may approach the FRC to request an early termination of their IM notice. The FRC may do this only if it is not detrimental to the best interests of children or other vulnerable people in the community.

Sections 105 to 109 of the FRC Act allow the Commissioner to enter into a voluntary agreement and to issue a notice about IM for a community member, if approached to do so by that community member. The FRC Commissioner may terminate an IM notice resulting from a voluntary agreement, if requested to do so by the person, provided he is satisfied doing so would not be detrimental to the best interests of children or other vulnerable people in the community.

Further information and links to relevant Australian and Queensland Government legislation are at **Appendix 4**.

#### *Western Australia*

Welfare reform initiatives are also being undertaken in cooperation between the Australian Government and the Western and South Australian Governments in relation to recent reports on remote communities in those states. In the Kimberley

region and the Cannington area of Perth, a trial beginning in 2008-09 will give State protection authorities the power to recommend to Centrelink that income support and certain payments to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are managed for the benefit of their children.

As part of this initiative families will be assisted in developing budgeting and money management skills. Families experiencing difficulties in managing their money will have voluntary access to IM.

### *South Australia*

In response to the Mullighan report (May 2008), the Australian Government has committed to work with the SA Government to protect children in the APY lands. Since the release of the report, the Australian Government has made the following funding and other commitments in response to its recommendations:

- \$15 million to build a third police station at Mimili and housing for the eight extra police and five more child protection workers that will be posted by the State Government in communities in the APY Lands. This is in addition to the Commonwealth's existing commitment of \$7.5 million over two years for construction of two police stations and accommodation at Amata and Pukatja
- offer of demountables to the SA Government to house police officers on the APY Lands, while permanent facilities are built (the offer includes conversion, transportation and installation of the demountables and is expected to cost around \$700,000)
- \$2.8 million for 30 additional places for secondary students in the APY Lands to go to the successful Wiltja Residential Program, linked to Woodville High School in Adelaide
- \$1.3 million over three years allocated to APY Lands under the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program to aid the recovery of people severely affected by mental illness, and help connect them to essential services
- \$300,000 to the Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement in SA for the provision of civil assistance to criminal matters on the APY Lands in anticipation of increased demand arising out of the Mullighan Inquiry
- appointment of an Executive Coordinator to lead the Australian Government's response on the APY Lands and engage with Anangu leaders, the State Government and other key stakeholders.

The Australian Crime Commission has been asked to consider the findings of the Mullighan report and make recommendations for action to its Board. This will be in the context of its work in leading the National Indigenous Intelligence Taskforce.

In addition, in August 2007, the previous Commonwealth Government offered the SA Government \$25 million for new houses and to upgrade a number of existing houses on the APY lands. The \$25 million funding offer requires the SA Government to manage existing and new community housing as public housing and ensure Anangu people have the opportunity to be trained and employed in jobs relating to housing services including construction, repair and maintenance and tenancy management. Negotiations are currently underway with the SA Government and communities on the APY Lands regarding the offer.

## **Indigenous economic development strategy**

The Commonwealth Government is currently developing its Indigenous Economic Development Strategy (IEDS). The strategy will be finalised before the end of the year.

The overarching objective of the IEDS will be to promote economic participation of Indigenous communities and individuals by improving Indigenous employment, business and wealth creation opportunities. The IEDS will be a key driver for halving of the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians over the next ten years.

## **Housing**

In relation to housing, the Australian Government is investing \$813 million in remote Indigenous housing and infrastructure in the NT, including \$793 million over the next four years as part of a joint agreement with the NT Government.

Under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program, living conditions for 80 per cent of people in targeted communities will be improved. This will include:

- around 750 new houses including new subdivisions
- more than 250 new houses to replace houses to be demolished
- over 2,500 significant housing upgrades
- essential infrastructure and improvements in living conditions in town camps.

## **Alcohol, substance misuse and smoking**

The socio-economic disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared with other Australians places them at greater risk of exposure and vulnerability to health risk factors such as smoking and alcohol misuse, and exposure to violence. However socio-economic disadvantage alone does not explain all of the differences in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Many of the risk factors associated with chronic disease are behavioural.

The Australian Government is making a significant investment in addressing Indigenous substance use through recent Council of Australian Government (COAG) initiatives targeting drugs, alcohol and tobacco, recurrent funding for substance use services and investment under the NTER.

This investment includes:

- \$49.3 million over four years for additional drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services in regional and remote Indigenous communities (COAG 2006)

- a further \$49.3 million over four years for Indigenous drug and alcohol rehabilitation and treatment services, particularly in remote areas (COAG 2007 Closing the Gap Measure)
- \$14.5 million over four years for the Indigenous Tobacco Control Initiative to help reduce the high rates of tobacco consumption in the Indigenous population (Closing the Gap Measure)
- recurrent funding to support Indigenous substance use services across Australia through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Substance Use Program (\$27.621 million in 2007-08)
- an initial allocation of \$11.4 million for drug and alcohol services under the NTER and a further \$2.6 million for 2008-09 under the Closing the Gap – NT – Follow Up Care Measure to continue drug and alcohol services implemented under the NTER.

The Australian Government recognises the important role of family and community in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make the behavioural changes required for long term recovery, and the need for treatment and support services to be culturally appropriate.

New service delivery models incorporating substance use services within the primary health care setting in the NT have been developed in consultation with the NT Department of Health and Families and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory. The models encompass the spectrum of care from community based counselling and education, residential rehabilitation and treatment services, to aftercare services which support transition back to community.

Priority areas for future funding to support these models are increasing workforce and providing professional development opportunities, increasing capacity of rehabilitation and treatment services and developing and implementing models for transition aftercare.

### **Taxation review**

On 13 May 2008 the Australian Government announced the review of Australia's tax system. The review will look at the current tax system and make recommendations to position Australia to deal with the demographic, social, economic and environmental challenges of the 21st century.

The review will consider improvements to the tax and transfer payment system for individuals and working families. This will include consideration of the relationships of the tax system with the transfer payments system and other social support payments, rules and concessions, with a view to improving incentives to work, reducing complexity and maintaining cohesion. Consultations will be undertaken as part of the broader review.