



Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs



Improving Service Delivery and Accountability

Key messages from the community consultations undertaken by the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs

In the first quarter of 2012 the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs (the Taskforce) undertook an extensive consultation process with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders to provide input into Taskforce deliberations. Over 1,700 people participated in community forums around the state and some 200 submissions were received from individuals and organisations.

As part of this process, the Taskforce heard first-hand issues about the delivery and accountability of government-funded services and how service provision can be improved. The key messages arising from the community consultation are outlined below.

While Taskforce deliberations are ongoing, the Taskforce has requested that this rich information be provided to all NSW Government agencies to inform the way services are planned, designed and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal communities.

Increasing Aboriginal representation in decision-making, service design and delivery

- Aboriginal people should drive and have ownership of services, from conception to delivery. Consultation should be a genuine two way process, with ongoing dialogue which fosters partnerships.
- Each community is different and government needs to listen to community not outsiders. No-one represents a community better than the people who live in that community. Decisions that come from the top down do not include local Aboriginal knowledge and community aspirations.
- Strong Aboriginal community governance, with good representation within the community and from peak bodies, enables effective negotiation with government and non-government organisations (NGOs).
- The diversity of views and opinions within Aboriginal communities needs to be recognised and accepted. Consultation needs to take into account broader community views if existing local governance arrangements do not represent the whole community.
- Aboriginal involvement and leadership in decision making should be recognised and supported. In particular the role of Elders within Aboriginal communities needs to be acknowledged. Engagement with young people about matters that impact them is also critical.
- Suggestions for how to ensure that real partnering and collaboration with local Aboriginal communities occurs included:
 - o MOUs with local communities;
 - o the development of Aboriginal community service delivery protocols;
 - o local planning which addresses local circumstances and community-identified needs;
 - o making program funding dependent on evidence of real collaboration and partnership, not 'tick a box' consultation;

- supporting the participation of local Aboriginal land councils (LALCs), Aboriginal NGOs and Partnership Communities in government forums, particularly Local Aboriginal Interagency Networks that bring service providers together in Aboriginal communities; and
- a leadership program to support the involvement of community members in boards and committees.

Strengthening the Aboriginal community controlled sector

- Aboriginal community controlled NGOs are essential and effective in delivering culturally appropriate, locally driven, flexible and cost effective services.
- Aboriginal NGOs should be supported to build their governance, leadership and organisational capacity to deliver more services to Aboriginal people. Aboriginal NGOs also need longer-term, sustained support and investment to improve their service delivery.
- Suggested mechanisms to strengthen the Aboriginal community controlled sector included:
 - preferred tendering arrangements for Aboriginal NGOs;
 - decentralised funding processes and assessment of applications to ensure appropriate community and Aboriginal representation on assessment panels;
 - tender selection being undertaken in individual communities so that the process can respond to actual community needs; and
 - secondments of Aboriginal people across the NGO, government and private sectors to build the capacity of all sectors.

Improving the quality, coordination and transparency of service provision

- Long-term approaches are required to properly address many of the complex issues facing Aboriginal communities. Short-term funding and the discontinuation of successful Aboriginal programs results in the loss of local capacity, knowledge and experience.
- Program design should be evidence based and supported by comprehensive data for effective planning and evaluation.
- There is a need for greater collaboration and coordination of services. Different levels of government need to work together to avoid duplication and this needs to involve transparent and open dialogue with Aboriginal people. Greater coordination between Aboriginal and mainstream non-government service providers would also reduce intrusion and confusion for Aboriginal communities.
- Place-based and flexible approaches to funding allow for regional variations to address local needs in different communities and provide local program managers with the flexibility to respond to local issues as they arise. Holistic and flexible approaches to service delivery empower Aboriginal people and assist in addressing all aspects of a person's life and well-being.
- Greater transparency and regular feedback to Aboriginal communities is needed about the quality of services, performance of programs and the implementation of state and federal agreements.
- Suggestions for how to improve the quality, coordination and transparency of service provision included:
 - funding agreements to include a requirement for services to engage with community, report on how many Aboriginal people access their services and develop access improvement targets;
 - local service delivery plans developed by local Aboriginal community governance bodies and government with measurable targets, including expenditure and outcomes;
 - public reporting on all programs, including the organisations responsible for the service delivery and the ratio of funding for Aboriginal and mainstream organisations;
 - publicly available and transparent audits of service delivery; and
 - co-locating services where possible or holding multi-agency days to inform the community about key services available.

Building cultural awareness and understanding

- It takes time to develop the respect of Aboriginal communities, and this takes commitment and continuous engagement with communities to build relationships and trust.
- Service relationships with Aboriginal people need to involve a strong customer service with effective communication between agencies and their clients.
- Building cultural awareness and understanding is necessary to ensure that more appropriate services are developed and delivered. This involves improved Aboriginal cultural awareness and competency of staff at all levels within government agencies and service delivery providers. Suggestions included mentoring, localised cross-cultural education and cultural safety programs. Aboriginal and mainstream NGOs and government agencies must have culturally appropriate complaints procedures to meet the needs of Aboriginal people.