
SOCIAL JUSTICE REPORT 2003

SUMMARY SHEET ONE: RECOMMENDATIONS



The *Social Justice Report 2003* contains **12 recommendations** directed to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the federal Government relating to:

- data collection issues to support COAG's national report on overcoming Indigenous disadvantage (recommendation 1, **p31**)
- the status of COAG's ministerial action plans for addressing Indigenous disadvantage (recommendations 2-5, **p39**)
- the progress of the COAG whole-of-government community trials (recommendations 6-9, **p44, p48**) and
- Capacity building and governance reform (recommendations 10-12, **p89**).

RECOMMENDATION 1 ON RECONCILIATION: DATA COLLECTION

1 That the federal Government request the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) to provide to COAG information on the actions that need to be taken in order to improve Indigenous data collection. The ABS should respond to the suggestions made by the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Delivery in the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2003*, as well as identify actions that they consider necessary to ensure the availability of relevant data on a regular basis. In providing this information, the ABS should:

- identify those issues that could be addressed through improvements to its existing data collection processes, as well as those issues which would require additional one-off funding allocations and those issues which would require additional recurrent funding from the federal government or COAG;
- estimate the cost of any additional one-off and recurrent funding needs, including the cost of conducting the Indigenous General Social Survey on a triennial basis; and
- consult with the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Services, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, and other relevant agencies.

RECOMMENDATIONS 2-5 ON RECONCILIATION: MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ACTION PLANS

2 That the federal Government, through its leadership role in the Council of Australian Governments, ensure that all Commonwealth / State Ministerial Councils finalise action plans on addressing Indigenous disadvantage and reconciliation by 30 June 2004. These action plans must contain benchmarks, with specific timeframes (covering short, medium and long-term objectives) for their realisation. Where appropriate, these benchmarks should correlate with the strategic change indicators and headline indicators reported annually by the Steering Committee for the Provision of Government Services.

3 That the federal Government, through its leadership role in the Council of Australian Governments, request the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to advise COAG whether it endorses these action plans and the benchmarks contained within, following consultations through its Regional Councils. ATSIC should be required to advise COAG of its endorsement or any concerns about the action plans within a maximum period of six months after being furnished with the action plans.

4 That the federal Government ensure that all Commonwealth/State Ministerial Council Action Plans are made publicly available as a compendium of national commitments to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.

5 That COAG publicly report on progress in meeting the benchmarks contained in each Commonwealth/State Ministerial Council Action Plan on an annual basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS 6– 9 ON RECONCILIATION: COAG WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT COMMUNITY TRIALS

6 That the federal Government, through the Department of Immigration, Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, commit to the existence of the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce for a minimum of the five year duration of the COAG whole-of-government community trials and accordingly commit resources to the Taskforce until 2007.

7 That federal Government departments participating in the COAG whole-of-government trials increase their staffing commitments to the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce by placing additional officers in the Taskforce’s Secretariat.

8 That COAG request the Productivity Commission (as Chair of the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision) to provide advice on aligning the benchmarks and outcomes agreed at the local level with COAG’s National Framework for Reporting on Indigenous Disadvantage. This advice should include any recommendations for adapting the Indigenous Communities Coordination Taskforce Database to enable reporting of outcomes against this National Framework.

9 That COAG agree and fund an independent monitoring and evaluation process for the whole-of-government community trials initiative. The Productivity Commission, Commonwealth Grants Commission or ATSIC’s National Office of Evaluation and Audit would be suitable agencies to conduct this review.

RECOMMENDATIONS 10–12 ON CAPACITY BUILDING AND GOVERNANCE REFORM

10 That COAG adopt ATSIC’s *Integrated framework on capacity building and sustainable development* as a central component of its Reconciliation Framework.

11 That COAG also provide funding for research into best-practice models of governance reform and capacity building relating to Indigenous peoples in Australia. Such research should be based on overseas models such as the Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, and build on the findings of existing work on governance reform in Australia.

12 That the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (Cth) ensure that reform of the *Aboriginal Councils and Associations Act 1976* (Cth) is treated as a high priority of the federal government and ensure extensive consultation is undertaken with Indigenous peoples about proposed amendments to the legislation. Any proposed legislative reforms should be in accordance with the recommendations of the 2002 review of the Act’s operation. In particular, proposed amendments should recognise the need for special regulatory assistance for Indigenous organisations and maintain a distinct legislative framework for regulation outside of the Corporations Act as a special measure.

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SUMMARY SHEET TWO: GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RECONCILIATION



During 2003, the government's approach to reconciliation has continued to be restricted to measures that fall within its 'practical' reconciliation approach. This has the consequence of there being a partial framework for progressing reconciliation with significant issues of unfinished business left in abeyance. The report establishes that progress in advancing 'practical' reconciliation over the course of the year has been variable.

"The statistical data indicates that there has been limited progress over the past five years in achieving the central purpose of practical reconciliation, namely improved Indigenous well-being. Of particular concern is the fact that the disparities that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians have remained substantially the same, or have widened over the past five and ten years. Indigenous Australians also presently endure health standards worse than those in some so-called 'third world' countries. The lack of progress in achieving substantial improvement in Indigenous well-being is also in marked contrast to outcomes in similar settler countries such as the USA, Canada and New Zealand' (p54).

2003 saw the development of significant measures for advancing reconciliation within the framework of the Council of Australian Governments. The national reporting framework on Indigenous disadvantage and whole-of-government trials under COAG (**see further summary sheet three**) are in fledgling stages and there are a number of issues that remain to be addressed before success is assured.

"These initiatives have not, however, been backed up by a range of other commitments and processes that are necessary to ensure the long-term sustainability of improvements in the well-being of Indigenous peoples. There remains an absence of an appropriate national commitment to redressing Indigenous disadvantage, sufficiently rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and benchmarks with both short-term and longer term targets agreed with Indigenous peoples. There are also critical issues relating to the depth of inequality experienced by Indigenous people, the size and growth of the Indigenous population and under-resourcing of services and programs to Indigenous peoples that cannot continue to be ignored if there is to be any genuine improvement in Indigenous peoples' circumstances.

Ultimately, the process of practical reconciliation is hampered by its lack of a substantive action plan for overcoming Indigenous disadvantage in the longer term, with short-term objectives to indicate whether the rate of progress towards this goal is sufficient.

The failure of the government to address these factors as part of its practical reconciliation approach reflects a fundamental flaw in the process. By committing to provide full access to citizenship entitlements and nothing more, practical reconciliation is a 'blank cheque' and amounts to a commitment into the foreseeable future to pay the increased economic and social costs associated with Indigenous disadvantage. In relation to employment alone, this cost is estimated by the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research to rise to the vicinity of 0.5 to 1% of gross domestic product within the decade.

At this stage, it is not possible to foresee a time when 'record levels of expenditure' of the Commonwealth on Indigenous services will not be necessary. It is also not possible to foresee a time when a continuation of the current approach will result in significant improvements in the lives of Indigenous peoples. Practical reconciliation does not have a plan for *overcoming* rather than simply managing Indigenous disadvantage.

‘Ultimately, deficiencies in monitoring and evaluating processes for reconciliation indicate that there are problems of accountability of governments for their contribution to reconciliation. This lack of accountability allows governments to unilaterally establish the boundaries of issues that they will address in the first place and then to avoid public scrutiny when material improvements in Indigenous well-being are not achieved and sustained. A number of recommendations have been made throughout the course of Chapter 2 of the Report to address this situation’ (pp55-56).

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SUMMARY SHEET THREE: COAG TRIALS



In its communiqué of 5 April 2002, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to trial a whole-of-government cooperative approach in up to 10 communities or regions of Australia. Appendix 2 of the report provides a detailed overview of the structure of the trials, and progress in each trial site.

‘While the trials remain in the preliminary stages of development, rapid progress has been made during 2003... Government departments are embracing the challenge to re-learn how to interact with and deliver services to Indigenous peoples... Through the active involvement of Ministers and secretaries of federal departments in the trials, a clear message is being sent through mainstream federal departments that these trials matter and that government is serious about improving outcomes for Indigenous peoples... ATSIC have stated that to date ‘there has been clear success through improved relationships across governments at trial sites’ (p42).

It is too early to determine whether the trials will have a positive impact in improving government service delivery to communities in each trial region in the longer term or whether transferable lessons will be learnt which are able to more broadly benefit other Indigenous communities.

‘The lack of a clear evaluation strategy is of great concern. It may be that the uncertainty in this regard is largely the product of the evolving nature of the trials and that there will be much greater clarity during 2004. I have previously, however, expressed concern at reliance by COAG on internal monitoring and evaluation strategies. In particular, I have expressed concerns about the lack of information that is publicly reported about such evaluations (thus limiting government accountability), the lack of appropriate consultation with Indigenous peoples and lack of independence in the monitoring process.’

‘A related issue is the existence of adequate data to contribute to the monitoring and evaluation process. The concern is that the trials have set objectives for data analysis and performance monitoring that will not be able to be achieved because of the existing limitations in data quality and collection (p47).

It is not clear how the lessons learnt from the trials will be transferable and contribute to broader reform of program design and service delivery for Indigenous peoples. Ultimately, the transferability of outcomes from the trials in the longer term will depend on whether the trials are able to more broadly change the status quo of service delivery and program guidelines. A significant challenge will be ensuring that the adoption of more holistic, whole-of-government approaches is not a transient feature and that departments do not simply slip back into their usual ways of doing things once the trials have ended.

Factors that will need to be addressed to ensure that this is not the case include: continued engagement of mainstream departments and programs, coordinating funding of proposals in non-trial sites, resource constraints, and capacity development of Indigenous communities.

There are also a number of processes available to ATSIC and Indigenous peoples to build on the achievements of the trials and more broadly inform policies and programs. There are three significant processes which ATSIC currently utilises which provide ATSIC with some leverage for advancing inter-governmental coordination and improved service delivery:

- ATSIC has entered into a number of partnership agreements with states and territories, as well as agreements and compacts with federal government departments.

- through the operation of ATSIC's Regional Councils and the development of their regional plans. Regional plans offer a significant opportunity for coordinating government activity within regions.
- ATSIC leads the Community Participation Agreements (CPA) initiative under the *Australians Working Together* package.

A further tool which is available to Indigenous communities to build on the advances of the COAG trials are the Indigenous Land Use Agreement provisions of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). 'Overall, the COAG whole-of-government community trials have advanced significantly during 2003 and offer much potential for reforming inter-government and whole-of-government approaches to service delivery to Indigenous peoples. There have already been a number of achievements from the process. There remain a number of challenges and some structural issues (particularly relating to monitoring and evaluation) that remain to be addressed. The long term success of the process will, however, depend on how the trials promote structural change in the way that governments go about delivering services to Indigenous peoples' (p54).

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SUMMARY SHEET FOUR: INDIGENOUS PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING



There has been increased attention over the past year to the nature of the relationship between government and Indigenous peoples. There has been a lot of talk from governments about the need to change the way they interact with and provide services to Indigenous peoples and communities. This has largely occurred as a result of the significant policy focus of Indigenous peoples and governments on capacity building and governance reform in recent years, and progress in 2003 in advancing the whole-of-government community trials by the Council of Australian Governments.

Debates during the year about the relationship of Indigenous peoples and government have identified three key, inter-connected, issues. First, the need to change the way government interacts with Indigenous peoples. For governments, the emphasis here has been on the need to change the way services are provided to Indigenous peoples, including through improved coordination between governments and among government agencies. Second, the need to build the capacity of Indigenous communities, coupled with demands for improved corporate governance among Indigenous organisations. Third, the need to review the structures and operations of ATSIC, such as through introducing improved corporate governance mechanisms and by making ATSIC more representative and participatory (see **further summary sheet five**). There are, however, differences on how to best address these issues.

Indigenous peoples seek to challenge the underlying basis of their relationship to governments in Australia. Indigenous peoples have increasingly come to realise that the current system perpetuates a cycle of dependency and is also not contributing to or promoting sustainable improvements in Indigenous communities and individual well-being.

‘Concerns about dependency on permanent government service delivery are accompanied by concerns that this service delivery model is not delivering long term and sustainable improvements in Indigenous communities. The current approach reduces the idea of development ‘to one of ‘community development’ devoid of any economic dimension’ and provides ‘little encouragement to Indigenous economic development since the resourcing of Indigenous organisations does not increase with increases in economic activity in their local area’. Service delivery of itself brings few economic benefits’ (p61).

Overall, it requires two main but inter-related changes. First, it requires changes to the approach of government to funding in order to increase Indigenous participation and control. Second, it raises challenges for Indigenous people to develop structures that are capable of interacting with governments while also being representative of and accountable back to Indigenous communities and people. This requires building the capacity of Indigenous communities to be self-determining as well as reforming the structures of ATSIC to provide effective representation within government at the regional, state and national levels.

The report identifies four main features of the developments over the past few years relating to capacity building and governance reform: the identification of significant capacity in Indigenous communities; the importance of capacity building in building a more effective service delivery framework ; the importance of corporate governance standards; and definitions of capacity building.

The Commission recommends the adoption of the ATSIC Framework which has three levels of interventions for capacity development – the community level; Indigenous organisations; and government level (including ATSIC). There are different approaches needed for each level (**pp 86-88**). The report recommends that this framework be adopted by COAG as part of its reconciliation framework.

‘Overall . . . there have been significant advances in the past three years in relation to capacity building initiatives. There is a broader acceptance of the need for capacity building and governance reform within Indigenous communities and to changing the way that governments go about delivering services. There is also a broader acknowledgement of the breadth of initiatives currently underway to address the overall circumstances of Indigenous peoples. This is let down, however, by the lack of a consistent understanding of what capacity building entails which promotes a more limited focus purely on the operations of existing service delivery mechanisms.

‘The proposal of an integrated capacity development approach by ATSIC demonstrates the *potential* for transforming the relationship of Indigenous peoples and government through a focus on governance reform and capacity building. It provides a holistic, whole-of-government approach that serves as an agenda for change. The adoption of this framework would not only provide a long term framework and vision for improving Indigenous well-being, it would also ensure that all governments proceed in addressing capacity development issues with a consistent understanding of the goals and objectives of such a process. Many current initiatives of governments – such as the COAG whole-of-government trials, proposals to reform corporate governance standards relating to Indigenous corporations, and agreement making with ATSIC – fit within or is consistent with this integrated framework’ (p88).

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SUMMARY SHEET FIVE: REVIEW OF ATSIC



The Social Justice Report 2003 supports the following recommendations of the ATSIC Review Team:

- to retain ATSIC's 35 Regional Councils and accord higher priority to the Regional Council planning process as the basis of national policies;
- to reunify ATSIC and ATSIIS in one organisation;
- to retain the conflict of interest directions within ATSIC (p95).

'In supporting the reunification of ATSIC and ATSIIS, I support the retention of the conflict of interest directions within ATSIC by which ATSIC's elected representatives would continue to set policy priorities and to decide the broad program allocation of funding but not have any involvement in making individual funding decisions. The reunification of ATSIC's structure would overcome a potential tension that has been created through the creation of ATSIIS whereby it is required to 'take all reasonable steps to ensure that ATSIIS conforms to the policies and strategic priorities established by ATSIC' on the one hand, and 'coordinate its activities to achieve effective synergies with overall Government policies and priorities as well as have appropriate regard to overall Government policies and priorities' on the other hand' (p95).

The report also identifies significant problems with the proposals of the ATSIC Review Team:

'I also have reservations about the Review Team's proposals for the creation of a national body and national executive in the format that they propose. I also consider that the Review Team's model does not provide adequate support to ATSIC's national structure and consequently would not provide ATSIC with sufficient leverage or powers to undertake a broader role of monitoring performance by other government agencies (at all levels) and in setting priorities to apply across government'(pp95-96).

There must be sufficient attention paid to the importance of ATSIC maintaining a strong voice at the national level. Any diminution of ATSIC's role at the national level will ultimately affect its ability to influence the national policy agenda and will lead to less effective advocacy for Indigenous peoples. This will be the case even where a diminution of the national focus is accompanied by an enhanced role for regional councils (p100).

ATSIC's existing powers should be enhanced by strengthening the scrutiny role of ATSIC over service delivery and program design by other government departments. This could be achieved through amendments to the ATSIC Act which:

- empower ATSIC to set the objectives and guiding principles for service delivery to Indigenous peoples across all issues (which they can do under the present legislation), but also to empower them to be able to develop legally binding directions for service delivery agencies that accord with these principles;
- require the Minister to table in Parliament all such directions set by the ATSIC Board;
- provide that all directions issued by the ATSIC National Board and subsequently tabled in Parliament have the status of legislative instruments (or delegated legislation);
- require all government departments to include in their annual reports to Parliament information as to how they implement the directions of the ATSIC Board in delivering relevant services and programs;
- empower ATSIC to evaluate how government departments and agencies (at all levels) comply with these directions in delivering services;

- provide for regular scrutiny of compliance with these directions by the Australian National Audit Office or through an enhanced Office of Evaluation and Audit within ATSIC; and
- provide for scrutiny processes by the Parliament, including through ATSIC reporting to Parliament about deficiencies in department's complying with directions and for parliamentary committees to scrutinise the actions of departments through specific inquiries or senate estimate processes. (pp100-101).

The report supports enhancing the structure of ATSIC for interface with state and territory government through improved support for ATSIC's State Advisory Committees (p102). It also supports the ATSIC Review report's emphasis on the need for enhanced powers at the regional level and for input from the regional and local levels to inform policy development and decision-making processes at the state/territory and national levels (p 103).

Overall, 'the ATSIC Review goes part of the way to identifying an agenda for change to ATSIC. There is, however, a need to go beyond what the Review Team have proposed and ensure that there is no relative weakening in ATSIC's national structure, while also increasing the focus on supporting innovation at the regional level.'

'Reform of ATSIC is a critical aspect in achieving the effective participation of Indigenous peoples in decision making processes and supporting sustainable development. The extent to which the government supports ATSIC over the coming year to more effectively drive an agenda for change, including by providing it with sharper legislative powers, will be the litmus test of their commitment to achieving sustainable improvements in Indigenous communities' (p105).

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SUMMARY SHEET SIX: PETROL SNIFFING



Over the past year, there has been significant concern expressed about petrol sniffing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at the national level. The phenomenon of petrol-sniffing is, however, not well-understood and there is no reliable national data on the number of people involved and the extent of resulting damage to individuals and communities.

There are, however, reported instances of petrol sniffing being a significant issue in several Indigenous communities across Australia. The limited research also suggests that there are different patterns of use of petrol and other volatile substances by Indigenous people compared to non-Indigenous people.

It has been argued that there are structural problems in the way governments address issues of petrol sniffing in Indigenous communities. Because of the lack of reliable data and the absence of any powerful lobby groups or other agencies with the capacity to ensure that petrol sniffing remains on the public agenda in anything more than a transient manner. Petrol sniffing as a public issue owes almost everything to sporadic media coverage.

In these circumstances, it is difficult to consolidate an evidence base, to build and sustain links with existing expertise, or to maintain extensive corporate knowledge on the subject. By identifying petrol sniffing as an 'Indigenous problem' it has also been marginalised as a policy issue, with the result that it has not received the attention and resourcing that it may have if it had been positioned within mainstream substance misuse policy frameworks.

In September 2002, the South Australian Coroner brought down his findings in the inquests into the deaths of three Anangu who were chronic petrol sniffers and lived on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands (AP Lands) of South Australia. Data collected in 2000 indicates that, despite an overall decline in the 1990s, the number of people engaged in petrol sniffing on the AP Lands has begun to increase in recent years. Approximately 6% of the total Anangu population and 12% of the population aged between 10 and 35 years of age were sniffers in 2000. Petrol sniffing had caused at least 35 deaths in the last 20 years in a population of between 2,000 and 2,500.

'The Coronial Inquest identified the need for 'prompt, forthright, properly planned, properly funded action' and the importance of effective inter-governmental coordination to achieve this and sustain it into the longer term. In the year since the Coronial Inquest, there has been some movement in this direction but overall not enough' (p150).

Communities on the AP Lands have expressed concerns about the continuing piecemeal approach to petrol sniffing and a reluctance to act by governments in the twelve months following the Coronial Inquest. Governments cite the intractable nature of the issue and the need for appropriate consultation as reasons for the slow progress to date.

There is significant concern that the discrete focus on petrol sniffing is potentially being obscured by the level of bureaucracy. There is concern that petrol sniffing will be submerged within a sea of other significant issues and not receive the focussed attention called for by the Coronial Inquest and communities on the AP Lands.

'[G]iven the smallness of the Anangu population, and the proportion of petrol sniffers within it, why has there been so little progress in addressing these problems, despite the plethora of governmental service delivery agencies and committees already in existence?' (p152).

See Chapter Four of the Report for full details of the case study of petrol sniffing on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands.

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SUMMARY SHEET SEVEN: ADDRESSING FAMILY VIOLENCE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES



There is no issue currently causing more destruction to the fabric of Indigenous communities than family violence. This has been acknowledged by all levels of government in recent years, with a number of significant inquiries and initiatives undertaken or commenced at the federal, state and territory level to address its impact.

Recent initiatives such as the Prime Minister's family violence roundtable in July 2003 and subsequent commitment of \$20 million as a 'down payment' to address family violence issues, the response of the Western Australian government to the Gordon Inquiry's findings, and the focus on family violence issues in several of the COAG whole-of-government community trials, demonstrate a genuine commitment from governments to address family violence issues.

Indigenous concepts of violence are much broader than usual mainstream definitions of domestic violence. Many current approaches to family violence derive from a model of 'domestic violence' - violence against women, underpinned by western models of female oppression. These do not 'fit' Indigenous experience. The identity of many Indigenous women is bound to their experience as Indigenous people. Rather than sharing a common experience of sexism binding them with non-Indigenous women, this may bind them more to their community, including the men of the community. Indigenous people may also have a negative perception of police and welfare authorities.

An emphasis on criminal justice responses to family violence poses two main concerns for Indigenous women. The first is that the system is generally ineffective in addressing the behaviour of the perpetrator in the longer term. The effect of imprisonment is to remove them from the community and then, without any focus on rehabilitation or addressing the circumstances that led to the offending in the first place, to simply return them to the same environment. The second is that there are a range of barriers in the accessibility and cultural appropriateness of legal processes which discourage Indigenous women from using the criminal justice system in the first place.

There are significant deficiencies in the availability of statistics and research on the extent and nature of family violence in communities. An overview of recent statistics and research into the extent and nature of Indigenous family violence is provided in the report (pp161-168). What data exists suggests that Indigenous people suffer violence, including family violence, at significantly higher rates than other Australians do. This situation has existed for at least the past two decades with no identifiable improvement.

Addressing family violence is a shared responsibility between all levels of government with prime responsibility resting with health and community service agencies in federal, state and territory governments.

There are a patchwork of programs and approaches to addressing family violence in Indigenous communities among federal, state and territory governments, but there remains a lack of coordination and consistency in approaches to addressing these issues between governments and among different government agencies.

Three recurring strategic aspects need to be present to address family violence in Indigenous communities, namely that programs be community-driven; that community agencies establish partnerships with each other and with relevant government agencies; and that composite violence programs are able to provide a more holistic approach to community violence (pp 183 – 184).

Review of existing approaches identifies a critical need to adopt an holistic approach to the problem of family violence and identifies the crucial importance of engagement with Commonwealth and State government agencies and communities to work in partnership on family violence strategies, as well as supporting and strengthening the capacity of ATSI Regional Councils to develop, implement and monitor family violence action plans.

Overall, the report concludes: '[The] commitments and recent initiatives by all governments...are welcome and long overdue. As yet, they are not sufficiently wide-ranging in their scope or effectively funded. There are also significant gaps in service provision, including through a general paucity of programs and lack of legal assistance to Indigenous women in many areas. As a consequence, there remains a need for ongoing, continuous support for innovative, community led solutions to address family violence and the adoption of an holistic, coordinated approach by governments. ATSI's Family Violence Plan provides a platform for improving this situation, with the development of regionally targeted programs and action plans. The escalating and debilitating affects of family violence on Indigenous people and communities requires urgent attention' (p191).

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PROGRESS IN ADDRESSING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE



INCOME

- Gross household income for Indigenous people increased by 11% between 1996 and 2001. In 2001, it was 62% of the rate for non-Indigenous Australians, compared to 64% in 1996.
- Median gross individual income for Indigenous people increased by 19% from 1996 to 2001, compared to an increase of 28.4% for non-Indigenous people. There has been a considerable increase in the disparity in individual income between these two groups between 1996 and 2001, as well as over the decade from 1991 to 2001.

EMPLOYMENT

- In 2001, 54% of Indigenous people of working age were participating in the labour force compared to 73% of non-Indigenous people.
- In 2001, the unemployment rate for Indigenous people was 20% - an improvement from the rate of 23% in 1996. This is three times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous Australians.
- 18% of all Indigenous people in employment in 2001 worked on a CDEP scheme. If CDEP were classified as a form of unemployment, the Indigenous unemployment rate would rise to over 34%.

EDUCATION

- 69% of Indigenous students progressed from year 10 (compulsory) to year 11 (non-compulsory) schooling, compared to 90% of non-Indigenous students in 2001.
- 38% of Indigenous students were retained to year 12 in 2002 compared to over 76% for non-Indigenous students. This was an increase from 29% in 1996.
- In 2001, Indigenous people participated in post-secondary education at a similar rate to non-Indigenous people, although they had a slightly higher attendance rate at TAFE colleges and lower attendance rates at universities. The proportion of Indigenous youth (aged 15-24 years) attending a tertiary institution declined between 1996 and 2001.

HOUSING

- In 2001, 63% of Indigenous households were renting (compared to 27% of non-Indigenous households), and 13% owned their home outright (compared to 40%).
- Indigenous people are 5.6 times more likely to live in over-crowded houses than non-Indigenous people.

CONTACT WITH CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

- Indigenous people have consistently constituted 20% of the total prisoner population since the late 1990s, compared to 14% in 1991.
- Indigenous people are imprisoned at 16 times the rate of non-Indigenous people. Indigenous women are imprisoned at over 19 times the rate of non-Indigenous women. These rates are higher than in 1991, when the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reported.

- Since 1997, Indigenous juveniles have constituted at least 42% of all incarcerated juveniles, despite constituting 4% of the total juvenile population. In 2002, Indigenous juveniles were incarcerated at a rate 19 times that of non-Indigenous juveniles, an increase from 13 times in 1993.

CONTACT WITH CARE AND PROTECTION SYSTEM

- Indigenous children come into contact with the care and protection system at a greater rate than non-Indigenous children, and are increasingly represented at the more serious stages of intervention.

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PROGRESS IN ADDRESSING INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE – HEALTH STATUS



LIFE EXPECTANCY

- Life expectancy for Indigenous females declined slightly from 1997 – 2001 to 62.8 years. This rate is lower than the life expectancy rate for females in India and sub-Saharan Africa (with the impact of HIV-AIDs factored out). The gap with non-Indigenous female life expectancy increased from 18.8 to 19.6 years in the same period.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females can also expect to live between 10.9 and 12.6 years less than Indigenous females in Canada, the United States of America and New Zealand.
- Life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males increased slightly from 1997-2001 to 56.3 years. This rate is lower than the life expectancy rate for males in Myanmar (Burma), Papua New Guinea and Cambodia. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous male life expectancy increased slightly from 20.6 to 20.7 years in the same period.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males can also expect to live between 8.8 and 13.5 years less than Indigenous males in Canada, the USA and New Zealand.

MEDIAN DEATH AGE

- In 2001, the median age of death was 24 years lower for Indigenous Australians than for non-Indigenous Australians. There has been no identifiable trend towards a reduction in this gap for either Indigenous males or females over the past decade.

INFANT HEALTH

- There are twice as many low birth-weight babies born to Indigenous mothers than to non-Indigenous mothers. The rate of low birth-weights has increased for both groups in recent years, with a slight increase in the disparity between the two groups over the decade.
- There are higher rates of low birth-weight babies among Indigenous Australians than there are for mothers in countries that are classified as low development countries by the United Nations, such as Ethiopia, Senegal, Zimbabwe, Lebanon and Indonesia.
- There are 2.5 times as many deaths among Indigenous infants than non-Indigenous infants in Australia, with no discernable reduction in the number of deaths or the rate of inequality since 1995.
- Rates of infant mortality for Indigenous people in Australia are significantly higher than rates for Indigenous people in Canada, the USA and New Zealand.