



CONCLUSION

There is a time lag between the formation of policy and delivery of programs and the outcomes as measured by the statistics contained in this report.

Many new initiatives in place, particularly research emanating from the COAG trials, have the potential to influence current policy development and significantly shift outcomes in the future.

Continued evaluation and monitoring of results to inform program and policy development are essential to incorporate lessons from these experiences and to ensure better programs and better services.

The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report 2005* contributes to delivering on a number of commitments made by the Western Australia Government in relation to government services provision.

This first version of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report* forms part of a reporting system for continually improving performance, via:

- establishing baseline indicators for measuring progress;
- facilitating cohesive and coordinated action;
- sharing examples of evidence-based best practice.

These are discussed further below.

BUILDING ON COMMITMENTS OF GOVERNMENT

The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report 2005* contributes to delivering a number of commitments of the Western Australia Government.

In 2001 the Western Australia Government stated it would restore a sense of purpose and focus to the public sector by setting clear strategic direction, clearly communicating priorities and developing indicators of progress. The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report* delivers on these commitments in the Indigenous Affairs portfolio. It sets clear strategic objectives, describes the priorities for action and provides a robust set of indicators against which progress can be measured.

The *Statement of Commitment to a New and Just Relationship* signed by the Premier in November 2001 commits the Government to building partnerships with Indigenous people where accountability would be an important principle. The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report* provides a framework for this accountability, based on real and measurable improvements in outcomes for Indigenous Western Australians.

At the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in June 2004, all Australian governments agreed to a *National Framework of Principles for Delivering Services to Indigenous Australians*. Two key principles identified the need for 'developing a learning framework' and 'focusing on priority areas'. The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report* helps put these principles into practice. It contributes to learning, by providing feedback on results and by providing examples of what works. It assists with maintaining a focus on priority areas by measuring progress in the areas COAG has agreed should be the focus of activity.

The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report* is part of a system for continually improving performance.

The initial proposal for developing agreement on measuring progress in Indigenous affairs at the national level, submitted to the Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) in May 2000, acknowledged the need to establish a framework that:

- provides data on service provision;
- enables regular reviews of results; and
- supports the joint planning of performance enhancements.¹

The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report* provides feedback to inform planning and contribute to more effective implementation of programs and partnerships in Western Australia. While it does not contain process indicators, it needs to be part of a system and a culture where key stakeholders work in partnership, value feedback and are prepared to openly review and discuss how they can improve.

A BASELINE FOR MEASURING CHANGE

The imperative

The statistics in this report show with great clarity that the positive life outcomes as experienced by the wider Western Australian population are yet to be experienced by much of the Indigenous population. This report is not alone in presenting the stark statistics of Indigenous disadvantage across Australia. It illustrates that the current outcomes, reflecting government policies and practices in the recent and historical past, have failed the majority of the Australian Indigenous population. One of the reasons for this is the time lag between the measurement of outcomes and the development and widespread implementation of policies and programs.

Noting this time lag for policy outcomes to be reflected in the statistics, particularly in the Headline Indicators, there is reason to believe this may change in the future due to:

- the highly significant research undertaken through the university sector and in Perth through the Telethon Institute of Child Health Research which has broadened our understanding of the impact of past policies and programs on the Indigenous population and other determinants of Indigenous disadvantage; and
- this knowledge is coupled with an increasing recognition and awareness by Governments and other service delivery agents of the diverse Indigenous culture, knowledge and consequent rights impacting on current policy and program development. Notably, these involve increasing recognition of
 - o the role of Indigenous people as important partners in achieving sustainable change, and
 - o the need for governments to work together and practice coordination of its policy and program delivery functions.

With this growing recognition and consequent shift in policy and program services delivery it is imperative to establish a baseline from which to evaluate the impact of these changes, for example in the approaches being trialled through Gordon place management and COAG trial sites. This will enable swifter responses by Government to factors that are independently identified as facilitators or inhibitors of program development and ultimately of successful outcomes.

The next steps in using the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Western Australia Report* will be in its use as a tool for better planning of service delivery, evaluation of outcomes, and that this improvement cycle will in turn drive policy change.

“A fundamental step in establishing mechanisms for the management of development processes is the construction of a baseline profile of social and economic conditions at the outset. Without this, it is difficult to determine the subsequent effects of one course of action over any other. Accordingly, this need to measure outcomes from a baseline is fundamental to development plans negotiated between government and regional governing bodies.”²

FACILITATING COHESIVE AND COORDINATED ACTION

Aligning effort with outcomes

The State Government is driving the agenda for *Better Programs and Better Services* for all Western Australians, with a focus on improving outcomes through better collaboration and coordination across government. The priority outcomes of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* reporting framework are aligned with the State Government’s priorities.

In addition, the *Draft Guidelines for Strategic Management of the Western Australian Public Sector* emphasises the alignment of agency activities with outcomes, and the need to operate collaboratively and holistically with a focus on meeting the needs of communities. In particular, they were designed to assist agencies to:

- operate **collaboratively and cohesively** – engaging with the Western Australian community – to achieve shared outcomes;
- plan for **the holistic and coordinated (‘joined-up’) delivery of services** which are accessible to those who need them, **and of the type and quality required by the community**;
- contribute to improving the quality of life of all Western Australians; and
- agencies should use the Strategic Planning Framework as their overall guide in relation to their strategic management activities, including: strategic planning, budgeting, service delivery, ongoing performance monitoring, evaluation and reporting.³

The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* reporting framework clearly shows where strategic action needs to occur around specific desired outcomes rather than services. Figure E on page 18 provides one example of the alignment of agencies under the Early school engagement and performance Strategic Area for Action. The efforts of other jurisdictions across Australia to implement the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* reporting framework may also be drawn upon in endeavouring to improve the alignment of government to these outcomes.

Closing the Loop - “evaluate, evaluate, evaluate”⁴

There is a critical need to focus efforts and limited resources to where the impact is greatest. Continual improvement of performance and better targeting of services requires independent evaluation and review, particularly where significant investment is planned. Early, formative evaluation built into project and program planning can maximise the results achieved for all stakeholders by early detection and reforming of projects in response to identified issues.

There are a number of key initiatives in train at the moment that are trialling new ways of working across government and in partnership with communities at the regional and local level. These hold significant implications for longer term and systemic shifts in the way government works together and with Indigenous people to address disadvantage. Their significance is not restricted to the improved outcomes, but is also in the valuable insights possible through a rigorous review of processes, mechanisms, and outcomes.

The Environmental Health Needs Committee has its focus on effective environmental health systems and is addressing improved coordination in the planning and delivery of environmental health related services such as housing, power, water and sewerage systems.

Whole of government approaches, such as those embodied in the place management approach arising from the Gordon Inquiry and those being implemented at COAG trial sites, are tackling cross-government coordination at the highest level and in partnership with communities on the ground. These initiatives represent unique opportunities to learn from and improve processes and structures for coordinating strategically driven action across government.

Particularly important research has accompanied the implementation of the COAG trial site in the Northern Territory. In an evaluation of the socioeconomic costs and benefits of sustaining Indigenous disadvantage, it was found that patterns of government expenditure in discrete communities could actually serve to perpetuate ongoing disadvantage, with higher than average spending on downstream outcomes of disadvantage, such as justice and unemployment, than on preventative measures such as education and employment creation. Further, if average conditions in similar mainstream communities in the Northern Territory were replicated in Indigenous communities in the trial site in the Northern Territory *“output per person would increase by about \$22,000 per annum and average employment incomes would increase by about \$13,000”*.⁵

There is compelling evidence put forward to support investment in employment creation and ‘human capital formation’ or capacity building strategies, nationally and regionally, to change the status quo. For example, human capacity building begins with investment in education and training access and services to meet the needs of a youthful Indigenous population. Employment and job creation opportunities centre around land such as the arts and craft industry, and working on land. The policy challenge is ahead

Building government capacity for collaborative action

National and international recognition of the dire circumstances of many Indigenous people has Governments increasingly collaborating across party lines and with Indigenous people to address the relative gap in life outcomes. While the focus has largely been on the capacity of communities, attention must also be given to the capacity of Government to work with Indigenous people in this new age of practical implementation of coordinated programs at the local level.⁶

The future direction for governments will increasingly involve across sector collaboration and partnerships. With the emphasis at all levels of government to work collaboratively and in partnership with Indigenous people, communities, non-government and private sectors, the importance of understanding factors that facilitate and inhibit this function are critical. This requires more attention that is given here, but to begin to consider this issue, some factors shown to facilitate across government collaboration or interagency work include:

- political will and public commitment, leading to adequate resourcing;
- engagement with the community and all relevant stakeholders, based on achieving ownership of framework for action and agreeing on relevance of outcomes;
- commitment to both the vision and efficient and effective processes;
- agreeing on a lead agency and defining responsibilities, including a strong leader and/or skilled convenor;
- clear and defined processes that enhance and ensure accountability of agencies; and
- good relationships between stakeholders based on mutual respect, understanding and trust.^{7,8}

The critical key to achieving improved outcomes is the development of effective partnerships with Indigenous people. To do this requires the development of the capacity of all parties to negotiate equally including:

- Building the capacity of government (communication and facilitation skills) based on understanding of local issues and culture;
- Understanding and practising culturally appropriate methods of negotiating to enable Indigenous people to participate equally; and
- Building the capacity of Indigenous people and communities to negotiate from an informed position.

*"Having well articulated policies regarding the health, safety and development of children that intermesh across departmental jurisdictions is a critical first step. Then these need to be translated into coordinated and jointly developed actions and planning time-frames that require sustaining mechanisms which span State and Commonwealth jurisdictions and which persist through the lives of governments."*⁹

The *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage in Western Australia Report* provides information. Information alone will not improve results. To move forward there now needs to be broad agreement to use the framework at the State level by decision-makers in the Commonwealth, state and local governments, in the Indigenous community, in non-government organisations and in the private sector. It provides the common baseline, the agreed priorities and the shared goals needed for effective collaborative action.

Endnotes

¹ *Development of a Commonwealth/State Framework for Achieving Better Outcomes for Indigenous Australians, Detailed Proposal*, Paper for the Standing Committee of Officials, Ministerial Council for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Canberra 5 May, 2000.

² J. Taylor, *Social Indicators for Aboriginal Governance: insights from the Thamarrurr Region, Northern Territory*, (Research Monograph No. 24), Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University, Canberra, 2004, p. 103.

³ Department of Premier and Cabinet, 'Agency Strategic Management in the context of Better Planning: Better Services. A Strategic Planning Framework for the Western Australian Public Sector'. Draft Guidelines, Public Sector Management Division, Perth, 2003.

⁴ H. D'Antoine, *pers.comm*, Community Consultation Session, Centre for Aboriginal Studies, Curtin University of Technology, Perth, 2004.

⁵ J. Taylor & O. Stanley. The Opportunity Costs of the Status Quo in the Thamarrurr Region, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, The Australian National University, Canberra, March 2005, p.93.

⁶ See for example: Australia. Parliament. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, *Many Ways Forward: Report of the Inquiry into Capacity Building and Service Delivery in Indigenous Communities*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2004 p11-17;

S. Gordon, K. Hallahan & D. Henry, *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, Perth, 2002; and Government of Western Australia, State Sustainability Strategy, [online] downloaded 21 March 2005 <<http://www.sustainability.dpc.wa.gov.au/docs/Strategy.htm>>.

⁷ S. Allsop, 'The Practice of policy: issues and examples in the creation of public policy in Western Australia', Institute of Public Affairs Administration Conference, Perth, 2003.

⁸ S. Eslick and L. Gevers, Intersectoral collaboration: critical success factors, prepared for the Office of Aboriginal Health, Department of Health (formerly Health Department of Western Australia), Perth, 2000.

⁹ S.R. Zubrick, S.R. Silburn & M. Prior, *Resources and contexts for child development: implications for children and society*, paper submitted to the Academy of Social Science in Australia., 2004.