

8 November 2017

Professor Bronwyn Fredericks  
Commissioner  
Queensland Productivity Commission  
PO Box 12112  
George Street  
BRISBANE QLD 4003

Dear Commissioner Fredericks,

**Re: Submission to the Queensland Productivity Commission's Draft Report on Service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities**

Aged and Disability Advocacy Australia (ADA Australia) is a not-for-profit, independent, community based advocacy and education service with more than 25 years experience in supporting and improving the wellbeing of older people and people with disability.

ADA Australia provides advocacy support to recipients of Queensland Community Care Services. ADA Australia also receives funding under the National Aged Care Advocacy Program (NACAP).

Headquartered in Brisbane, ADA Australia has regional offices in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Toowoomba, and the Gold Coast and is active in providing advocacy services in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities across Queensland.

ADA Australia provides the auspice for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Disability Network of Queensland (ATSIDNQ). The ATSIDNQ is a growing network of over 700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, their families, carers and supporters. The Network offers a culturally safe space for members to connect, share and raise awareness of issues they are facing. The Network gives members the opportunity to celebrate their strengths, share their stories and contribute to the conversation about disability in positive ways. The Network employs Indigenous staff who work with members to understand the variety of issues Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability face and ensure this information is fed back to government policy makers.

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ welcome the opportunity to review and provide brief comment on the Queensland Productivity Commission's Draft Report on *Service delivery in remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities* (the Draft Report).

Overall, ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ are supportive of the overarching structural, service delivery and economic reforms proposed in the draft report. In particular, ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ

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consider the transfer of decision making closer to communities to be a positive step towards improving service delivery in remote and discrete communities.

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ encourage the Queensland Productivity Commission to consider the application of these reforms to communities in the South West regions of Queensland such as Augathella, Windorah, Thargomindah, and Cunnamulla. The Draft Report does not recognise these communities, despite these areas being classified as very remote<sup>i</sup>, having significant Aboriginal populations and facing ongoing challenges in accessing essential services such as health and disability services.

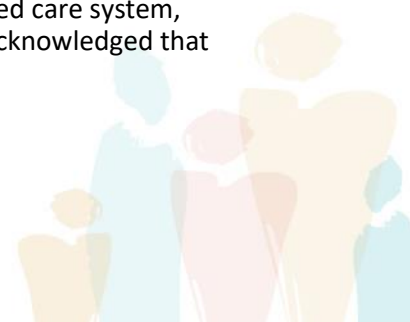
The Health and Wellbeing chapter of the Draft Report, has the most relevance to the work and knowledge of both ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ. Whilst we are supportive of the proposed recommendations in this chapter, we do have concerns regarding its scope. ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ note that this chapter gives very little consideration to the provision of aged care services, nor the roll out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

The introduction of the NDIS has the potential to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with greater access to disability support. The NDIS creates increased opportunity for disability services to be delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations/communities. It can also assist in easing pressures on other State funded systems such as health and housing. This is not acknowledged in the Draft Report and as such, there is no further discussion about how access to the NDIS can be improved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The ATSIDNQ has identified several challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability who are eligible to access the NDIS. Concerns include, but are not limited to

- Limited understanding amongst communities and remote health services about what the NDIS is, what it is for and how to access and use it.
- The NDIS system is hard to navigate and information on the NDIS is not culturally accessible. The use of inappropriate language is often a significant barrier. For example, the term “insurance” can be confusing and misleading, as can words such as disability or carer. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have no local words for ‘disability’ therefore it makes it hard for them to understand what a disability is, or even feel comfortable using the word or identifying as a person with a disability.
- There is a lack of disability services in remote communities and limited support available to assist for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to understand and register under the NDIS.
- There is an urgent need for more Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders to be employed within the disability sector. Indigenous disability workers can play an important role in encouraging and supporting community members to understand and sign up for the NDIS. Current workforce shortages in this area impact on the uptake of the Scheme. It is particularly important for planners and assessors to be from the local areas, so they understand the protocols and unique challenges faced by community members.

With regards to aged care services, ADA Australia notes that whilst the aged care services remain the responsibility of the Australian Government, the supports available through the aged care system, have the potential to alleviate pressures on state based health services. It is also acknowledged that



there are many people with disability who are forced to reside in residential aged care due to access issues within the state based disability (in areas where the NDIS has not been rolled out) and housing systems. For example, one ATSIDNQ member advised that her mother had to go into residential aged care due to a lack of accessible public housing.

ADA Australia's dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advocates have identified a number of barriers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face in accessing aged care services. These include:

- A general lack of awareness about available aged care services. This lack of awareness partly stems from the methods and resources used to promote and communicate aged care services within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Difficulties navigating the complexities of the aged care system.
- Communication strategies adopted by My Aged Care, the gateway to the aged care industry, are not always appropriate. Most information is disseminated on the internet or over the phone and access to the internet, language barriers and low literacy levels present as challenges for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- The child removal policies of the past have undeniably resulted in intergenerational trauma which can deter some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and their families from accessing care in the institutional setting of a mainstream residential aged care facility. The ATSIDNQ recommend that all aged care services be required to demonstrate an understanding of the history that has significantly impacted on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Having the capability to identify disparities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to face, will encourage services to provide a quality of care that is culturally appropriate.
- Some Elders, especially those who are members of the Stolen Generation, have incomplete, disjointed or no access to official records such as birth certificates and adoption papers. A lack of official identification has been known to slow down or stop the process of accessing aged care services.
- In rural areas there is often only one community care provider or residential care facility to choose from and these services are not always culturally appropriate. Many Elders do not want to travel off Country to access aged care supports and in some instances, will forgo care when appropriate options are not available on Country. It is therefore essential that all aged care services practice cultural sensitivity, follow cultural protocol and adopt a collaborative and coordinated community approach to delivering services.

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ were pleased to see recommendations made in the Draft Report with regards to the attraction and retention of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce. ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ encourage the Queensland Productivity Commission to also consider the disability and aged care workforce.

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ suggest that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, disability and aged care workforce could be supported to grow through increased

- Opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to apply for identified positions.
- Recognition of lived experience or life skill where formal qualifications do not exist



- Support and incentives for current workers to access higher education including traineeships and on the job training.

It is also acknowledged that confidentiality and professional boundary concerns can discourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from accessing aged and disability supports from services where kinship and blood ties exist. Formal training around confidentiality and professional boundaries may assist in eliminating these concerns.

ADA Australia and the ATSIDNQ, would welcome the opportunity to further discuss points raised within this letter with the Queensland Productivity Commission.

Please don't hesitate to contact myself or the ATSIDNQ Project Officer, Bronwyn Clark on 3637 6000 or [bronwyn.clark@adaaustralia.com.au](mailto:bronwyn.clark@adaaustralia.com.au) should you seek further clarification or information.

Kind Regards,



Geoff Rowe  
Chief Executive Officer  
ADA Australia

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<sup>i</sup> in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' Australian Standard Geographical Classification – Remoteness Areas (ASGC-RA 2006) System

