



9 December 2019

Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training
Department of Education
Email: pathwaysreviewconsultations@education.gov.au

To whom it may concern,

Submission: Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) is a peak body for the Social and Community Sector in the Northern Territory (NT) and an advocate for social justice on behalf of people and communities in the NT, who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage.

NTCOSS has a broad membership base, made up of non-government and community organisations, Indigenous organisations, and community councils across the NT, as well as other organisations and individuals committed to social justice issues for people and communities who are socially and financially disadvantaged in the NT.

Further to discussions with the Review Panel, NTCOSS welcomes the opportunity to make a written submission to the Review, to expand on the following issues:

Education opportunities in remote communities

In remote regions, it is well established that Aboriginal people are particularly disadvantaged in terms of social, economic and health measures. People are less able to access services, further education, training and employment in their communities.

The focus on delivering most senior secondary schooling and the majority of middle years schooling in urban schools (including boarding schools) has been perceived by some stakeholders as representing a withdrawal of government support for remote communities (particularly the smaller communities).

A key finding by Guenther et al.¹ was that in 2016, an estimated 1500 young people aged between 12 and 17 were not engaged in any form of schooling in the NT. Furthermore, between 2014 and 2017, the attendance rate for Indigenous students fell from 70.2% to 66.2%, with the NT consistently recording the lowest proportion of Indigenous students at or above the national minimum standards (according to NAPLAN measures)².

¹ Guenther et al (2016), *Boarding Schools for Remote Secondary Aboriginal Learners in the Northern Territory. Smooth Transition or Rough Ride?* In Australian Association for Research in Education Annual Conference, 30 November 2016, Melbourne. Retrieved from https://www.aare.edu.au/data/2016_Conference/Full_papers/671_John_Guenther.pdf

² Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2018), *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2018*, retrieved from <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/reports/closing-the-gap-2018/education.html>

The Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs' report on educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students heard that access to boarding schools does not 'negate, or compensate for, lack of access to quality education in a student's home community', and found that the best outcomes for students are 'achieved at schools where there are strong links with the community and between health and education services'³.

Driver licences

As raised by NTCOSS in discussion with the Review panel, access to driver licences poses significant barriers to engagement with further education and training. Professor Rebecca Ivers et al. identified that low rates of licensing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have far reaching and sustained negative impacts, with a direct relationship between licensing, education and employment⁴. The study found that people who hold a driver licence have 'significantly higher odds of being in full-time employment or having higher levels of formal education'⁵. The study identified that:

(p)rograms that ensure individuals have more control over the things in their lives that are important to them, including education and employment, are critical to increasing the health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As such, driver licensing support programs that aim to increase licensure, including learner driver mentor programs, may provide significant opportunities to close the gap⁶

The study concluded that a holistic approach is need to minimise barriers, for example addressing the often prohibitive financial cost associated with licensing; literacy issues; language; lack of cultural responsiveness in the system; meeting the requirements of graduated driver licensing; justice system (for example, Aboriginal people have greater contact with the justice system due to licensing offences); and lack of service provision, particularly in remote communities. Furthermore, there is a need for more support systems that assist in both obtaining and maintaining licensing.

Proof of Identity (POI)

Access to POI documents has been identified as a barrier to enrolling in boarding school, further education and training programs (including participating in driver training programs), particularly for Aboriginal people.

Barriers to obtaining these documents include variation in names recorded by different government agencies (and within agencies); the literacy required to complete application forms; understanding of spoken and written English; access to service providers (particularly in remote communities) and

³ xvi Parliament of Australia, House of Representative, Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs (2017) *The power of education: From surviving to thriving. Educational opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, Canberra, retrieved from https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Indigenous_Affairs/EducationalOpportunities/Final_Report

⁴ Ivers R, Hunter K, Clapham K, Helps Y, Senserrick T, Bryne J, Martiniuk A, Daniels J, Harrison J (2016) 'Driver licensing: descriptive epidemiology of a social determinant of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 40 no. 4, retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/1753-6405.12535>

⁵ ibid

⁶ ibid

the interaction between Western naming and identification practices and traditional Aboriginal naming processes. For a better understanding of this, see Rod Hagen's essay in 'Proof of Birth'⁷⁸.

For enrolment at the NT's Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University, applicants must provide POI that includes full name and date of birth, which limits the type of POI that can be used, and for most non-birth certificate POI (eg passport, driver's licence, proof of age, Health Care Card, etc) to be issued, a birth certificate must be produced first. Larrakia Corporation and Tangentyere Council can provide people with alternative POI, however these services have limited geographical/jurisdictional scope and uses, and are only available to people accessing those services (in Darwin and Alice Springs).

ABSTUDY, Newstart and the Community Development Program (CDP)

In various consultations over the past 10 years, stakeholders have raised concerns about the application process for ABSTUDY, including difficulties for their clients in obtaining appropriate identification necessary to process an ABSTUDY application, and the lengthy processing times. This is, in part, linked to barriers associated with accessing POI, as identified above. It has been reported that this can lead to clients being unable to enrol in training or school by the term or course commencement date.

The low rates of payments under Newstart and related schemes (such as Youth Allowance and ABSTUDY); the onerous compliance conditions associated with these and the punitive measures for non-compliance, have been shown to cause people to completely disengage from government support systems, and impacts on people's capacity to participate in education, training and employment.⁹

Of the approximately 35,000 people required to participate in CDP, 83% are identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and living in remote communities.¹⁰ Compliance obligations under CDP are onerous and inflexible, and participants are three times more likely to be penalised for non-compliance and are penalised more often than participants in other schemes.¹¹ Stakeholders argue that CDP does not provide pathways into employment, does not support the creation of new employment opportunities and is not effective in engaging and supporting young people.¹² While

⁷ 'Traditional Australian Aboriginal naming processes' in Castan M, Gerber P, eds. *Proof of Birth*, Melbourne: Future Leaders; 2015 retrieved from http://www.futureleaders.com.au/book_chapters/pdf/Proof-of-Birth/Proof-of-Birth-Chapter7.pdf

⁸ See also Castan Centre for Human Rights Law submission to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights on examples of best practices to ensure the registration of children, namely those in situation of risk and marginalised: Human Rights Council resolution 34/15, 31 October 2017 retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Children/BirthRegistrationMarginalized/CastanCentreSubmission.pdf>

⁹ NTCOSS, Submission to the senate Inquiry into the Adequacy of Newstart and Related Payments and Alternative Mechanisms to Determine the Level of Income Support Payments in Australia 2019

¹⁰ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'An evaluation of the first two years of the Community Development Programme', accessed at <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/cdp-evaluation-first-2-years.pdf>

¹¹ Allam L 'Government releases damning review of its own Aboriginal work-for-the-dole scheme', The Guardian, 6th February 2019, retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/feb/06/a-third-of-remote-aboriginal-work-for-the-dole-participants-say-community-worse-off>

¹² Central Land Council 2017, Submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee, Inquiry into the appropriateness and effectiveness of the objectives, design, implementation and evaluation of the Community Development Program, retrieved from https://www.clc.org.au/files/pdf/CLC_submission_-_CDP_senate_inquiry_June_2017.pdf, and Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT 2017, 'Developing Strong and Resilient Remote Communities: Proposal for Establishment of a Remote Development and Employment Scheme', retrieved from <https://www.clc.org.au/Remote-Employment-Program/>

formal training opportunities are an option for participation in the CDP, the compulsory and onerous nature of the program has not been shown to generate positive outcomes for participants.¹³

Increasing the rates of Newstart and other payment would have positive effects on economic growth within Australia, particularly within remote/regional communities.¹⁴ Along with the measurable economic benefits, increasing the rate of social security payments would have positive impacts in numerous other areas. The Health of Disability Support Pension and Newstart Allowance Recipients report by Monash University found that there is a significantly increased burden of ill health within the cohort of Australian Newstart compared to employed people of working age.¹⁵ Poverty and financial pressure directly correlate to poor health outcomes and the reduced ability to engage and participate in employment, education and training.

Health outcomes can be improved when addressing the social determinants of health – these being the ‘conditions in which we grow, work, live and age’.¹⁶ These social determinants of health are inclusive of areas such as accessing housing, social support services, social engagement/ inclusion, and nutritious food and education. All of these areas are severely impacted by the inadequacy of current payments, particularly in the NT where there are high rates of poverty, exacerbated by increased costs of living. Increasing the rates of social welfare and removing punitive conditions to their access would arguably result in stronger outcomes in remote communities.

The Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the NT (APONT) proposes an alternative approach to CDP, including measures to support local organisations to develop strategies to engage young people to support their engagement in education, training and work, and establishing a pool of remote youth project places to provide young people with opportunities to participate in paid work experience and accredited training.¹⁷ NTCOSS recommends consideration of APONT’s proposal for an alternative to CDP as part of the Review’s work.

Yours sincerely



Deborah Di Natale
CEO

¹³ Allam L ‘Remote work-for-the-dole changes to go ahead despite strong opposition’, The Guardian, 12th October 2018, retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/12/remote-work-for-the-dole-changes-to-go-ahead-despite-strong-opposition>

¹⁴ Deloitte Access Economics, 2018, Analysis of the impact of raising benefit rates – Australian Council of Social Service NTCOSS, 2018, Cost of Living Report – Issue 21

¹⁵ Prof. A. Collie, 2019, The Health of Disability Support Pension and Newstart Allowance Recipients, Monash University

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT 2017, ‘Developing Strong and Resilient Remote Communities: Proposal for Establishment of a Remote Development and Employment Scheme’, retrieved from <https://www.clc.org.au/Remote-Employment-Program/>