

THE WOORABINDA ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CORPORATION FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING AND HEALTH



SUBMISSION TO THE QUEENSLAND PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION

Consultation Paper: Service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities March 2017

It is acknowledged that the Consultation Paper is more relevant to local government structures in discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This submission is made from the perspective of community members who have established a non-profit organisation to address many of the issues referred to in the Consultation Paper. They are issues delaying improvements in community wellbeing. This response is from the perspective of community members.

The Woorabinda Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Health is a recently formed organisation. It is a community based non-profit organisation established to ensure service provision to the community is based on local decision making and problem solving. Its role is to overcome gaps in service and improve outcomes for community members through better coordination of services, local cultural considerations and more locally based delivery.

Background

Woorabinda is a discreet Aboriginal community some 170 kilometres from Rockhampton. It was originally established as a "mission" and is identifiable by its cultural separateness, and its social and geographical isolation. Woorabinda Aboriginal Shire Council administers to a population of about 1000.

Many service providers operate in Woorabinda on a fly-in fly-out basis. Australian Red Cross is based in the community, employing up to 18 staff and delivering family support, youth programs, women's and children's services and a mental health support service. CQID maintain a rehabilitation centre and a local family support worker, Darumbal Youth Services has a locally based worker, and Primary Health Network have now established a locally based coordinator in response to Council lobbying.

Other services operate on a visiting schedule by non-local organisations funded to deliver a service, or government departments.

Issues

Even though the community is subject to a very high level of entrenched disadvantage, it is clear to community members that they are subject to lower levels of service than those residing in Rockhampton. Some Examples include:

- Expectant mothers are required to spend 2-4 weeks in Rockhampton away from family, usually in hostel accommodation, prior to delivery;
- For families wishing to access best quality education, secondary students must leave community to attend boarding schools requiring working parents to contribute as much as \$10,000 per year above their ABSTUDY entitlement;
- Nutritious grocery shopping in community is limited and prices exorbitant at the state owned store;
- Access to supplementary health services such as dentistry, psychology and obstetrics are severely limited; and
- Training and employment services visit according to visiting schedules.

It is obvious that geographical issues will impact on the level of service provided from outside agencies. Many Woorabinda residents, however, believe they are not being serviced adequately by visiting services funded to assist their community. The issue is compounded by the fact that local residents have no input into program design to ensure local cultural expectations are met, and no involvement in ongoing decision making.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Woorabinda community members need to be considered best placed to drive change in their community. This requires a bottom-up approach to accommodate not only meaningful engagement but more importantly, community ownership. Local decision making, program design, the ability of community to participate in problem solving, and respect and understanding for local cultural constraints are critical aspects of the process. It is clear to the people of this community that these processes are not able to fully apply to fly-in fly-out services which then are unable to deliver the best outcomes and which have limited accountability to the local community.

This Woorabinda Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation for Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Health is newly formed and yet to access funding to meet the gaps in service it has already identified. Its establishment is to overcome the ongoing disadvantage and intergenerational trauma which continues because of lack of service coordination, poor access to services and limited program outcomes, clearly evident in the community. The Commission should consider the measures taken by the community as being reflective of the

importance to have more services locally based and community driven, culturally appropriate and accessible.

The Directors of the Corporation are well aware of the problems associated with some tied funding. The ability to have a level of flexibility is imperative in dealing with the myriad of problems experienced because of high levels of disadvantage. The necessity to maintain some tied funding is recognised, but the current processes which require different sources of funding from different state and federal departments, often for the same clients, creates major issues associated with service provision, achievement of the best outcomes, administration and accountability. Funding from less “pools” and greater flexibility would produce more effective outcomes. It would also be more efficient with less duplication. A range of local and visiting agencies funded to deliver different levels of family support, mental health support and youth programs in one discrete community is not efficient and leads to duplication of effort and funding. There is a requirement for greater levels of efficiency to ensure an increased level of effectiveness.

Accountability to community is as imperative as it is to the taxpayer. To accommodate greater flexibility with funding provision, all funding should require ongoing robust monitoring and evaluation, and be concerned with more than process. This would facilitate continuous improvement.

Governance support is also a critical issue in many discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and should be tied to funding. Most discrete communities are governed by local government authorities which receive substantial funding to engage qualified accountants and other professionals. Governance support is mostly at hand.

Locally based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander non-profit organisations undertaking a benevolent function, however, do not have the same level of governance support. They do require greater flexibility with the funding they attract, but access to governance support is a necessity for ongoing, rigorous management expertise. This support needs to be built in to funding along with ongoing monitoring and evaluation processes which ensure transparency.

Dennis Ware
Principal Program Officer
Woorabinda Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation
For Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Health

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