REVIEW OF FIRST PHASE OF THE PETROL SNIFFING STRATEGY

Final Report prepared for:
Department of Families, Housing,
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1 Introduction

The Office of Indigenous Policy Coordination (OIPC), Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA)[1] commissioned Urbis to conduct a review of the first phase of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy (PSS) ie the first 12 months of its operation.

This is the Final Report on the review.

1.1 Background and context

Since 1998 the Commonwealth Government has had in place measures of various kinds to address petrol sniffing in Indigenous communities. Starting that year, the *Comgas* Scheme administered by the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health within the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) provided a subsidised non-sniffable fuel (aviation fuel or Avgas) to registered Indigenous communities as a replacement for standard petrol.

In 2004 BP Australia, working in conjunction with DoHA and the Australian Institute of Petroleum, developed a new fuel designed for the specific needs of the scheme. Unleaded Opal fuel was launched in February 2005, replacing the supply of Avgas. As a vehicle fuel unleaded Opal performs similarly to regular unleaded petrol (ULP) in terms of economy and efficiency, but it is more expensive than ULP both to produce and to distribute. Accordingly the Government subsidises production and distribution of *Opal* as a harm minimisation and supply reduction strategy; the subsidy ensures that consumers pay the same amount for *Opal* as they would for regular unleaded fuel.

A paper presented in Vancouver in June 2007 by David de Carvalho of DoHA emphasises the significant role played by Aboriginal communities in pressing for action to tackle petrol sniffing: 'The role of community-based advocacy and the desire for change was a very strong driver for reducing petrol sniffing and ensuring better policy outcomes. Communities and organisations in Central Australia had long identified petrol sniffing as a major problem. Their concerns reflected the high levels of petrol sniffing experienced in many communities, the potentially very severe physical and damage (including death) that petrol sniffers can suffer, and the severe social damage and chaos that petrol sniffers can cause in communities – threatening 'to destroy an already fragile social system' The NPY Women's Council, among others, lobbied for some years for effective action to address petrol sniffing in Central Australian communities. Once Opal fuel was developed, they and other members of the 'Opal Alliance' pressed strongly, and successfully, for Opal to be introduced over a wider region than had been covered by DoHA's Comgas Scheme. The Opal Alliance was also central in having a cost/benefit analysis undertaken by Access Economics, which reinforced the case for effective intervention on petrol sniffing.

The May 2005 Budget provided $9.6 million, over four years, to expand the Comgas scheme (later renamed the Petrol Sniffing Prevention Program). Subsidised *Opal* fuel would now be made available to Indigenous communities, roadhouses, petrol stations and other relevant fuel outlets[2].

In September 2005 the Government announced further funding ($9.5 million over two years) in addition to that announced in May, to support a comprehensive regional strategy to tackle petrol sniffing within a Central Desert Region which covered parts of South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory. The Western Australian, Northern Territory and South Australian Governments had already given their support to an Eight Point Plan of action for this tri-State region. The goals of the Plan were to reduce the incidence and impact of petrol sniffing across the Central Desert Region, and also to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy to determine whether it might appropriately be expanded to other regions with similar issues.

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1 Prior to 2006, OIPC was a separate department with coordination responsibility for Indigenous policy. In 2006, following a restructure, OIPC was brought within FaHCSIA and no longer sat as a separate office.

2 As at 1 August 2007 there were 104 sites in Central Australia receiving Opal fuel. These included 72 communities, 29 roadhouses and service stations, and three pastoral properties.

In May 2006 the Australian Government allocated a further $55.1 million, over four years, for the Eight Point Plan in the Central Desert Region, and also for a regional approach in certain other areas. One of these new regions involved an expansion of the original Central Desert Region to incorporate Alice Springs and an area of the Northern Territory extending north to just above Ti Tree and west of the Stuart Highway; the other new region was the East Kimberley (added in early 2007).

There were four Commonwealth Departments involved in the funding announced in the May 2006 Budget – FaHCSIA (as the Department is now known),[3] the Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), the Attorney General's Department (AGD) and the (now) Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).[4] As part of this funding, DoHA received $20.1 million for the continuing roll out of Opal fuel and related activities. Further to that allocation, the Minister for Health and Ageing announced in July 2006 the commitment of $12 million, from 2007-08 to 2009-10, to supply unleaded Opal fuel in all petrol stations in Alice Springs as a further measure to help reduce the incidence of petrol sniffing in Central Australia.

1.2 The Eight Point Plan for the Central Desert Region

A 2004 evaluation report on the Comgas scheme recognised the value of substituting an alternative, non-sniffable fuel such as Avgas, but also argued that a strategy based just on limiting supply was not adequate. What was needed was 'broad based strategies that deal with the full range of social determinants of health and wellbeing and that assist to stabilise communities and give them the capacity to deal with chronic and chaotic issues such as petrol sniffing' (de Carvalho p13). The Eight Point Plan reflects an understanding that addressing petrol sniffing requires a multifaceted approach that in turn requires participation by a range of government and other agencies. The paper presented by de Carvalho in Vancouver in 2007, for example, notes that:

> *It is now widely recognised that socio-economic factors play a part in the general aetiology of petrol sniffing, including poverty, hunger, illness, low education levels, unemployment, boredom and general feelings of hopelessness. These form the environment in which such self-destructive behaviour takes place and as a result need to be addressed cohesively and concurrently through comprehensive intersectoral action.*

The comprehensive approach of the Eight Point Plan was strongly influenced by the NPY Women's Council and CAYLUS (Central Australian Youth Link Up Service), outcomes reported by the Mt Theo Program, and detailed literature reviews of interventions into petrol sniffing conducted by Peter D'abbs and Sarah McLean (de Carvalho p13). The findings of two Coroners' Inquests into petrol sniffing deaths in the AP Lands in South Australia were also important influences. These factors had contributed to a climate of political, government and community concern about petrol sniffing.

Meetings of an Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) relating to petrol sniffing, with representation from the Secretaries of key government agencies, were held in July and August 2005. The Eight Point Plan was first articulated at this August meeting.

State and Territory representatives met with the Commonwealth in Adelaide in September 2005 and gave support to the proposed Eight Point Plan. The eight points were as follows:

3 Formerly the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The current title of this and other relevant departments will be used throughout this report.

4 Formerly the Department of Education, Science and Training.

- roll-out of unleaded Opal fuel to affected communities, roadhouses and pastoral properties across the region
- a uniform legal framework across the region dealing with petrol sniffing and mental health
- appropriate levels of policing
- alternative or diversionary activities for young people
- activities to strengthen and support communities
- rehabilitation and treatment facilities
- a communication strategy
- evaluation.

As previously indicated, the Eight Point Plan aims at:

- reducing the incidence and impact of petrol sniffing in a defined area of Central Australia by addressing the mix of inter-related causes and
- evaluating the effectiveness of a regional and comprehensive response to petrol sniffing, to help establish whether and how it might usefully be expanded to other regions.

At a Commonwealth level the Eight Point Plan has been led jointly by DoHA and OIPC within FaHCSIA. Specific departmental responsibilities are as follows:

FaHCSIA:	Youth diversionary activities, strengthening and supporting communities, consistent legislation, appropriate levels of policing, evaluation
DoHA:	Rollout of Opal fuel, communication and education strategies, treatment and respite facilities
DEST:	Alternative youth activities (with FaHCSIA and AGD)
AGD:	Alternative youth activities (with FaHCSIA and DEST), strengthening and supporting communities

According to de Carvalho (2007, p17) the $55 million specified in the May 2006 budget was allocated across these Departments as set out in Table 1.1.

Table 1. 2 May 2006 budget allocation to the PSS by Department

Department	Amount of funding	Activity
DoHA	$20.1 million	Roll-out of Opal fuel and to scope requirements for rehabilitation facilities
FaHCSIA	$15 million	Strengthen and support communities
AGD	$14.9 million	Prevention, diversion, rehabilitation and restorative justice programs for Indigenous communities
DEEWR	$5.1 million	Diversionary education projects

A Project Management Plan prepared by FaHCSIA in 2006 for the *2006/07 Reducing Substance Abuse (Petrol Sniffing) Budget Measure* elaborates on the scope of the Eight Point Plan. It identifies three areas as falling 'within State and Territory Government jurisdiction', namely *measures to improve policing in communities to reduce trafficking of illegal substances; measures to make substance abuse legislation consistent across jurisdiction;* and *provision of treatment and respite services*. The Commonwealth is said to have a role in supporting such initiatives – and specifically working with State and Territory governments to 'improve availability of appropriate treatment and respite services for petrol sniffers'.

The Project Management Plan lists several elements that are not usually mentioned as part of the Eight Point Plan; these include 'community patrols', 'restorative justice initiatives' and 'provision of preventative drug education strategies'.

The Senate Inquiry report, *Beyond Petrol Sniffing: Renewing Hope for Indigenous Communities* (Senate Community Affairs References Committee Secretariat, June 2006) recognised the Eight Point Plan as an important and promising step in addressing petrol sniffing in a holistic manner.

1.3 This review

1.3.1 Aims of the review

The consultants were required to produce a short and concise report addressing the aims of the review, which were to:

- define the theory behind the Strategy
- examine the causal logic of the impact of the Strategy on the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage (OID) headline indicators
- describe the policy context of the Strategy and how well the Strategy has been designed
- answer questions about how well the Strategy is being implemented in accordance to its original design
- examine the suitability of the success criteria, their measures and the performance reporting approach

- describe how the Strategy has progressed in its initial implementation ie outputs/activities achieved to date
- provide stakeholder and participant feedback on the appropriateness and satisfaction of programs/services/ activities implemented to date
- describe the reach of the Strategy to date (eg numbers and locations of sites receiving Opal fuel, number, age and gender of youth participating in various youth diversionary activities implemented to date, reach of the communication strategy in Alice Springs etc)
- describe the coordination and implementation of the whole of government approach between the Australian, State and Territory governments
- provide options for consideration about how the Strategy can be improved, noting that the strategy is currently being expanded to other areas.

This review is primarily concerned with the period July 2006 to December 2007 and focuses in particular on the Northern Territory.

1.4 Methodology

The methodology consisted of the following three components:

- an overview of relevant documents and literature
- fieldwork conducted in Alice Springs, Docker River, Imanpa and Apatula
- telephone interviews with a range of stakeholders in Canberra, the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.

1.4.1 Literature overview

The first component was an overview of:

- Lessons from key research literature relating to petrol sniffing. This is provided at Chapter 2.
- Consideration of key documents relating to the PSS, including the original Budget decision in September 2005 to fund the Eight Point Plan, project documentation for each of the eight components and program documentation for all of the programs that provide support to the PSS. This documentation is referred to as appropriate through this report.

1.4.2 Fieldwork

A second component of the project involved a field visit to Alice Springs and three remote NT communities: Docker River, Aputula and Imanpa. These three communities are participating in the Northern Territory Integrated Youth Services (NTIYS) project being implemented by Mission Australia, which is funded under the PSS.

The field visit was conducted in early February 2008 by a two-person study team including one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal consultant. It was organised with the advice and assistance of the Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Unit (CAPPSU). Team members met with a range of government and non-government stakeholders, including some who were directly involved in managing or running the PSS initiatives and others who were not. A full list of those consulted is included in Appendix A. It had originally been hoped to consult with former petrol sniffers, but this proved not to be possible in practice.

Question guides were developed for government and community stakeholders to guide the consultations.

1.4.3 Telephone interviews

A series of telephone interviews (and a discussion group in Canberra) were also conducted with other stakeholders in Adelaide, Canberra, Perth, Darwin and Central Australia to complement the fieldwork. Those consulted included representatives of State or Territory government departments, and Canberra and State-based representatives of Australian Government departments involved in the PSS. These consultations were mostly conducted in January and February 2008.

1.5 Structure of this report

The report on the review is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2 provides an overview of lessons from the literature on petrol sniffing
- Chapter 3 considers the program logic of the PSS
- Chapter 4 discusses planning, management and implementation of the Strategy
- Chapter 5 covers the rollout of Opal fuel
- Chapter 6 deals with facilitation of alternative youth activities
- Chapter 7 relates to provision of rehabilitation and treatment facilities
- Chapter 8 discusses communication strategies
- Chapter 9 relates to the development of a uniform legal framework
- Chapter 10 discusses provision of an appropriate level of policing
- Chapter 11 discusses strengthening and supporting communities
- Chapter 12 deals with evaluation
- Chapter 13 sets out conclusions and recommendations arising from the review.

Appendix A provides the list of stakeholders consulted.

2 Lessons from the literature on petrol sniffing

There is a considerable amount of literature concerning the causes and social contexts of petrol sniffing, the health and social effects of petrol sniffing, the types and (to some extent) the efficacy of interventions, and the advantages/disadvantages of legislative approaches. This overview of the literature focuses on the evidence that underlies the approach taken under the PSS and key issues that are likely to impact on the way the PSS is evaluated.

2.1 Why petrol sniffing is an issue for concern

The 1985 Senate Select Committee on Volatile Substance Abuse (SSCVSA 1985) identified three broad reasons for concern about petrol sniffing in remote Aboriginal communities:

- the severe physical and psychological effects on those involved
- the combined consequential social effects threaten, in some communities, to destroy an already fragile social system
- the extent of the problem.

Petrol sniffing prevalence is difficult to determine due to the inadequacy of data collection mechanisms. In its submission to the Northern Territory Select Committee on Substance Abuse in the Community, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation indicated that approximately 2,000 children, or 10% of Aboriginal children in the central reserves area of the Northern Territory, were sniffing petrol (SSCSAC 2004). Other estimates range from approximately 2000 to 6000 (DoHA 2007).

Deaths linked to petrol sniffing have galvanised public attention through media reporting and the publicity over a series of coronial inquests. Between 1981 and 1991, 60 Aboriginal men and three women died from petrol sniffing. Since 1991, the Coroners in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory have reported on deaths from volatile substance abuse. However the actual number of deaths likely to be attributable to petrol sniffing is likely to be an underestimate due to the difficulties associated with data collection (de Carvalho 2007). While the number of deaths from petrol sniffing is small, it equates to a significant proportion of local populations, one estimate being around 8% (DoHA & DIMIA 2005, p4).

Petrol sniffing is also associated with a range of health and social harms including increased violence, acquired brain injury, property damage, child abuse and neglect, dispossession of Elders and theft (DoHA & DIMIA 2005, p4). A significantly high proportion of crime committed in Indigenous communities where petrol sniffing is present is attributable to petrol sniffers. D'Abbs & Maclean (2000) summarise case studies that demonstrate that between 39% and 58% of offences in one year were described as involving petrol sniffing. In its *Opal Cost Benefit Analysis*, Access Economics (2006) used the figure of 49% of offences to estimate criminal costs.

2.2 Evidence for the effectiveness of petrol sniffing reduction strategies

- *Successful strategies involve a holistic approach using a range of concurrent interventions that target the problem at several levels*. Interventions are least effective when they address only one aspect of the problem. D'Abbs & Maclean (2000) encapsulate this by reference to Zinberg's (1984) substance abuse intervention framework which sees interventions aimed at the drug (the pharmacological-toxicological properties of the substance), the set (the attributes of the person using the substance) and the setting (the physical and social environment in which the substance is being used). This is supported by empirical studies (eg Nganampa Health Council 2007; Roper 1998; Stojanovski 1994; Burns et al 1995) which found that the factors contributing to petrol sniffing reduction were multiple and varied within each community. The Select Committee on Substance Abuse in the Community in the Northern Territory (2004, p23) concluded in its inquiry into petrol sniffing that:

> *any strategies to address petrol sniffing need to be introduced in tandem with measures for addressing the socio-economic issues underpinning the practice, as well as with strategies which address availability and accessibility.*

Shaw et al (2004) found that the effectiveness of fuel replacement as a reduction strategy was enhanced where other strategies were being employed. These findings lend support to the multi-pronged holistic approach of the PSS, which aims to approach the problem of petrol sniffing from toxicological, social, legislative and enforcement perspectives. It also suggests that pinning down any one key factor as the one that has made a difference will be difficult, and it will be important to examine the *combination of strategies* employed across communities in order to identify factors that promote or hinder success.

- *Early intervention is critical, before the behaviour becomes entrenched* (d'Abbs & Maclean 2000). It is widely agreed that the people hardest to help stop sniffing are chronic sniffers (d'Abbs & Maclean 2000; Shaw et al 2004):

  > *By the time someone has become a chronic sniffer, the likelihood of their stopping is substantially reduced. (d'Abbs & Maclean 2000,p.17).*

  This research finding supports the focus in the PSS on facilitation of alternative activities and communication to prevent uptake or escalation of petrol sniffing. It also highlights the importance of an evaluation strategy to be able to measure change amongst different types of petrol sniffers (eg chronic, occasional/recreational).

- *Replacement of sniffable fuel with non-sniffable fuel was demonstrated to be a successful strategy* for reducing levels of petrol sniffing in a range of situations by the 2004 Evaluation of the Comgas Scheme (Shaw et al 2004). It is important to acknowledge, however, that the degree of effectiveness of the strategy depended on three key factors:

  - distance to the nearest outlet for unleaded petrol
  - length of time Avgas had been used
  - types of other interventions being implemented for reducing petrol sniffing.

  The finding that replacement fuel as an effective reduction strategy supports the wider rollout of Opal fuel. The Australian Government's 2007 *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report (SCRGSP 2007, p38) identifies the introduction of non-sniffable fuel as a 'strategy that works'. Nganampa Health Council, which has collected sniffing data in the APY lands over the past 20 years, has reported a massive reduction in petrol sniffing since the introduction of Opal fuel:

  > *The introduction of Opal fuel has largely (though not completely) eliminated supply. Active policing is required to eradicate illegal dealing in sniffable fuels*
  > *(Nganampa Health Council 2007, p4).*

  The fact that effectiveness was greater under the above conditions supports the regional approach being adopted by the PSS, which seeks to minimise access to sniffable fuel within and between communities within a designated area. This regional approach is sanctioned by the Australian Government as the most appropriate response (DoHA & DIMIA 2005, p4). The third factor for success relates to consistent use over time: those communities that had consistently used Avgas since its introduction had lower levels of petrol sniffing (Shaw et al 2004). The commitment of the PSS to a long-term strategy is consistent with these findings.

- *Interventions targeting a particular substance (eg petrol) may result in shifting users to another form of substance misuse* (d'Abbs and Maclean 2000). Many petrol sniffers are poly drug users who use drugs that are available and affordable. Volatile substances are drugs of last resort and tend to be used when other psycho active substances are unavailable or are too expensive (Shaw et al 2004). A reduction in the availability of sniffable fuel may result in an increase in other substance use. The apparent success (or otherwise) of Opal fuel replacement as a strategy for reducing petrol sniffing needs to be weighed against any displacement effects that might result - for instance, petrol sniffers

switching to another volatile substance or another drug such as *gunja* (marijuana) or sniffers moving on to a community that still stocks unleaded petrol. An evaluation of particular reduction strategies needs to consider unintended consequences of this kind.

- *The influence of the peer group is a key factor in the maintenance of petrol sniffing* (d'Abbs and Maclean 2000, p.22). Brady (1992) also suggests that the role of peer groups is under-investigated. Consideration could be given to incorporating a focus on peer groups in monitoring petrol sniffing activity in communities. Information about peer group structure and changes could be used to try to predict fluctuating petrol sniffing behaviour. D'Abbs & Maclean (2000) found that

  > *Waves of petrol sniffing usually coincide with periods of limited opportunity for other recreation for young people in communities.*

  This is consistent with broader substance misuse research which finds that the promotion of an environment in which meaningful activities are available enhances protective factors within communities. Such evidence underpins the focus of one of the eight components of the PSS on diversionary activities.

- *There is at this time little evidence regarding the efficacy of treatment and rehabilitation programs for petrol sniffers*. Substance abuse treatment and rehabilitation programs tend to focus on addiction and dependency, and it is not clear what relevance these concepts have for understanding or treating petrol sniffing (d'Abbs and Brady 2003). In Central Australia there continues to be considerable debate regarding the type and location of rehabilitation facilities. Some argue for an Alice Springs based residential facility, while many people from other parts of the region argue for an outstation model. Debate also focuses on whether facilities should be aimed primarily at sobering up/detoxification (which can take as little as six hours) or longer-term rehabilitation. Central to the debates are the issues of funding and distribution of scarce resources. (d'Abbs & Maclean 2000, pp81-83). It is clear, however, that outstation or community-based facilities will not be suitable for the care of significantly brain damaged sniffers, the numbers of whom are likely to rise in the short term, and who are likely to require long term residential care (McFarland 1999). D'Abbs & Maclean (2000, p91) argue that further assessment and evaluation of rehabilitation options is required.

- *The key success factors for effective programs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are known.* The 2007 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report (SCRGSP 2007, p17) identifies the following success factors that appear to be common to programs that work:

  - cooperative approaches between Indigenous people and government (and the private sector)
  - community involvement in program design and decision-making — a 'bottom-up' rather than 'top-down' approach
  - good governance
  - ongoing government support (including human, financial and physical resources).

  The need for a whole of government approach to addressing petrol sniffing has long been identified through successive State/Territory and national inquiries (including SSCVSA 1985). The Inquiry into Petrol Sniffing in Remote Northern Territory Communities (SSCSAC 2004, p23) concluded that:

  > *…if Government is to effect any change it is imperative that it address the issues with a whole of government approach, ensuring that all service delivery is networked to ensure it is coordinated, the services comply with the program parameters and that those delivering it are accountable for its outcomes.*

  Such evidence underscores the importance of an approach that is collaborative (between governments and between governments and communities) and rooted in local circumstances through a community-by-community implementation process, as described in program documents (DoHA & DIMIA 2005, p5).

2.3 Measuring the impact of petrol sniffing strategies

Prevalence data has not been routinely collected. However, DoHA has put in place a process to collect data on an ongoing basis.

Nganampa Health Council has collected data in APY communities for the past 20 years. Recently the Australian Government has undertaken baseline data collection that utilises the Nganampa Health Council methodology.

Baseline data was collected under the 3D Strategy Evaluation (funded by FaCSIA) from 40 communities in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland. DoHA provided funding for the collection of baseline data from an additional 36 communities, including from communities identified to receive Opal fuel. These two data collections have formed a single report that has provided baseline data on petrol sniffing prevalence in remote Australia. A summary of this report was publicly released on DoHA's website in May 2008. DoHA is currently in the process of contracting a consultant to undertake follow-up data collection in a number of communities.

It is understood the NT Department of Health also undertakes data collection, albeit via a different methodology to those discussed previously, which raises the question of comparability.

Petrol sniffing is a variable, fluctuating phenomenon which adds to the complexity of accurate data collection. Sniffers are highly mobile and move from one community to the next, resulting in fluctuating overall numbers. Sniffers may stop and start sniffing at different times. Clear patterns to the fluctuations have not been established, although some trends to increased use appear in some communities eg wet season, ceremonial events and community events such as football matches, and school holidays. However these patterns are by no means consistent or uniform across communities and regions (d'Abbs & Maclean 2000, p.19).

The quality and utility of proxy measures of petrol sniffing related harm is variable. Police data in the Northern Territory, for example, are unable to clearly identify petrol sniffing as a factor in offences (Urbis Keys Young 2006). Data from Aboriginal Health Services and other health services are unlikely to reflect the extent of health-related harm as petrol sniffers are unlikely to present to health services except in the case of severe trauma (d'Abbs & Maclean 2000).

3 Program logic

This chapter considers the program logic for the PSS. The program logic establishes the link between *evidence* and the *approach taken by the PSS*. It describes the basis for and nature of the strategies employed under the program, as well as the causal logic for the identified outcomes. The program logic has been informed by consideration of key research and evaluation findings, program documentation (including the PSS Implementation Plan) and discussions with OIPC and other stakeholders.

3.1 Key elements of the PSS program logic and policy context

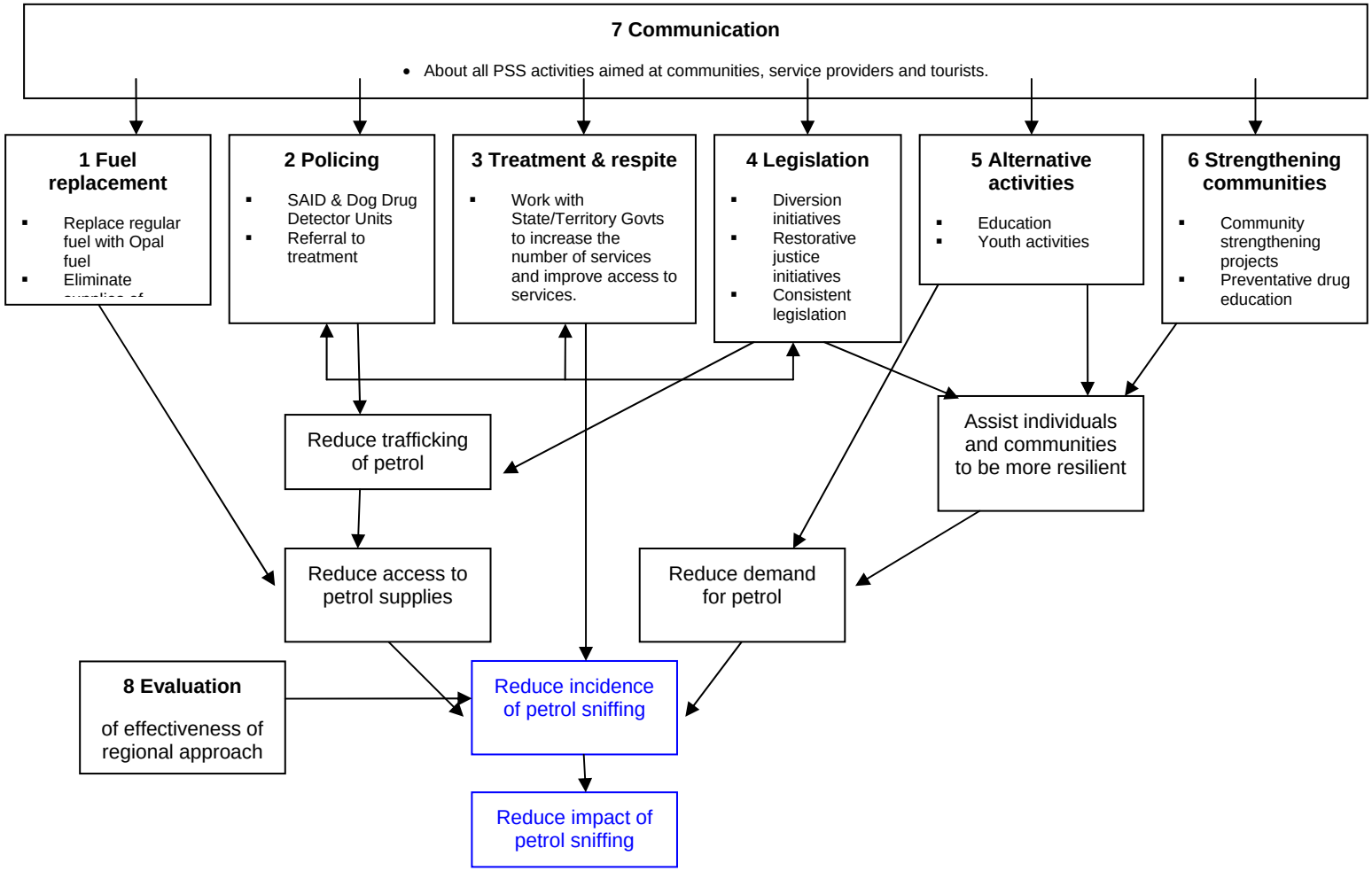
The logic behind the PSS draws heavily from two pieces of research evidence. The first of these concerns the importance of a *holistic approach* ie not just addressing one aspect of the problem, but rather targeting multiple factors concurrently (D'Abbs and Maclean 2000). This also involves a *combination of supply reduction and demand reduction* activities. While fuel replacement has been demonstrated to be an effective method of addressing petrol sniffing, Shaw et al (2004) found that its effectiveness was enhanced when coupled with other strategies such as treatment, rehabilitation and law enforcement.

The second key influence on the PSS is the finding that fuel replacement is most effective as a reduction strategy when implemented on a *regional basis*. In their evaluation of the earlier Comgas Scheme, Shaw et al (2004) concluded that fuel replacement was most effective when access to petrol supplies within the community, as well as in nearby communities, was cut. Conversely, the closer a petrol-free community was to another community that had petrol supplies, the less likely it was that the intervention was likely to be effective. The evaluation also found that *persistence over time* was a critical success factor to the intervention's success.

The PSS was conceived with these findings in mind. The Strategy identifies *specific regions* for implementation, with the aim that the communities within each region will support the strategy in the first instance by minimising access to petrol outlets. Within each region, there should be no outlets for regular petrol. The PSS also seeks to avoid a singular approach by attacking the problem from many angles. In addition to fuel replacement, the initiative is supported by strategies aimed at improving policing, access to treatment and rehabilitation services, legislative change, community development, provision of alternative activities, communication and evaluation. Such a broad scope has critical implications for the involvement of State/Territory governments, which have jurisdiction over matters such as legislation and treatment/rehabilitation services. Thus the PSS also involves a whole of government approach which recognises the important but different roles played by each level of government.

The PSS structure also reflects the widely used *public health model* of intervention, which seeks to address health problems using primary interventions (for those at risk and for general populations), secondary interventions (early intervention) and tertiary interventions (for those with chronic and advanced conditions). By recognising the different target groups and intervention methods required, the problem should be addressed in a more comprehensive and sustainable way.

Figure 3.1 – Provides a diagrammatic logic for the various strands of the PSS.



The first six activity areas aim to achieve the intermediate outcomes of a) reducing access to petrol supplies and b) reducing demand for petrol. Achievement of these intermediate outcomes will lead to achievement of the ultimate outcomes, to reduce the incidence and impact of petrol sniffing. Communication activities support and assist to progress the six activity areas by aiming to improve awareness and education amongst a range of target groups. The eighth component of the PSS is evaluation, which aims to identify achievements and increase the evidence base for interventions.

Another important influence on the development of the PSS has been the policy context in which it was established. The coordinated, regional, multi-faceted approach of the PSS has developed somewhat organically over a number of years, as the result of the interplay of community pressure, widely publicised crises, a developing evidence base and sporadic governmental action. The problem of petrol sniffing, while recognised since the 1960s, has been characterised by intermittent attention and short-term interventions. The problem has tended to come to the attention of the media, politicians and the wider community when a death occurs or the findings of coronial inquests are released. As D'Abbs and Brady (2003, pp3-4) commented:

> *Petrol sniffing erupts periodically into the living rooms or onto the breakfast tables of the public through highly sensationalised media exposes, redolent with images and stories evoking senseless tragedy, and personal and community rises – if not an implied terminal breakdown…Politicians ,either because they are genuinely moved by the accounts, or because they sense the political dangers of being seen as unresponsive to the crisis portrayed, exert pressure on government departments to take action. Because petrol sniffing is seen in the first instance as destroying the health of sniffers, this pressure falls in the first instance on agencies in the health sector… As a result of these processes, government agencies especially in the health sector are placed under pressure to be responding promptly and decisively to the latest petrol sniffing crisis.*

At the same time, a number of Indigenous and youth community organisations (eg NPY Women's Council, CAYLUS) have lobbied for some years for increased resourcing to petrol sniffing interventions. The success of the Comgas Scheme, backed up by an increasing evidence base (eg d'Abbs & Maclean 2000), and the clear promise of Opal as a replacement fuel, led to the widespread implementation of Opal from 2005. Encouraged and propelled by these events, the Eight Point Plan (which subsequently developed into the PSS) developed from a cross-departmental meeting in 2005, which in itself represented recognition that petrol sniffing was not just a health issue, and that the answers lay in attacking the problem from different angles. Thus, the policy context has been characterised by the organic development of responses to petrol sniffing and of sporadic, crisis-driven action that has worked towards developing awareness amongst policy makers that a broader response was necessary.

3.2 The causal logic of the impact of the Strategy on the OID indicators

The objectives of the PSS are consistent with the priority areas identified by the headline indicators contained within the 2007OID report. This important report identifies the priority areas that need to be addressed by interventions in order to reduce Indigenous inequalities in terms of health, education, employment, incarceration and a range of other social indicators of disadvantage. Whilst it is important to understand that development of the PSS predated this report, it is reassuring that the program directly addresses five of the key indicators, namely:

- *Indicator 1 – Life expectancy*. The PSS aims to reduce the prevalence and impact of petrol sniffing, resulting in decreased mortality from petrol sniffing and petrol sniffing related injury, decreased levels of injury (including brain injury and trauma) and hospitalisation, and better quality of life.
- *Indicator 2 – Disability*. Through a reduction in the prevalence and incidence of petrol sniffing it is hoped that the growth of petrol sniffing related brain injury will be halted.
- *Indicator 8 – Suicide and self-harm*. Reduction in petrol sniffing combined with treatment and rehabilitation, diversion initiatives, community strengthening and alternative activities for youth may impact on levels of suicide and self harm in Indigenous communities.
- *Indicator 11 – Family and community violence*. The research shows that petrol sniffing is directly related to increased levels of violence and antisocial behaviour in communities characterised by

chronic petrol sniffing. A reduction in petrol sniffing, combined with an increased focus on policing, should have an impact on the levels of violence within affected communities.

- *Imprisonment and juvenile justice detention*. The PSS includes activities that aim to divert Indigenous petrol sniffers from detention.

In conclusion, the goals and objectives of the PSS are well supported by the research and by key measures identified by the Australian government. The goals and objectives are well defined under the eight distinct, but interrelated program areas. The change process and policy direction presumed in the program logic (as depicted in Figure 3.1) is plausible. The objectives and identified strategies have grown out of previous programs (such as the Comgas Scheme) and are supported by previous evaluation and research findings and would therefore appear to be feasible. However it is important to acknowledge the key role played by State and Territory governments under the PSS; for this reason the feasibility of some objectives depends on more effective cooperation and coordination by these agencies.

4 Planning, management and implementation of the Petrol Sniffing Strategy

4.1 Overall planning and management

FaHCSIA's 2006 Project Management Plan for the PSS sets out a six-level structure for Commonwealth management of the PSS, ranging from Ministerial oversight (DoHA, DEEWR, AGD, FaHCSIA) at the top, through a cross-agency Steering Committee, a FAS (First Assistant Secretary) Strategic Intervention Taskforce and a Budget Measures Working Group, to four departmental Project Managers and four departmental Project Teams. State/Territory Governments, Community Councils, CAPPSU, Australian Government Agency Managers and Indigenous Community Councils were to feed into the Strategic Interventions Taskforce through FaHCSIA State/Territory managers.

The present review has not sought to examine this intended management structure in detail. In brief, however, it appears that to date there has been relatively little interdepartmental oversight or coordination at SES or other very senior departmental level, limited input to implementation of the Strategy from State and Territory Governments, and little input from Community Councils. Implementation of the Strategy has been managed mostly by departmental officers below SES level, with FaHCSIA and DoHA personnel playing key roles. A very high level inter-departmental Petrol Sniffing Steering Committee (with representation by departmental Secretaries from DoHA, OIPC, FaHCSIA, representatives from the NT, SA and WA governments, and CAPSSU) had oversight of the Strategy in the very early stages of implementation but fell into abeyance after that. A SES-level inter-departmental Steering Committee for the PSS has only very recently been reinstated (which is cross-agency, but unlike the earlier Committee is not cross-jurisdictional). Governance of the Strategy 'has floundered a bit', said one senior government officer: 'It needs to be driven a lot more clearly from the national point of view'. A number of State-based partner agency representatives would have liked to have received some more detailed guidance from FaHCSIA beyond provision the Project Implementation Plan, and to have seen more coordination between the PSS activities being conducted by the individual agencies:

> *I don't know if there was a clear linkage in terms of how we [the various agencies] would work together… it was [only] clear what was our responsibility. [The PSS activities] need more linking up, so they're less disjointed. We stuck with what we knew was our domain.*

The roll-out of Opal fuel by DoHA has proceeded as intended across the whole Central Desert Region, covering areas of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory (both the original and expanded NT zones). DoHA's communication and information strategy is likewise intended to cover the whole region. However other elements of the Eight Point Plan – notably youth diversionary activities and strengthening of communities – have been approached differently in the three jurisdictions. This is also true of these areas which are more directly matters of State/Territory responsibility, such as policing and treatment/rehabilitation services. Given that the Commonwealth has additional powers and responsibilities in the Northern Territory as distinct from SA and WA, the Northern Territory has in practice generally been the main focus of Commonwealth activity – especially by FaHCSIA. In South Australia and Western Australia certain of the Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) have played a role, together with the Regional Offices of FaHCSIA and other Commonwealth departments.

By 2006 it seems to have become clear that the PSS would not take the form of a cohesive inter-governmental strategy so much as a series of independent through related initiatives in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. Many of the people consulted in the course of this review were unsure how and why this shift came about. Some stakeholders attributed this to the absence of an SES-level group to drive implementation of the PSS. Another explanation offered was that it represented a recognition that different historical and institutional contexts in the three jurisdictions made it inappropriate to pursue a uniform or integrated approach. Some stakeholders, however, emphasised that one of the benefits of the original plan for coordinated regional activity across State and Territory borders was that this reflected Aboriginal cultural and family realities rather than the vagaries of European administration.

In light of the way the Strategy has developed, some of the following sections of this report deal separately with the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.

A further comment made by some stakeholders involved in implementation in the States/Territories was that there may not have been full or adequate realisation by Canberra-based partner agency offices of the time and significant practical challenges involved in implementing the Strategy 'on the ground' in remote Indigenous communities with (in some cases) very transient populations.

4.2 Project success criteria

The FaHCSIA Project Management Plan sets out suggested 'project success criteria' relating to various aspects of the PSS. This includes a table (Table 1.8) which sets out both success criteria and measures to be used for each.

The criteria and measures specified for the *communication strategy* are clear and appropriate. Other elements of the table set out in section 1.8 may need further consideration. For instance, some of the suggested measures – such as 'reposition services to better meet the need to fund existing community efforts' – seem to need clarification or simplification. The criteria 'improvement in general wellbeing through improved education, higher employment, reduction in violence, crime and suicide, reduction in broader substance abuse, and better health and life outcomes' appears to be based on the OID headline indicators but is very broad in nature, and the measure 'evaluation methodology being developed will include qualitative surveys to assess improvement' does not provide more detail about precisely what will be assessed.

Other criteria, such as 'take-up' of diversionary activities, may in practice be difficult to measure in any consistent way. (For example, if three young people attend a cooking session for the full hour it runs, while others come and go with varying degrees of apparent interest and engagement, how is the level of take-up of this activity to be calculated?)

It is assumed that matters of this kind will be considered in detail in the current development of a PSS evaluation framework by Courage Partners (discussed in Chapter 12).

As noted below in this report in relation to evaluation, the Research and Evaluation section of FaHCSIA – which had responsibility for various PSS evaluation activities – did not have any input into the development of the project success criteria. This meant that there was a lack of alignment between the project success criteria and the Evaluation Plan developed by the section.

4.3 Northern Territory

Day-to-day responsibility for planning and management of various aspects of the PSS in the Northern Territory lies with CAPSSU, based in Alice Springs. CAPSSU reports to the FaHCSIA Regional Manager for the NT, but also has close links with FaHCSIA project personnel in Canberra.

Work on implementation of the Strategy in Alice Springs began early in 2006; in August 2006 CAPSSU was established to coordinate and oversee implementation of the Eight Point Plan across Central Australia. The region covered by the Plan included the APY Lands in South Australia, the Ngaanyatjarra Lands in Western Australia and several communities in the south of the Northern Territory. In the event, however, CAPSSU's responsibilities have related only to the Northern Territory – reflecting the fact that, as explained above, implementation has been managed differently in SA and WA.

The four communities of Docker River, Imanpa, Mutijulu and Aputula are located within the area of the Northern Territory covered by the original Central Desert Region. Early in 2007 this was extended to include an area covers another 18 or so remote communities together with the town camps of Alice Springs. However, for financial, staffing and other reasons, CAPSSU has to date been able to do little work in the expanded area.

The original intention was that there would be staffing contributions to CAPSSU from the SA, WA and NT Governments. However this did not occur, and CAPSSU has to date been staffed by Australian Government personnel only. Current CAPSSU staffing involves:

- a Manager (on a contract ending February 2008)
- a Deputy Manager (on secondment from the ICC until May 2008)
- a Project Officer (on secondment from DoHA)
- two other Project Officer positions unfilled at the time of this review.

There are no DEEWR personnel working with CAPSSU, although it was originally intended that there would be.

CAPSSU's stated business priorities for 2007-08 are as follows:

- *Provide 'on the ground coordination from Alice Springs' of the petrol sniffing strategy in the Central Desert Region*
- *Coordinate with government agencies, stakeholders and communities the implementation and management of the Integrated Youth Strategy in the communities of Aputula, Imanpa, Mutijulu and Docker River*
- *Build effective relationships with government agencies, stakeholders and communities in the petrol zone to ensure coordinated delivery across the region*
- *Coordinate and drive innovative whole of government Indigenous service delivery to the designated petrol sniffing strategy in the Central Desert Region*
- *Provide support, advice and assistance as deemed necessary to assist in the delivery of the initiatives of the Taskforce Operations Group in the expended petrol region of Central Australia*
- *Progress the expansion of the Integrated Youth Strategy into the balance of the Expanded Central Zone in Central Australia*[5]*.*

The main focus of CAPSSU's work in the past year or so has been on managing the Mission Australia contract for delivery of the Integrated Youth Strategy (IYS) to the communities of Docker River, Imanpa, Mutijulu and Aputula (see section 5.1 below). This has involved ongoing liaison with Mission Australia, work with the communities themselves, and liaison with other relevant government and non-government agencies.

When the previous Australian Government introduced the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) in mid-2007, however, CAPSSU was required to take on a range of support responsibilities in Central Australia relating to that Response, including initial planning work, surveys and advice. The CAPSSU Manager was also called upon to act temporarily, under the NTER, as the Government Business Manager at Imanpa. CAPSSU and FaHCSIA representatives observed that carrying out these NTER responsibilities has inevitably reduced the CAPSSU staff time available for progressing the Eight Point Plan, and 'strained the whole organisation'. Other issues that were raised by CAPSSU staff members during this review included the following:

- the fact that several staff positions are currently unfilled
- uncertainty about the future of current staff contracts and secondments
- the fact that neither current funding nor current staffing allow CAPSSU to undertake any systematic work in the extended zone in the Northern Territory.

[5] Kathleen Anderson, 'Future directions of the Expanded Petrol Sniffing Zone of the Central Australian Desert Zone', July 2007

Given that there are no significant funds available under the PSS for activity in the expanded NT zone, one of CAPSSU's concerns has been to try to identify other possible funding sources for this purpose. In particular CAPSSU has been successful in obtaining funds available under the NTER for a program of school holiday youth activities in several communities in the expanded zone; it continues to seek funding through the NTER for various other youth activities.

Both CAPSSU and Mission Australia indicated that they have had a close and effective working relationship. Mission Australia representatives, for example, reported that CAPSSU has provided active and supportive contract management and a range of practical assistance. The impression that Urbis received in Central Australia was that CAPSSU has also provided strong and consistent advocacy for the Strategy to departmental personnel in Canberra. On the other hand, a number of those who were consulted during the review believed that CAPSSU has to date been less successful in building effective relationships or partnerships with other government and non-government stakeholders in the local area, and that in the future better communication, consultation and co-operation will be required. In a written submission prepared for this review, for example, CAYLUS stated that 'no effective methods of incorporating local expertise were developed by the CAPSSU' (submission prepared for this review, dated 4 February 2008)[6].

During 2007, CAPSSU arranged two stakeholder forums which were intended to help bring other government and non-government stakeholders up to date with what was happening with the PSS. One stakeholder described these as coming 'a year too late', while another suggested that an informal and open 'catch-up' each month could be more fruitful. CAPSSU has indicated that it hopes in the future to set up a Strategic Youth Partnership; if well planned and executed, this could perhaps help develop more co-operative and effective relationships with other relevant parties.

4.4 South Australia

The SA office of FaHCSIA has responsibility for overall oversight of the PSS activities in SA. PSS activities have been funded by a range of Australian Government and State agencies including the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), AGD FaHCSIA, DEEWR, the Department of Transport and Regional Services, DoHA and the SA Department of Sport and Recreation. A number of other SA State government agencies (eg the Department of Families and Communities) have been involved in various aspects of the projects, from development/negotiation of proposals through to aspects of project implementation and provision of inkind assistance. The Port Augusta Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICC) is currently responsible for monitoring youth activity programs on the AP Lands.

The South Australian PSS projects have been largely identified, worked up and managed by the various Australian and State Government agencies at a South Australian State level. (Some Australian Government agencies such as AGD liaised with their national office during development of proposals and were required to obtain signoff once they had worked up project proposals.) As noted above, some government stakeholders would have liked to see further guidance from the national FaHCSIA office, and more coordination between PSS activities among them. However it was felt that a whole of government approach had worked more effectively at the State level. The fact that many of the PSS activities in SA have been carried out under Regional Partnership Agreements (RPAs) with communities was felt to have promoted this, as well as a very thorough and close process of community consultation in developing projects, and high community support for the projects (since communities have to sign off on the RPAs). The management process around the RPA concerning youth activities in the AP Lands is regarded as a positive example of a inter-governmental process with close community engagement: it has a Key Stakeholder Steering Group which meets every six weeks (with representatives from Australian and State Government agencies, sporting organisations and the APY

6 Recently CAYLUS was surprised to learn that a contract to provide a school holiday program in some parts of the expanded Central Desert Region had been awarded to a NSW-based company without CAYLUS or other local organisations being informed or consulted – despite this being a field in which CAYLUS has been active, with DoHA support, for a number of years.

Lands regional Service Coordinators. This is part of a three-tier planning and management set-up which also includes a working group from each community and a consultative group across the AP Lands.

On the other hand, the extensive consultation process involved in the RPA was quite time-consuming and costly, and meant that it took some time for projects to get off the ground.

Another positive aspect of the management and implementation process in SA was reported to be the close involvement of the three Regional Service Coordinators on the APY Lands to drive implementation of projects on the ground in the communities.

Interestingly, as in the Northern Territory, the NTER was reported to have 'diverted a lot of resources and attention' from implementation of the PSS in its initial stages.

4.5 Western Australia

In Western Australia the FaHCSIA office is responsible for overall coordination of PSS activities, and has assisted ICC Managers to draft up Implementation Plans for the PSS for two regions of the State: the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and East Kimberley. (There is no overall Western Australian Implementation Plan.) The ICC Managers have responsibility for implementation of the Plans. A range of other Australian Government (eg AGD, DEEWR) and State Government agencies have also been involved. The Western Australian Drug and Alcohol Office has had the lead role in driving the whole of government approach to the PSS from a State Government perspective.

As in South Australia, many of the PSS activities have been run under the RPA process.

Work is currently still being conducted on finalising the Implementation Plans for both the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and East Kimberley regions. In relation to the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, one key source of input into this has been an indepth consultation report and implementation plan for the PSS prepared by consultants Gillian Shaw and David Brooks for the Ngaanyatjarra Council and Ngaanyatjarra-ku Shire in June 2007 following extensive community consultations (Shaw and Brooks 2007). However it is understood that to date no action has been taken to implement the recommendations of this report and work is still being taken by FaHCSIA to finalise which aspects of the recommendations will be incorporated into the final Implementation Plan.

Especially given that the two Implementation Plans are still to be finalised, there has only been quite limited progress on PSS activities in Western Australia. Possible reasons suggested for this have included: lack of earmarked funding to progress some of the initiatives, and the need for further clarity of the roles of key government agencies (eg between State and National offices of FaHCSIA and the ICCs). Again it was said that the NTER had diverted resources and attention from PSS activities.

Some stakeholders also felt that the whole of government aspect of PSS implementation in Western Australia has been somewhat restricted, and that it would be useful to have more active driving of this at a State Government level by the Drug and Alcohol Office. Some said that aspects of the Office's function may have made it more difficult for it to effectively carry out its whole of government role under the PSS eg since its role relates to policy and research rather than service delivery, and it is centrally located in Perth with limited outreach into the areas relevant to the PSS. In addition there was no specified funding allocated to the Office for taking on this role. The fact that the PSS funding has generally gone to the individual agencies involved (eg DEEWR and AGD) was also felt to have discouraged a whole of government approach. In addition it was felt that further direction from FaHCSIA national office would have been beneficial, although there has been more of this recently.

5 The rollout of Opal fuel

One of the primary activities conducted under the PSS to date has been the rollout of Opal fuel. This chapter discusses the rollout by DoHA, including the communication campaign centred on this issue. It covers the following issues:

- activities carried out for the Opal rollout
- achievements of the rollout
- limitations of the rollout
- the Communication Strategy for the Opal rollout.

5.1 Opal and its rollout

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Opal rollout is viewed as both a harm minimisation and supply reduction strategy. Opal is a specially designed low aromatic and non-intoxicating fuel which complies with Australian Fuel Standards. It has very little sulphur and very low levels of aromatics, and therefore anyone attempting to sniff it will not get the same 'high' as they would from sniffing regular unleaded fuel. Opal can be used in place of regular unleaded fuel, and is therefore suitable for most cars and other vehicles requiring petrol (other than, for instance, some European high performance vehicles and cars built before 1986). Opal has the same octane rating as regular unleaded fuel, and therefore can be mixed in a petrol tank with regular unleaded without having any adverse impact on the vehicle's performance.

Opal was developed in 2004 by BP (British Petroleum) Australia Pty Ltd, in conjunction with DoHA and the Australian Institute of Petroleum. It was launched in February 2005 and replaced the supply of Avgas (aviation fuel, which still had a fairly high lead content) under the previous Comgas Scheme.

DoHA has subsidised the cost of production and distribution of Opal fuel, so that it does not cost users any more than regular unleaded fuel.

There was no legislative basis mandating the introduction of Opal in any communities, and therefore it has been introduced on a voluntary basis in communities.

The key activities undertaken by DoHA in the rollout of Opal have included:

- Liaison with BP and the Australian Institute of Petroleum around development of Opal.
- Liaising with key stakeholders in communities which identified that they wished to participate in the Opal rollout (eg State and local government and community representatives, petrol station owners). This has included
  - communities within the Central Desert Region (and then Expanded Central Desert Region) which nominated themselves for inclusion in the rollout
  - communities in those two regions which were at risk of petrol sniffing and agreed to nominate themselves after approaches from DoHA
  - (in a small number of instances) communities outside of these two regions which nominated themselves to DoHA for inclusion in the program.
- Organisation of the practical aspects of implementation eg ensuring distribution of Opal supplies to fuel sale outlets.

DoHA initially tried to introduce Opal into Alice Springs in mid-2006, without an associated communication strategy. There was 'vocal and negative community and media reaction' in response, stemming from the false belief that Opal was damaging car engines. This then led to reduced confidence by motorists' to use Opal, and many service station managers stopped supplying Opal due to the pending backlash (DoHA 2007b, p4).

DoHA subsequently carried out research which found that there was a major lack of accurate and factual information about Opal in the Alice Springs community. This research informed a communication campaign which was developed and implemented at the same time as the second (successful) rollout of Opal in February-March 2007. This campaign is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

5.2 Achievements of the rollout

Overall, the predominant view by both DoHA and other government and community stakeholders is that the rollout of Opal has been a major success in reducing the levels of petrol sniffing in communities. For instance the following quotes illustrate the virtually unanimous view of stakeholders interviewed in Central Australia on this issue:

> *Opal has largely knocked off sniffing* at this point.
>
> Petrol sniffing has *virtually stopped* in remote communities.
>
> *Opal is working wonders.*
>
> Opal has had a *huge impact.*
>
> Sniffers are currently *very thin on the ground.*
>
> Petrol sniffing *has dropped right back.*
>
> Opal has *made a world of difference.*
>
> *It's the best thing that's ever happened here.*
>
> *Opal is great*.

In the case of government stakeholders, their views about the success of the Opal rollout tended to be based predominantly on one or more of the following factors:

- information about the rollout provided by DoHA
- absence of negative feedback from communities
- evidence of the reduced incidence of petrol sniffing.

The 2006-07 DoHA Annual report describes the rollout of Opal fuel and subsequent reduction of harm caused by petrol sniffing as one of the year's 'significant wins in Indigenous health' (DoHA 2007c, p9).

Stakeholders identified three key indicators of the success of the rollout:

- the large number of communities to which Opal has been rolled out
- the high volume of Opal sales
- evidence of the reduced incidence of petrol sniffing.

These three issues are discussed in more detail below.

5.2.1 Extensive rollout

Firstly, Opal has been rolled out to a large number of communities and other sites (see Table 5.1). As at 1 November 2007, 72 communities (and supporting organisations) were receiving Opal, as were three pastoral properties and 29 service stations/roadhouses. Although four jurisdictions (NT, SA, WA and Queensland) have been involved in the rollout, by far the largest number of sites have been in NT. Some 66 of the 104 communities/pastoral properties/service stations and roadhouses participating in the rollout are located in NT.

Table 5.1: Participants receiving Opal fuel by State (as at 1 November 2007)

State/Territory	Communities (and supporting organisations)	Pastoral properties	Service stations/roadhouses	Total
South Australia	15		3	18
Northern Territory	41	3	22	66
Western Australia	11		4	15
Queensland	5			5
Total Receiving	***72***	***3***	***29***	***104***

Source: DoHA

If the number of communities and others *approved* for inclusion in the Opal rollout are included, the reach of the program is even greater. As shown in Table 5.2, some 84 communities, three pastoral properties and 34 service stations/roadhouses have been approved for participation.

Table 5.2: Participants receiving or approved to receive Opal fuel by State (as at 1 November 2007)

State/Territory	Communities (and supporting organisations)	Pastoral properties	Service stations/roadhouses	Total
South Australia	16		3	19
Northern Territory	44	3	27	74
Western Australia	15		4	19
Queensland	8			8
New South Wales	1			1
Total Receiving	***84***	***3***	***34***	***121***

Source: DoHA

Opal has now been quite comprehensively rolled out or approved for rollout to communities in both the Central Desert Region and the Expanded Central Desert Region – only a few services stations in either of these areas do not have Opal (or will not in the near future). Opal has also been rolled out to a few individual communities elsewhere which approached DoHA for inclusion in the rollout (eg in East Arnhem and Mornington Doomadjee). In addition DoHA plans to rollout Opal to the East Kimberley region (which was added to the program in early 2007) later in 2008.

5.2.2 The high volume of Opal sales

The large volume of Opal fuel sales is also seen to indicate the successful take-up of Opal. For instance between January-December 2007, some 20 million litres of Opal fuel were sold. As one stakeholder observed:

> *This is testament to the fact that even though there have been a few who did not like change, the overwhelming majority have used the fuel as* [intended].

5.2.3 Evidence of the reduced incidence of petrol sniffing

Another key indicator of the success of the Opal rollout noted by stakeholders is the documented and anecdotal evidence that there have been major reductions in the incidence of petrol sniffing after the introduction of Opal.

The most systematic and persuasive data available on the reduced incidence of petrol sniffing is the most recent of a series of regular prevalence surveys of petrol sniffing conducted by Nganampa Health Council on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands (Tregenza 2007). The Council has conducted 14 surveys to date, and more recently on an annual basis.

The 2004 survey conducted by the Council found that 224 people – 8.4% of the total APY Lands population – were identified as having sniffed petrol over the previous 12 months. The October 2006 survey found that there had been a very significant reduction in petrol sniffing on the APY Lands – over 80% – since 2004. A survey conducted by the Council eight months later (in May 2007) confirmed the validity of the results: the number of petrol sniffers had further reduced (by over 50%) since October 2006. Only 38 people (1.3% of the total APY Lands population) were recorded as having sniffed petrol in the previous eight months before the May 2007 survey, and of these only 18 were regular sniffers. The report stated that during October 2006 -May 2007, 'petrol sniffing was a relatively rare and sporadic event', and the activity was only recorded at all in two communities. It was concluded that the unavailability of sniffable fuels is likely to have been a significant contributor to the clear and sustained reduction in petrol sniffing, and that the introduction of Opal fuel has 'largely (though not completely) eliminated supply' (Tregenza 2007, p4).

More comprehensive comparative data on the incidence of petrol sniffing over time in a number of Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia will be available in future when James Cook University undertakes its further rounds of data collection for the baseline data project it is conducting for DoHA (discussed in Chapter 12). The University has recently completed its first round of collection of baseline data in 55 communities and made recommendations for future data collection.

The DoHA Opal Communication Strategy document cites some further sources of data to support the conclusion of the Nganampa Health Council report that the incidence of petrol sniffing has substantially reduced since the Opal rollout:

- CAYLUS recently reporting a 90-95% reduction in petrol sniffing in the Alice Springs and Western Desrt communities since the introduction of Opal
- reports from local authorities that the number of petrol sniffers in Alice Springs has decreased to less than 20 since the introduction of Opal (DoHA 2007b, p3).

Stakeholders consulted for this review from government (including both Commonwealth and State) and community organisations also referred to anecdotal evidence which supported the conclusion that the introduction of Opal fuel had been associated with a major reduction in the incidence of petrol sniffing in the communities concerned.

5.2.4 Limitations of the rollout

Despite the general agreement that the introduction of Opal fuel in Central Australia has had great benefits in reducing petrol sniffing, stakeholders also made the following points about some limitations of the Opal rollout or its impact:

- A number of those consulted felt that although the rollout has covered almost all of the Expanded Desert Region, the fact that several petrol stations have refused to convert to Opal (despite attempts at negotiation and consultation by DoHA with them) is a limitation of the rollout. There are also reportedly some 'easy sources' of suitable fuel on highways or in towns relatively close to communities covered by the Eight Point Plan. It should be noted that there is no Commonwealth, State or Territory legislation in place that allows the Government to mandate Opal.
- Some stakeholders argued that there are areas of high need (in terms of having major petrol sniffing problems) which are not in the original or Expanded Central Desert Region, and therefore

have not been included in the Opal rollout. (It should be noted, however, that communities outside of the Expanded Central Desert Zone can apply to DoHA to be included in the rollout, and some have done so to date.)

- The timing of the Opal Communication Strategy was not ideal (as discussed in more detail below).
- There is still occasional petrol sniffing in communities, and some use of other inhalants such as glue or paint. Petrol sniffing is also still a problem in Alice Springs.
- The decline in petrol sniffing in communities has been accompanied by a substantial increase in the use of marijuana (which tends to have greater community tolerance than sniffing). One police officer said that cannabis use had 'skyrocketed', while another suggested it had increased 'tenfold'. (Whether the Opal rollout has led to increased use of other substances is one of the issues to be investigated as part of the evaluation of the Opal rollout currently being conducted for DoHA – see Chapter 12).
- Despite the impact of Opal in reducing petrol sniffing, 'You still have all the underlying problems' in communities. Accordingly, a great deal depends on how governments and communities use the current 'window of opportunity' to tackle entrenched social, educational and economic disadvantage and dysfunction.

5.3 Communication Strategy for the Opal rollout

DoHA has responsibility for conducting the communication component of the Eight Point Plan, and communication activities relating to the other aspects of the Eight Point Plan for which it has responsibility such as the Opal rollout. The major communication activity conducted to date by DoHA has related to the Opal Communication Strategy.

As noted above, the first attempted rollout of Opal in Alice Springs in mid-2006 did not involve a communication campaign and the resulting community and media backlash led to many service stations stopping supply of Opal. The later rollout of Opal in Alice Springs in February-March 2007 was accompanied by a communication campaign, which was implemented in Central Australia (primarily Alice Springs) at the same time. The campaign, between February and April 2007, covered a range of activities including print and radio advertising, stakeholder engagement strategies, a series of public relations activities and a direct information mail-out to all households in Alice Springs.

Table 5.3 sets out the nature of the media activities undertaken and flyers/brochures produced, and the number of each of these.

Table 5.3: Activities for the Opal rollout communication campaign

Media	Network / Paper	Details	Number of Ads / Copies
Radio	8 KIN Central Australia	45 seconds	90
	8CCC Alice Springs	60 seconds	50
	8CCC Alice Springs	45 seconds	75
	8HA Alice Springs	45 seconds	105
	Sun FM Alice Springs	45 seconds	105
	Top FM	45 seconds	105
Newspaper	Alice Springs News	Page 2	5
	Centralian Advocate	Page 7 or 9	10
	Katherine Times	Best possible position	5
	Tennant and District Times	Page 2	5
Brochures		Consumer Brochure	20,000
		Technical Brochure	1,000
Flyers		Consumer Flyer	5,000

5.3.1 Effectiveness of the Opal Communication Strategy

An evaluation of the Opal communication campaign was commissioned by DoHA and undertaken by consultants TNS. The report on the evaluation was completed in August 2007, but has not been publicly released and was not available to the consultants.

However, DoHA advised that the key findings of the evaluation were positive and included that:

- the messages in the Strategy resonated well with the broader community
- community members understood the key issues in relation to Opal (eg what it is, who could use it, that it wouldn't damage care engines), and how it connected to the PSS more generally.

Nonetheless, a key limitation of the Opal Communication Strategy in Alice Springs identified by both DoHA and some Central Australian observers related to its *timing*. It was argued that it would have been preferable to start this a short time *before* the actual rollout (eg a few weeks), rather than at the same time, in order to better prepare people for the rollout. It was said that failure to do so led to widespread misinformation and doubts about Opal in the second rollout phase, again resulting in some 'backlash' among locals, although less severe than with the initial (aborted) rollout of Opal in mid-2006. Some viewed the overall increase in sales of Premium fuel which have occurred (and been maintained) since the Opal fuel rollout[7] as evidence that there is still distrust of Opal by at least some people.

5.4 Future activities

As documented in the *Ongoing Regional Rollout of Opal Fuel Communication Strategy*, DoHA plans to implement further communication activities for residents in new communities and regions in which Opal is rolled out (DoHA 2007b). It is expected that this will occur later in 2008.

[7] DoHA confirms that Premium sales have gone up but notes that no exact figures are available on the amount of this increase.

6 Facilitation of alternative youth activities

This chapter discusses the facilitation of alternative youth activities in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia, for which FaHCSIA has overarching responsibility.

6.1 Northern Territory

In April 2007 the Australian Government signed a three-year contract with Mission Australia for delivery of an Integrated Youth Strategy (IYS) to the four NT communities of Docker River, Imanpa, Mutijulu and Aputula. The first Mission Australia youth workers began work in the four communities in mid June 2007.

IYS funding totals $12 million over the three-year contract period – $4 million for infrastructure and $8 million for operational costs. This contract is managed by CAPSSU on behalf of FaHCSIA, AGD and DEEWR; CAPSSU has its own budget separate from the $12 million. CAPSSU representatives emphasise that the IYS contract represents a significant achievement in that it brings together the requirements of three separate funding agencies in a single agreement.

Some Central Australian stakeholders originally expressed surprise when Mission Australia's appointment was announced. In particular the NPY Women's Council – which had itself tendered for conduct of the IYS in light of its longstanding concern with petrol sniffing issues and its experience in conducting youth programs in these communities – criticised the appointment on the grounds of Mission Australia's lack of experience in Central Australia and with its remote Indigenous communities. CAYLUS – which had itself evidently refrained from tendering on the basis that the NPY Women's Council was the obvious candidate – was similarly surprised at the selection of an organisation like Mission Australia. Mission Australia was aware of such criticisms, and reports that accordingly it devoted time in the early months of the project to 'mending fences' with relevant parties. It also reports that it has since received valuable advice and support from CAYLUS in particular.

A paper prepared by CAPSSU sets out eleven core principles of the IYS as follows:

- *Resources and infrastructure*
- *External coordinating administrative body*
- *Skilled and committed youth workers*
- *Regularity and consistency of service*
- *Gender and age status appropriate activities*
- *Activities which are meaningful, stimulating and culturally relevant*
- *Promotion of self esteem and coherence for young people in their lives with their families*
- *Involvement of role models*
- *Promotion of strong intergenerational relationships*
- *Knowledge of families*
- *Community development and participation. Facilitation of alternative activities* (Anderson 2007).

6.1.1 The IYS

The IYS contract calls for each community to have two resident Senior Youth Workers, supported by locally recruited Anangu colleagues. It also provides for four outreach youth workers to visit each community from time to time and to provide 'cover' for the resident Senior workers in a particular community when they are ill or on leave etc. A position of Education Outreach Coordinator has been vacant for a period after the sudden resignation of the person who originally held the position; however

Mission Australia has recently appointed two new Outreach Education Officers who will have particular responsibility for working with the community schools and with disengaged students.

The Mission Australia teams in each community regularly forward to their manager in Alice Springs a weekly Activities Program. According to Mission Australia personnel, activities designed for various age groups are planned with input from young people themselves and from the local Anangu workers; naturally they also reflect the various skills of individual youth workers. The contract provides that Mission Australia will seek active community input through an advisory committee in each location; however it has not yet been possible to establish such committees. It was said that initiation of the NTER so soon (two weeks) after the IYS had created confusion in people's minds about the IYS. Such confusion, along with controversy relating to the NTER and the range of people and activities involved in it, were described as having made it very difficult for the Mission Australia teams to establish any effective advisory structure. (Communities were 'totally distracted' by the NTER, said a CAPSSU staff member.)

Youth activities undertaken in the communities to date have included music (each community has received band equipment), swimming excursions (very popular over summer), outdoor sports such as football, various indoor sports, bush trips, hunting, cooking, making and watching videos, 'junk' sculpture/welding, sewing, discos and movies. Under the Eight Point Plan the recreation hall in each community was to be upgraded and refurbished as a focus for youth activities, but progress in this regard has been slow.

Among those consulted in the course of this review there were varying opinions about progress or success with the IYS to date. The CAPSSU Manager, for example, believed that Mission Australia had to date done 'a fantastic job' in the face of significant challenges. Some others have not been as impressed, so far, by Mission Australia's approach and personnel – though it was widely agreed that the IYS represented 'a really hard gig'. On the other hand a NSW-based youth worker who visited Mutijulu in January 2008 to conduct a school holiday program reported to Mission Australia that he found positive changes since an earlier visit – eg young people 'looking healthier and happier' and community members taking more responsibility for their children. Observations made by a range of stakeholders – including some Mission Australia personnel – included the following:

- Mission Australia's task has been made harder by a significant level of staff turnover – attributed in large part to the fact that living conditions are very difficult in the absence of the permanent, separate housing that each Senior Youth Worker was originally intended to have.
- Apart from delay in providing suitable housing, work to upgrade the community recreation halls has only recently got underway, and the workers have also had to wait for office space to operate from. It has typically taken a long time for equipment and resources to reach the workers.
- Given the difficulty of their task and their relative inexperience, it was said, the workers faced a 'long learning curve' and needed very effective practical and professional support. It appears that workers did not receive prompt cultural awareness training, although a two-day workshop was held for this purpose in Alice Springs in late 2007.
- Various practical requirements, such as the need for facilities for secure storage and the need for workers to be trained in the use and maintenance of equipment, have not been addressed in a timely way.
- The requirements imposed on Mission Australia by the contract governing the IYS are quite complex and very demanding. Possibly the contract should be reviewed in the light of experience to date, to ensure that all of its provisions remain feasible and appropriate.
- The demands on youth workers' time and energy are great – including the need to offer activities in the evening, at weekends and during the school holidays. While agreeing that the staff could not be expected to work '24/7', some observers believed that more activities needed to be organised at weekends and during school holidays in particular.
- As some observers see it, the emphasis to date has been primarily on finding activities to keep children and young people occupied and engaged. Equally or more important, however, is the need to provide a range of learning opportunities, whether relating to living skills, sexual behaviour and

relationships, alcohol and drug issues, or skills which may increase future educational or work opportunities.

- Meeting the needs of a very wide age range – from small children to young adults – is very challenging. In general it has been easier to engage and interest younger children rather than teenagers and young adults. Several people made the particular point that after Business (initiation) teenage boys have to be treated as men and offered appropriately adult activities and opportunities.
- Mission Australia has experienced difficulties with management of some of its Anangu employees – some of whom may have had little previous experience in fulfilling the responsibilities of a full time job. Accordingly, later contracts with Anangu workers have usually been for casual employment. (The original plan to employ Anangu workers using the structure of the CDEP could not proceed because the CDEP in all four communities was abolished under the NTER.)
- Several people observed that *Mission Australia* is 'a very unfortunate name' in this context, because of the heavy weight of associations carried by the word 'mission' in Aboriginal memory. It was suggested that the youth program could be given a suitable Anangu name, or names.

In an enterprise of this nature, a great deal depends on the personality or approach of individual youth worker. Good workers were characterised by various observers, for example, as *approachable, energetic, young at heart, knowledgeable about the community*, and *on the kids' wavelength*. 'It's about sitting back and listening'. Numbers of people referred very positively to a particular youth worker who had recently left Docker River after three years work for the Community Council. He was described as a 'superb' worker who 'had that spark about him' and had 'a great feeling for the whole community'. It was emphasised that *continuity* in program and personnel is also very important.

The fact that the IYS has so far been implemented only in the four NT communities which were included in the original Central Desert region is an obvious limitation. A number of stakeholders observed that these were not necessarily communities of particular need in relation to petrol sniffing. It was said that Docker River, for example, had major problems several years ago, but that great progress had been made with the help of the very strong youth program run by the Community Council. Problems in Aputula, some believed, were far less than in other communities such as Hermannsburg that lie outside the original PSS region[8].

The IYS contract requires Mission Australia to maintain records of uptake or participation in youth activities. An example of the figures compiled for this purpose is set out in Table 6.1.

[8] A number of those consulted in the course of this review were critical of the way the boundaries of the Central Desert Region were originally drawn – particularly the small area of the Northern Territory that was included.

Table 6.1: A one week summary of IYS activities

ACTIVITY	MUTITJULU	IMANPA	APATULA	DOCKER RIVER	Total per Activity
Rec Hall Activities	5-10yr = 18 10-15yr = 20 15 yr + = 9	5-10yr = 16 1015yr = 18 15 yr + = 12	5-10yr = 18 10-15yr = 16 15 yr + = 11	5-10yr = 32 1015yr = 26 15 yr + = 13	84 80 45
Bush Trip =2 vehicles (8 per age group per gender	5-10yr = 5 10-15yr = 4 15 yr + = 6 Elders = 3	5-10yr = 4 10-15yr = 6 15 yr + = 4 Elders = 2	5-10yr = 2 10-15yr = 8 15 yr + = 6 Elders =	5-10yr = 6 10-15yr = 7 15 yr + = 6 Elders =	17 25 22 5
Sports	5-10yr = 16 10-15yr = 24 15 yr + = 12	5-10yr = 16 1015yr = 22 15 yr + = 8	5-10yr =9 10-15yr =18 15 yr + = 12	5-10yr = 27 1015yr = 24 15 yr + = 26	68 97 58
Discos	5-10yr = 26 10-15yr = 22 15 yr + = 8	5-10yr = 18 1015yr = 22 15 yr + = 14	5-10yr = 11 10-15y r= 17 15 yr + = 22	5-10yr = 22 1015yr = 34 15 yr + = 18	77 95 62
Young mother's development		0 -4 yr = 2 5-7 yr = 3 14 yr + = 6			2 3 6
School pick up/breakfast	5- 10 yr = 16 Youth Workers have stopped the Breakfast program and youth pick up in Mutitjulu	5- 10yr = 13	5- 10 yr =	5- 10 yr =	29

6.2 The Expanded Central Desert Zone

In July 2007 CAPSSU prepared a 28-page draft paper proposing a three-year approach to addressing priority needs in the Expanded Central Desert Zone. Among other things this paper suggests establishment of a Central Australian Petrol Sniffing Strategy Network to help develop 'the collective strategies of network members' and of CAPSSU. It also proposes an approach to regional delivery of services, using among other things a 'hub and spoke' model grouping certain of the communities around nominated regional service centres. The paper proposes that youth services to the 16 communities of the expanded zone be provided in accordance with IYS principles (see above) and through the appointment of:

- 26 community-based male and female youth workers with appropriate experience and qualifications
- 6 youth workers, based in Alice Springs, to provide relief and outreach services
- 2 Outreach Education Coordinators
- 28 local Indigenous Trainees
- a full-time manager of Youth Services with appropriate administrative support.

Total funding requirements are calculated at some $16 million.

6.3 South Australia

As noted in Chapter 4, a range of projects have been funded in South Australia under the PSS by various Commonwealth and State agencies. For instance the South Australian office of AGD is administering a substantial budget for prevention, diversion, rehabilitation and restorative justice programs to address petrol sniffing issues in the APY Lands. Other funding agencies involved have included the Australian Government Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA), FaHCSIA, DEEWR, the Department of Transport and Regional Services, DoHA and the SA Department of Sport and Recreation. Other SA State government agencies such as the Department of Families and Communities have been involved in various aspects of the projects, including provision of inkind assistance. The Port Augusta ICC is responsible for implementing and monitoring youth activity programs on the AP Lands.

A number of the South Australian PSS activities have been funded (or are currently being negotiated) under RPAs negotiated with communities, including one centred on 'alternative activities to combat petrol sniffing and substance misuse'.

The range of youth and community activities that has been initiated in South Australia is largely based on the results of an extensive consultation process that was undertaken (by an independent firm) with the communities of the AP Lands.

Some of the key activities funded to date have included the following.

- Funding from AGD, FaHCSIA, DEEWR and the SA Department of Sport and Recreation to the South Australian National Football League (SANFL) for an extension of its RPA program relating to petrol sniffing in the lands – specifically for employment of a Program Manager, an Activity and Sports Development Coordinator and two Indigenous trainees. The program provides structured physical activities for young people including a youth multi-sport program, an APY inter-community sports competition and a range of other activities. This project aims to address the research finding that petrol sniffing is often related to boredom.
- Funding from AGD, FaHCSIA (and proposed from DEEWR and the Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resource Management Board in the future) to employ a Senior Program Manager to oversee a 'caring for country' youth engagement strategy on the APY Lands. This project provides an opportunity for young people on the AP lands to participate in three activities:
  - conservation land management (eg rock-hole management, learning about bush medicines and foods), coordinated and supported through the Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resource Management Board
  - accredited training and work experience relating to livestock management and the pastoral industry
  - visual arts and crafts, through working with Anangu artists.
- Funding from AGD to the South Australian Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement for implementation, planning and community engagement to support a Restorative Justice framework that has been developed for the APY Lands. This framework aims to help local people develop strategies for managing anti-social behaviour connected with petrol sniffing in the APY Lands in culturally appropriate ways. The Restorative Justice Officer funded under the program is based in Coober Pedy and covers ten communities in the APY Lands. This was a continuation of a previous project and arose out of a recommendation of an indepth AGD-funded scoping study conducted in 2006. This report demonstrated that there was widespread community support for the initiative.
- Funding from the Commonwealth Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA)[9]– which also has responsibilities relating to sport and recreation – towards the costs of

[9] Formerly the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA).

youth activities in the AP Lands, including dirt bike racing, a BMX program and a horse riding program. DEWHA representatives based at the ICC in Port Augusta worked closely with the SA Department of Families and Communities in this regard.

The above initiatives can be seen as covering both the *youth activities* and the *supporting communities* elements of the Eight Point Plan. For instance the SANFL program involves, among other things, a football competition across the communities, and with the DEWHA-funded youth activities project priority was given to recruiting people living on the APY Lands, and providing some training, in order to increase community capacity.

In addition to the specific activities funded under the PSS there have been other complementary initiatives eg a Youth Leadership Program for the APY Lands being run by FaHCSIA.

Since the PSS projects such as those outlined above are only in a relatively early stage of implementation, it is too early to be able to report on their outcomes in any systematic way. Some of the projects have quite specific Performance Indicators to be reporting against to their funding agencies (eg reductions in petrol sniffing and crime), so it is hoped there will be data available on these at a later stage.

Nonetheless at this early point there has been promising anecdotal evidence from some projects that they will have positive impacts. For instance the SANFL project has reportedly been 'very well received by the community and very well-supported', as evidenced by the high numbers of participants, and the fact that the project has engaged not only young people but also a range of other community members as well (eg as trainers, preparing food at football matches, and getting involved in fund-raising). Similarly there is anecdotal evidence that the DEWHA-funded project has helped increase the level of participation in sport and recreation activities across the APY Lands.

Some stakeholders argued that the PSS projects have been soundly based in that they address the key issues associated with petrol sniffing (eg boredom), adopt a holistic approach with a broad substance abuse (versus just petrol sniffing) focus, and have arisen out of close consultation with the community. Nonetheless, the latter factor – and the practical challenges of implementing projects in remote Indigenous communities with transient populations – have meant that the projects have taken some time to get off the ground.

6.4 Western Australia

As discussed in Chapter 4, a number of Australian Government and State government agencies have been involved in funding and implementation of the PSS in Western Australia, but with the two PSS Implementation Plans (for the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and the East Kimberley) still to be finalised progress on PSS projects has been fairly limited. Nonetheless, some PSS activities are underway (although in their very early stages). These include, for example:

- Funding of $2.7 million from FaHCSIA for the Ngaanyatjarra Lands Youth Worker Accommodation Project. This project funds provision of accommodation for youth workers (whose positions have been funded by AGD).
- Funding from FaHCSIA for an independent consultant to provide a Baseline Community Profile for East Kimberley. This is part of a larger FaHCSIA project to conduct such Profiles for a number of communities, as discussed further discussion in Chapter 11.
- Funding from FaHCSIA for an early learning centre in Warburton.
- Funding of $137,000 by AGD for the Warburton Youth Diversion Activity, a joint initiative between the Warburton and Warakurna Police which promotes reengagement by Indigenous young people with their communities. This is through activities such as cultural back to country camps, a patrol service to visit young people in their homes and encourage engagement with positive activities, and traditional hunting and food gathering.
- Funding of $27,000 by AGD for the Pila (desert) to Yuru (big water) project, which rewards 20 at risk teenage boys with a two week overland football adventure to the Kimberley, on the proviso that

they satisfy various conditions in the three months leading up to the camp (eg regular school attendance, and negligible contact with the criminal justice system).

- Funding of $16,000 by AGD to the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council for the Kiwirrkurra Summer School Holiday program. Kiwirrkurra is an extremely isolated community with very limited services.
- Funding of $25,000 by AGD to Garnduwa Kimberley Youth Sport and Recreation for a 'Young Women, Active Leaders' State Indigenous Women's Leadership Workshop.

As in South Australia:

- the PSS projects implemented have had a focus both on providing alternative youth activities and strengthening communities
- the generally early stage of implementation precludes conclusions about the impact of the projects, but there has reportedly been anecdotal evidence by police that the Pila to Yuru project has led to strong behavioural change, reduced substance abuse and increased school retention by the young people involved.

7 Rehabilitation and treatment

This chapter discusses the provision of rehabilitation and treatment services.

The Project Management Plan for the PSS identifies rehabilitation and treatment services as a State and Territory responsibility. No Commonwealth funding has been allocated for this element of the Eight Point Plan, although DoHA has overall responsibility for this aspect of the PSS.

Some recent developments in the Northern Territory and in South Australia related to treatment and rehabilitation services are summarised below.

In August 2007 the Drug and Alcohol Services Association (DASA) in Alice Springs opened ten new beds which have been funded through the Northern Territory Government with COAG funding, primarily for the purposes of the Territory's *Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act* 2005 – that is, to offer a rehabilitation and case management service for (adult) sniffers of petrol and other inhalants. These beds are located in a 20-bed residential facility that has been made available to DASA by the NT Government, and where detoxification services relating to other drug and alcohol problems are also provided. (DASA's Program Manager commented that this is not an ideal combination, since the needs and behaviour of the two groups are often rather different.)

The ten-bed Alice Springs facility previously occupied by DASA has been taken over by Bush Mob, a non-government organisation which over the past ten years has offered support, respite and rehabilitation services for young people with substance abuse problems, including petrol sniffing. The new residential service, described as offering 'stabilisation and treatment', targets young people aged between 12 and 18, with sniffing and/or other drug problems. It offers accommodation for carers as well as young people themselves. Bush Mob's residential and non-residential services are funded by the Northern Territory Government.

In February 2007 Drug and Alcohol Services SA began an outreach service in the AP Lands for people with substance abuse problems, including petrol sniffing. This service is staffed by two highly qualified nurses and four Anangu consultants. Referrals to the service have come from a wide range of sources, including families, Police, the Courts, and various other government and non-government agencies. Clients have included both current and former sniffers, with most also involved in binge drinking and/or use of other drugs such as cannabis. The outreach service aims to provide an expert assessment followed by support of various kinds and appropriate referrals.

Meanwhile a new residential facility has been under construction at Amata; this is due to take its first clients in April 2008. It caters for eight clients, with facilities for family members nearby. After assessment if will offer rehabilitation services, over a period of up to eight weeks or so, for clients from the Lands with any substance abuse problem, including petrol sniffing. Activities are planned to include educational programs around health issues such as nutrition, hygiene and drugs and alcohol, together with a range of diversional activities and (with TAFE support) skills development. The Amata facility has been funded from both State Government and Commonwealth sources.

DoHA also reports that there are plans to provide, in the near future, additional drug and alcohol workers to be based in primary health care services in the Central Desert Region.

Organisations like the NPY Women's Council express concern at the lack of specific services available for people who have suffered brain damage as the result of petrol sniffing. As a result the responsibility for trying to provide appropriate support for these people and their families falls on other services and organisations which are not necessarily resourced or equipped to provide it.

8 Communication strategies

This chapter discusses the communication activities for the PSS, which is one of DoHA's responsibilities under the PSS.

To date, the communications component of the PSS has primarily focused on the Communications Strategy for the Opal roll-out, in line with the Opal roll-out being one of the key areas of initial activity under the 8 Point Plan. This campaign has been discussed in Chapter 5.

The rest of the communications strategy in relation to the PSS as a whole is only now starting to get under way. The rationale and intended approach to this has been documented in a detailed DoHA's internal document, *8 Point Plan to Address Petrol Sniffing Communication Strategy*, completed in August 2007 (DoHA 2007d). This covers the aims, objectives, intended audience, key messages and planned activities for the Strategy. The Strategy's overall aim is to coordinate and focus the public communication and education activities to support the implementation of the PSS in the Central Desert Region. This aim is underpinned by recognition that:

- awareness of the Eight Point Plan is low amongst both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (as indicated by research by DoHA undertaken to inform the Communication Strategy for the Opal rollout)
- poor awareness of authoritative sources of information, and poor exchange of or lack of such information, is a key barrier to communities taking action to addressing petrol sniffing.

It was reported that there have been some delays in implementing the Strategy due to the government being in caretaker mode after the Federal election in November 2007.

The five key activities to be undertaken for the Strategy are set out below. To date there has only been some action in relation to the first component.

- *A national communications audit* of all current communication resources used to:
  - address the incidence of petrol sniffing and inhalant substance abuse in Indigenous communities relating to petrol sniffing
  - promote programs and initiatives similar to those in the Eight Point Plan (by State and Commonwealth Government and non-government organisations).

DoHA has recently commissioned consultants TNS to undertake this audit. The final report on the audit is due in May 2007. Subject to the findings of the audit, the consultants may also be required (if necessary) to carry out further research including market testing of new materials.

- *Revising and updating the Petrol Sniffing and Other Solvents Toolkit* (a South Australian resource which has been recognised as effective and valuable), in line with the recommendations of the evaluation of the kit by consultants MacKenzie and Johnson.
- *Development of a series of case study stories* to illustrate the problem of petrol sniffing, its causal factors, the challenges faced, and how Indigenous communities have addressed the problem, and outcomes of the community's response. These case studies will be aired on Imparja television, ABC and SBS.
- *Development of a web portal* on the FaHCSIA website to provide a single entry point for people wanting information about the 8 Point Plan and its components.
- *Identification of appropriate distribution methods* for information and education materials, through stakeholder consultation (DoHA 2007d).

All materials developed will be market tested to ensure they are appropriate.

In addition to the communications activities undertaken by DoHA, the other PSS partner agencies will also continue to be responsible for communication activities to promote their specific initiatives. DoHA will conduct regular audits of activities to ensure a register of activities is maintained and that the messages are consistent.

9 Uniform legal framework

There has to date been little if any cross-jurisdictional activity designed to agree on and implement uniform legislation relevant to petrol sniffing issues or inhalant abuse.

However, some broader related initiatives have been undertaken since the inception of the PSS, but have relevance to petrol sniffing. These include:

- *The NPY Lands Cross Border Justice Scheme*, which aims to improve the delivery of law and justice services to the NPY lands, by removing obstacles to delivery of law and justice (and certain related) services caused by State and Territory borders. The three States intended to implement the scheme through model legislation, but so far only WA has done so. The Private International Law section of AGD will be involved in progressing amendments to the *Service and Execution of Process Act* 1992 (C'th) related to this once the proposals for the scheme have been finalised.
- *The Volatile Substance Abuse Prevention Act* 2005 (NT), which provides a comprehensive approach to the prevention, early intervention and treatment of volatile substance abuse (including petrol and other substances such as paint and glue). Under the Act police and other authorised people have powers to seize inhalants when they are being abused, and to apprehend those under their influence to take them to a place of safety (which would usually be their home). Courts also have power to order chronic substance abusers into compulsory treatment.

However projects such as these do not obviate the need for the uniform legal framework component of the PSS to be implemented.

Some possible reasons were suggested for the lack of progress on this component of the PSS. These included that it has not have specific funding attached to it. It is also regarded as a fairly complex and challenging project, involving coordination between different sections of various State and Territory departments (particularly justice and police) and AGD at a Commonwealth level. In addition, petrol is of course not an illegal substance in itself (and petrol sniffing per se is not illegal). It is nonetheless illegal in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia to knowingly sell or supply petrol for the purpose of sniffing, and many, though not all, Aboriginal communities in Central Australia have banned the bringing of regular unleaded petrol onto their lands.

Therefore to progress this issue further there will first need to be agreement between the jurisdictions at a policy level as to whether they want to have further laws relating to this issue, and if so, what these would cover.

It was argued in consultations that a key issue to be considered in the uniform legislation project is its connection with treatment services – ie whether legislation should consistently provide the power to mandate referral of petrol sniffers into treatment.

A useful resource for the uniform legislation project is the appendix to the Senate Inquiry report into petrol sniffing, which summarises key legislation relating to petrol sniffing by State / Territory (Senate Community Affairs References Committee Secretariat 2006).

10 Policing

'Appropriate levels of policing' are understood as a State or Territory responsibility, and no specific funding under the Eight Point Plan was allocated for this purpose. However, FaHCSIA has overall responsibility for this aspect of the PSS.

In South Australia there has been some increase in Police numbers in the AP Lands during the life of the Eight Point Plan, as part of the SA Government's ongoing response to social problems (including petrol sniffing) identified in the Lands. In the Northern Territory the Commonwealth's NTER has led to an increased Police presence in a number of communities – including Docker River, Imanpa, Mutijulu and Aputula.

Cross-border arrangements previously introduced have helped make policing in Central Australia more effective. This has meant, for example, that NT Police officers can act as Special Constables across the border in Western Australia.

At the inter-governmental Adelaide conference in 2005 where the Eight Point Plan for the Central Desert Region was discussed, Police representatives put forward a proposal for a Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk (SAID) that could operate across the region and provide expertise and leadership in Police efforts to combat drug use and abuse. The then FaCSIA Minister, Mal Brough, took up this suggestion, and $500,000 was provided by the Commonwealth to establish such a unit in Alice Springs; a two-person SAID team began work in January 2006. At the end of 2006 further funding of $785,000 was made available; among other things this made it possible to provide SAID with the services of sniffer dogs (which have reportedly been welcomed by local community leaders).

Although its responsibilities do not primarily relate to petrol sniffing, those consulted during this review typically regarded SAID as a useful initiative which had intercepted significant amounts of illicit drugs, provided welcome support to local Police, and reinforced the message that substance misuse is unacceptable and has consequences.[10] SAID had also succeeded in building trust with community members so that they were now much more likely to volunteer information that could be helpful to Police. In the view of the Manager of CAPSSU, SAID results had been 'absolutely outstanding'.

SAID's 'patch' or area of operation is the original – not the extended – Central Desert region. The current SAID officers are members of the NT Police who are authorised to act as Special Constables in SA and WA.

[10] For example, between January 2006 and December 2007 SAID officers laid 1,107 charges of various kinds and recorded 185 interventions relating to petrol sniffing.

11 Strengthening and supporting communities

FaHCSIA has overall responsibility for the element of the Eight Point Plan concerning strengthening and supporting communities. To date the activity in this area has largely been around activities which relate to the facilitation of alternative youth activities component of the PSS.

In the Northern Territory there has not to date been much PSS activity specifically relating to this element other than the IYS. However, the following points were made by stakeholders on this issue:

- The strengthening of communities is an approach or philosophy that underlies various components of the Strategy.
- Since the Territory's remote communities generally have a young age profile, work with young people is potentially a key contributor to better community functioning.
- In Docker River CAPSSU was involved in implementing a Shared Responsibility Agreement (SRA) that involved reviving the local Women's centre, promoting arts activities and 'resurrecting' a market garden.
- If the communities come to engage with and have effective input to the IYS, this will represent progress in community development.

In South Australia several of the initiatives relating to provision of alternative youth activities under the PSS – for example the restorative justice project – have potential to contribute to the strengthening of communities in the AP Lands. Other SA Government activity in the Lands, such as work around community governance, is clearly relevant to community development and strengthening even if it does not explicitly relate to the Eight Point Plan. Further, the nature of the sporting activities and competition promoted across the Land as part of the Eight Point Plan is designed to have impacts across the community, not just on participating individuals. Among other things these programs are intended to improve fitness and nutrition, as well as engaging widespread interest in the competition among community teams.

In Western Australia several of the projects concerning alternative youth activities also have the potential to contribute to community strengthening – for example the leadership program for young women.

One government stakeholder was of the view that the community support element of the Eight Point Plan had not been thought through adequately at the outset – as reflected in the fact that no budget had been allocated for this purpose. Some FaHCSIA stakeholders also observed that, given that there is no allocated budget, there is also some ambiguity as to whether certain activities relating to this component should be regarded as falling under the PSS, given that strengthening communities is core business for FaHCSIA.

It goes without saying that strengthening and supporting communities requires genuine and effective community involvement in planning and decision-making. To date this kind of community participation seems to have been most advanced in South Australia.

12 Evaluation

This chapter discusses the last point under the Eight Point Plan, evaluation.

The following five key activities have been undertaken in relation to evaluation for the PSS:

- development of an Evaluation Plan for the PSS
- collection of baseline data by DoHA and FaHCSIA
- an evaluation of the Communications Strategy for Opal
- an impact evaluation of the Opal fuel roll-out
- a national audit of communications materials relating to petrol sniffing and petrol sniffing programs

Each of these projects is briefly described below. Only the evaluation of the Communications Strategy has been completed (and the report was not available to the consultants). The other three are still underway and have not produced any reports at this point, other than a summary of the DoHA baseline data.

12.1 Development of a PSS Evaluation Plan

An overarching Evaluation Plan for the PSS was developed by the Research and Evaluation section of FaHCSIA in the early stages of the implementation of the PSS, outlining how the evaluation component of the PSS would be implemented. It was reported that there were significant difficulties and delays getting this signed off by the high-level Petrol Sniffing Steering Committee – the Plan was initially developed in October 2006 but not signed off until June 2007. Therefore the content does not accurately reflect the activities actually undertaken in relation to evaluation of the PSS. The document is also fairly general in nature, rather than providing very specific direction for future evaluation activities.

It was reported that there was insufficient coordination and communication between the Research and Evaluation section of FaHCSIA and the other PSS activities – for example, as noted above, the project success criteria in the Project Management Plan were developed without any input from this section, which resulted in a disconnect between the criteria and the Evaluation Plan. The section also did not have the power to approach the Petrol Sniffing Steering Committee directly in their own right, and was required to have everything signed off by another branch of FaHCSIA, which inhibited progress. As indicated by the example provided above, while the Research and Evaluation section conducted various activities relating to evaluation early on in the PSS, much of this work never progressed. It was reported that the section's capacity to progress evaluation activities has improved markedly in 2009.

The example above illustrates that is preferable to designate responsibility for PSS components to specific agencies, and give areas within the responsible agencies capacity and responsibility to progress specific initiatives in their own right.

12.2 Development of a PSS Evaluation Framework

FaHCSIA has recently commissioned consultants Courage Partners to develop a comprehensive Evaluation Framework for the process, impact and outcome evaluation of the strategies being implemented under the PSS. The aim of the Framework is to provide a structure for evaluating the eight components of the PSS. The separate evaluations of the eight components to be undertaken by the responsible agency will sit under this Framework. The Framework will include an overarching program logic, evaluation questions for each part of the Framework, Performance Indicators to measure progress over time; articulate linkages to the OID and other indicators of Indigenous wellbeing; and assess coordination between the PSS components. The final Evaluation Framework is due to FaHCSIA in April 2008.

12.3 Evaluation of the Communications Strategy for Opal

An evaluation of the Communications Strategy for DoHA was commissioned by DoHA and undertaken by consultants TNS. The report on the evaluation was completed in August 2007, but has not been publicly released and was not available to the consultants. However, the methodology and the key findings (as reported by stakeholders) have been described in Chapter 8.

12.4 Baseline data projects

Both DoHA and FaHCSIA are currently conducting projects to collect baseline data relevant to the PSS. In both instances the aim is to repeat the data collection processes in the same communities in the future, to enable comparison with the baseline data. While these projects are not strictly 'evaluation' activities, they will enable monitoring of changes over time in relation to petrol sniffing (and related issues in the case of the FaHCSIA project).

12.4.1 DoHA

DoHA commissioned James Cook University to collect baseline data on the prevalence and effects of petrol sniffing in relation to the number of sniffers and their status (ie frequency of sniffing), health related harm, and related public order offences.

Data has been collected from 55 communities (out of 74 communities originally planned) which have recently commenced receiving or are scheduled to receive Opal fuel in the future, or are close to communities receiving Opal (in order to measure any displacement effect).

The final report on this data has been completed, and a summary report was publicly released on 1 May 2008.

A second round of data collection in relation to petrol sniffing, using the same methodology, will be conducted as part of the Opal fuel evaluation (see below) in the 19 communities recommended by James Cook University. The data collection in relation to health and public order will not be repeated, since the consultants concluded that the data collected was not valid or reliable on these indicators.

12.4.2 FaHCSIA

FaHCSIA is also conducting a Baseline Community Profile project in various communities nationally, including a number of those participating in the PSS. This project is being conducted by FaHCSIA's Research and Evaluation section in Canberra, in conjunction with FaHCSIA's WA State Office. Of relevance to the PSS, data is being collected on a number of indicators relating to substance use and misuse in selected (but not all) of the baseline communities eg the availability of sniffable petrol, and the number of incidents of petrol sniffing and other substance abuse.

Unlike the DoHA baseline project, the FaHCSIA project is also collecting baseline data on a much broader range of other indicators as well (eg services and infrastructure, early childhood development and growth and effective environment health systems).

Submissions have been sought for consultants to conduct the baseline report on East Kimberley later this year.

12.5 Impact evaluation of the Opal fuel roll-out

DoHA has commissioned James Cook University to undertake an initial impact evaluation of the roll-out of Opal fuel to:

- identify the impact of the roll out in contributing to changes in the prevalence of petrol sniffing and other outcomes, including any potential unintended consequences
- identify and analyse the range of factors that determine the success or otherwise of the outcomes of the Opal fuel roll-out.

This includes, for example, measuring the prevalence of petrol sniffing in selected communities, determining the impact of Opal on this, identifying other factors which may have contributed to prevalence, and identifying any unintended consequences such as geographical displacement.

As noted above, the evaluation will repeat the data collection exercise conducted in the baseline data project recently completed by James Cook University.

The final report on the evaluation is due in May 2008.

12.6 Commentary

The evaluation component of the PSS is largely only getting underway now, with a number of evaluation-related projects currently in train. Since this process is in its early stages and very little information is available on the results at this point, only very limited conclusions can be drawn about the implementation of this component of the PSS. Nonetheless, the following general observations can be made.

Evaluation activities for the PSS have only recently received concerted attention – and some stakeholders felt that it has been later than would ideally have been the case. Some stakeholders noted that there has been some 'slippage' in evaluation activity beyond that originally envisaged. Suggested reasons for this included the delays in getting FaHCSIA's Evaluation Plan (discussed above) approved, and the absence of the high level SES Steering Group for much of the PSS's implementation.

The evaluation activities undertaken or underway have also been focused at the Australian Government (Canberra) level, and been undertaken either by FaHCSIA (as the lead agency on the PSS) or DoHA (in relation to its own activities). At this stage there has been little attention to formal evaluation at the State level of PSS implementation (by either Australian Government or State agencies), beyond the inclusion of Performance Indicators relating to petrol sniffing and related problems in some funding agreements with auspice organisations implementing PSS initiatives. However, it appears to be clearly envisaged that more of this will occur in the future, since the brief for the Evaluation Framework project currently underway stipulates that the separate evaluations of the eight components to be undertaken by the responsible agency will sit under this overarching Framework. It would be beneficial to ensure this receives priority in the near future, and where feasible, that specific funds are ear-marked to enable external evaluations to be conducted.

13 Conclusions and recommendations

This section of the report summarises findings and conclusions under the research headings set out in the Statement of Requirement for the review. There is inevitably some overlap and repetition in the material set out under the various headings.

13.1 The theory behind the Strategy

The theory underlying the PSS was well-grounded in the limited research and anecdotal evidence concerning petrol sniffing available at the time. The theory behind the PSS has become more clearly articulated over time (eg with the Project Implementation Plan).

As noted in Chapter 3 of this report, the various components of the PSS are designed to respond to the issue of petrol sniffing through both *supply* reduction and *demand* reduction, while also addressing some of the consequences of sniffing for individuals and communities.

The chief *supply reduction* strategy is the replacement of standard unleaded petrol across the region by 'non sniffable' Opal fuel – in Aboriginal communities, at commercial service stations and roadhouses, at some station properties and in Alice Springs. This measure has been supported by some increased levels of policing in communities (facilitated in the Northern Territory by an increase in Police numbers under the NTER) and by the establishment of the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk, which is based in Alice Springs and operates across the tri-State Central Desert Region. Under the Eight Point Plan there is also an intention to increase the effectiveness of policing activity and legal responses through the alignment of relevant legislation in each jurisdiction.

Since petrol sniffing is understood to reflect a range of social problems and disadvantage such as boredom, low incomes and low self-esteem, *demand reduction* elements of the PSS include the establishment of programs offering alternative activities for young people in communities, together with the broader objective of strengthening communities.

The Eight Point Plan also includes several other elements, including support for appropriate treatment and rehabilitation services for people affected by petrol sniffing. Another element, evaluation of design and implementation of the Strategy is clearly important, especially in light of the intention to use the Central Desert initiatives to test the effectiveness of a comprehensive regional response to petrol sniffing. The Eight Point Plan also includes provision for communication and education activities designed to ensure that people know about and understand the purpose of the Plan and to help build community support for it.

The PSS theory of combining appropriate *supply* and *demand* measures is supported in practice by the fact that a number of Central Australian stakeholders saw the current situation in the following terms:

- The introduction of Opal fuel across the region has greatly reduced the level of petrol sniffing
- This significant drop in petrol sniffing has created a valuable breathing space or 'window of opportunity', giving new heart to communities and reinvigorating community opposition to sniffing
- More active and visible policing has helped to keep down levels of sniffing and antisocial behaviour.
- Youth work programs in communities, including the Integrated Youth Strategy, have also been helpful in this regard.

One important aspect of the PSS is the fact that it is being implemented on a *regional* basis. Obviously this is particularly important in relation to the introduction of Opal fuel, since the effectiveness of this measure could obviously be undermined if people simply had to move from one location to another in order to obtain sniffable petrol. For related reasons, policing and law enforcement are likely to be most effective if they are regional in scope.

A significant element of the implementation of the PSS in the Northern Territory has been the establishment of a small administrative unit (CAPSSU) 'on the ground' in Alice Springs. Even though

some are critical of aspects of CAPSSU's performance, the value of a local presence of this kind seems well accepted in principle.

Other critical aspects of the theory behind the PSS include *persistence over time* in the activities implemented, and the *public health model* of intervention which aims to address health problems at a primary, secondary and tertiary level.

13.2 The causal logic of the impact of the PSS on the OID indicators

Although the OID report predated the PSS, the objectives of the PSS are consistent with the priority areas identified by the OID headline indicators and there is a sound causal logic in the assumption that the PSS may have an impact on these. In particular the PSS directly addresses five of the OID indicators ie life expectancy, disability, suicide and self harm, and family and community violence.

As emphasised in several parts of this report, the introduction of Opal fuel across the region has created an important window of opportunity to achieve real improvements in community functioning and well-being for Indigenous people generally. However, concerted and continued action is necessary if this opportunity is not to be wasted, and the impact on OID indicators realised in practice.

13.3 Policy context and design of the Strategy

The PSS was developed quite quickly in response to a combination of research evidence, high profile coronial cases relating to deaths linked to petrol sniffing, and government, political and community concern about the issue. Nonetheless, as indicated in section 13.1, the Strategy is well conceived as a response to petrol sniffing in Aboriginal communities and the broader context within which sniffing has occurred.

13.4 How well is the strategy being implemented?

Answering this question raises a number of different points canvassed in earlier parts of the report.

- The Strategy was designed to involve a whole of government approach across a range of Commonwealth, State and Territory Government agencies and other relevant parties. This review suggests that the Strategy would benefit from an increased level of coordination and consultation among relevant Commonwealth agencies, and active oversight and driving of the strategy at SES level. (FaHCSIA has reportedly recently initiated action in relation to both these areas). Similarly there would be benefit in improved communication among those responsible for various parts of the strategy in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia – including representatives of relevant State Government, Territory Government and non-government agencies. For example, given the different approaches being taken to alternative youth activities in WA, SA and the NT, there is obviously scope for exchange of information and ideas on plans and outcomes.
- Overall the roll-out of Opal fuel has to date been successful and effective. However, there remains a need to bring into the fold a small number of service stations which have to date refused to stock Opal fuel, and also to consider the introduction of Opal in places such as Laverton (WA) which function as service centres for some Central Desert communities. The effect of the continued ready availability of premium unleaded fuel also needs further consideration.
- Alternative youth activities have been approached in different ways in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia.
  - In the Northern Territory the main focus to date has been on an Integrated Youth Strategy (IYS) being implemented by Mission Australia in the four communities of Docker River, Imanpa, Mutijulu and Aputula. Point made by stakeholders about the IYS include the following:

    - It covers only four of the numerous NT communities which have significant youth needs, and no dedicated funding is available under the Eight Point Plan for related initiatives in communities across the expanded zone.
    - Progress in implementing the IYS has been slowed by factors such as confusion or suspicion arising out of the NTER, turnover in youth workers reflecting problems such as lack of suitable worker accommodation, and delays in upgrading community facilities such as recreation halls.
    - As it develops the IYS needs to place stronger emphasis on developing young people's knowledge and skills.
  - In South Australia and Western Australia a range of activities for young people are underway or planned, such as sports and other activities, diversion programs. Projects in both States are in the relatively early stages of implementation, particularly in Western Australia. In Western Australia the two PSS Implementation Plans are still to be finalised.

- Levels of policing in the Northern Territory have benefited from increases in Police numbers under the NTER. There has also been some increase in Police numbers on the AP Lands in South Australia. The SAID is generally regarded as a valuable initiative and as enforcing law enforcement activity relating to substance abuse.
- So far as this review could establish, there has been little activity to date in relation to uniform legislation. Thus it appears that there is a need for inter-governmental consultation to reach agreement on relevant policy issues, as a prerequisite for enactment of appropriate legislation.
- There has been some useful progress on treatment and rehabilitation facilities since the adoption of the PSS, though the Eight Point Plan provides no specific Commonwealth funding for this purpose.
- Activities relating to strengthening and developing communities have largely concerned activities which also fall under the alternative youth activities umbrella.
- The Communications Strategy has focused primarily on the Opal rollout to date. This was generally successful, other than ideally it would have been timed to commence a short period before the rollout itself. A Communication Strategy for the PSS overall has been documented but implementation to date has been restricted to the first activity required (a national audit of communications material relating to petrol sniffing).
- Evaluation activities have only recently commenced, and have generally not advanced far enough to have produced any results to date. However, there will be results from many of the initial activities underway by the end of the year. To date evaluation work has focused largely on the Australian Government (Canberra) level, and been undertaken by either FaHCSIA or DoHA.

Factors that have *facilitated or enhanced implementation* of the PSS include, obviously, the allocation of Commonwealth funds to support key elements of the PSS, together with the efforts of both Commonwealth and State/Territory agencies.

Factors that may have *adversely affected implementation* include insufficient inter-agency communication and coordination (including insufficient collaboration at a senior level), and the lack of specific funding for some parts of the Strategy. On the ground in the Northern Territory, the fact that the Commonwealth's NTER was launched immediately after the start of work on the IYS has been a complicating factor and is said to have limited communities' willingness and capacity to engage with the IYS.

Sustainability of the various activities initiated under the PSS is essentially a matter of adequate and continuing funding, together with appropriate management arrangements within and among the responsible agencies.

13.5 Suitability of the success criteria, measures and performance reporting

A series of 'project success criteria' are set out in the Project Management Plan for the PSS. Some of these are clear and appropriate, but others may benefit from further work or clarification. Some measures may also be difficult to consistently measure (eg concerning 'take up' of diversionary activities).

13.6 Activities and outputs to date

Implementation of some of the elements of the PSS is well advanced, with the Opal roll-out being the most obvious example, On the other hand there appears to have been no progress to date on uniform legislation, while DoHA's general communications program on the Strategy is expected to be introduced later this year.

In broad terms the activities undertaken to date under the PSS are seen by stakeholders as appropriate and useful; again this applies to the roll-out of Opal in particular. There is general agreement that suitable youth activities and support are crucial to the success of the Strategy – but it is too early for there to be any consensus on the adequacy and effectiveness of the specific steps taken so far.

Most progress

- The most obvious achievement to date has been the roll-out of Opal fuel across the Central Desert Region, with reportedly clear and substantial results in reducing levels of petrol sniffing.
- There has also been significant activity in relation to providing increased activities and opportunities for young people. In the Northern Territory, however, this has mostly been limited to the four communities which were included in the original, not the expanded, Central Desert Region. In South Australia and Western Australia the activities are still at an early stage.
- Establishment of the Substance Abuse Intelligence Desk is generally seen as a valuable initiative in tracking illegal activity relating to substance abuse in Central Australian communities. There have been some increases in the levels of policing available in NT and South Australian communities – though not directly as a result of the PSS.

Least progress

- DoHA has prepared communication and education plans relating to the PSS overall, but these have not yet been implemented to date. The communications activities to date have focused on the Opal fuel rollout.
- There has evidently been no progress towards ensuring greater consistency of legislation across jurisdictions.

13.7 Stakeholder and participant feedback

Feedback from a range of agencies and individuals is reflected in the material presented throughout this report and in other parts of this section. Key points included the following:

- The PSS approach and the elements of the Eight Point Plan represent a realistic effort to address various dimensions of the petrol sniffing problem.
- The introduction of Opal fuel in the Central Desert Region has succeeded in substantially reducing the level of petrol sniffing, thus creating a valuable breathing space or window of opportunity for Aboriginal communities.
- More needs to be done to take advantage of the opportunities created by Opal's introduction, particularly in relation to strengthening and supporting communities, and supporting and engaging young people in ways that improve both their current situation and their future prospects.

- There needs to be improved consultation, sharing of information and cooperation at various levels – for example, among the four Commonwealth departments directly involved in the PSS, between people working on relevant strategies in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, and between CAPSSU and other government and non-government stakeholders in the Northern Territory.
- Some elements of the Eight Point Plan (most notably the Opal roll-out) relate specifically to petrol sniffing. Others such as policing and uniform legislation may relate to petrol sniffing in a broader drugs and alcohol context. Youth diversionary activities and strengthening communities can be regarded as 'generic' initiatives that are equally relevant across a range of policy area such as crime prevention, mental health, physical health and well-being, educational achievement and substance abuse. With such 'generic' interventions it is likely to be especially difficult to draw clear links between PSS activities and outcomes relating specifically to petrol sniffing. Another aspect of this point is that (especially in the absence of dedicated funding) some agencies may find it hard to say whether a particular initiative comes under the PSS or not; while others with PSS responsibilities may find it hard to set appropriate limits to their range of responsibilities.
- There was a range of stakeholder views on the importance of maintaining a specific focus on petrol sniffing as against embedding the PSS more thoroughly in a wider substance abuse context. The point was made, however, that while there are high levels of sniffing in communities this has very damaging results that call for a clear focus on sniffing per se. As and when the levels of sniffing are significantly reduced, issues around sniffing can appropriately be seen in the broader context of drug and alcohol problems and of policy responses to this.

13.8 Reach of the Strategy to date

As explained elsewhere, Opal fuel has been rolled out across the Central Desert region and in Alice Springs. There are other aspects of the PSS that need to be considered separately for different areas. In South Australia, youth activities and community strengthening have been pursued across the AP Lands. In the Northern Territory, significant activity in these fields has so far been confined to the four communities included in the original (not the expanded) Central Desert region.

13.9 Whole of government approach

To date the implementation of the PSS has not involved a consistent or comprehensive whole of government approach. Initiatives have varied (possibly for good reasons) as between SA, WA and the NT, and at present there is relatively little awareness in one jurisdiction of what is happening in the others. Planning and coordination among Commonwealth Departments at SES level was part of the original intention, but to date there has not been a great deal of involvement at the most senior level.

As noted elsewhere, there appears to be substantial room for improvement in relation to a whole of government approach to implementation of the Strategy. Various stakeholders see a need for:

- more active planning and oversight of the PSS by senior Commonwealth personnel from FaHCSIA, DoHA, AGD and DEEWR (as FaHCSIA has recently initiated)
- more active communications and coordination among departments around funding and implementation of the Strategy
- improved liaison and cooperation between Commonwealth agencies and relevant State and Territory bodies
- more exchange of information and ideas among people on the ground in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

Within South Australia, however, there appears to have been a quite active intergovernmental approach.

13.10 Options for improvements and development

Key suggestions emerging out of this review can be summarised as follows.

13.10.1 Planning and governance

- Continue to provide increased oversight of the PSS by senior personnel in relevant Commonwealth departments.
- Continue to promote increased communication and coordination across Commonwealth agencies.
- Strengthen arrangements for communication and co-operation between Commonwealth, Northern Territory, South Australian and Western Australian agencies.
- Ensure that there is a clear overall picture of PSS budgets and expenditure.
- Review CAPSSU's current budget, staffing and responsibilities to ensure that it is appropriately resourced for its current role.
- Support CAPSSU in developing increasingly effective partnerships with relevant government and non-government agencies and organisations in the NT.
- Clarify plans and resourcing implications for the implementation of PSS initiatives in the expanded Central Desert Region and in the East Kimberley.
- Consider the possibility of allocating some funds that could be used in a flexible fashion to meet particular PSS needs or opportunities that may arise in particular communities (either within the Expanded Desert Area or elsewhere). For instance, this could allow emerging petrol sniffing problems to be addressed quickly before they become entrenched.

13.10.2 Opal roll-out

- Continue to work with service stations in the Central Desert Region which have so far declined to stock Opal fuel.
- Monitor the implications for the PSS of the continued availability of premium ULP in the Central Desert Zone.

13.10.3 Youth activities

- Support increased exchange of information and ideas between those responsible for PSS youth activities in South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory.
- In relation to the IYS in the Northern Territory:
  - Ensure that problems and delays in providing suitable youth worker accommodation and upgraded recreation facilities are promptly addressed.
  - Ensure increasing focus on education and training aspects of the IYS.
  - Ensure that all staff in the field receive ongoing training in cultural awareness and in working effectively with Aboriginal communities.
  - Review the terms of the IYS contract with Mission Australia in the light of experience to date, to ensure that all parts of the contract remain appropriate.
  - Adopt a suitable Anangu name (or names) for the IYS at community level.

13.10.4 Supporting communities

- Review the significance of this element of the Strategy, and consider options for liaising with and supporting other relevant programs or agencies.

13.10.5 Legislation

- Encourage relevant State and Territory personnel to meet to discuss, and if possible agree on, steps towards uniformity in legislation.

13.10.6 Evaluation

- Revisit the project success criteria and measures set out in the original Project Management Plan.
- In the light of the evaluation frameworks already developed or being developed, continue with evaluation tasks that focus on both the PSS overall and its individual components.
- Seek to ensure that evaluation adequately covers initiatives at State as well as national level.
- Continue to gather the best available data on petrol sniffing incidence and prevalence (through both the DoHA and FaHCSIA baseline indicator projects).

13.10.7 Communications

- In any future roll-out of Opal fuel, plan to have an appropriate communications strategy in operation a few weeks in advance.

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Appendix A People consulted

People consulted

Canberra	
OIPC/FaHCSIA	Barry Johnson Belinda Collins Sharon Bowen-Smith Luna Purification Sally McNicol Jenny Walker Chris Nuin
DEEWR	Andrew Dennison
DoHA/OATSIH	Aaron Briscoe Stephen Castle Tony Kiessler Kerry Warren Sanjeev Kumar (formerly FaHCSIA)
AGD	Edward Huddy
Alice Springs	
CAPSSU	Steve Vaughan Kathleen Anderson James Farrell
Mission Australia	Peter Penley Dannielle Wiseman Robert Van Gils
SAID	Sachin Sherma
NPY Women's Council	Vicki Gillick Sue Cragg
Alcohol and Other Drugs Services of Central Australia	Michael Cody Richard Furrell
CAYLUS	Blair McFarland Tristan Ray
Docker River	
Government Business Manager	Mike Lawson
Community members	Pastor Roy Yaltjanki
	Councillor Texan Brady
Police	Senior Constable Owen Auricht

	Senior Constable Mark Berry
Store Manager	Adriana Bugge
Primary School Principal	Edwin Graham
Community Employment Broker, DEWR	Debra Corkill
Imanpa	
IYS Senior Youth Worker	Angie ……..
IYS Anangu Youth Workers	Leslie Luckey Robbie Coombes
Council Chairperson	Tanya Luckey
Former Council CEO	Deidre Finter
Form Acting CEO	Sue Camplin
Clinic Nurse	Carmel
Aboriginal Health Worker	Sandra
Aputula	
IYS Senior Youth Worker	Deborah Salt
IYS Outreach Worker	Shon Klose Charles Tako
Anangu Youth Worker	Shaeleigh
Council CEO	Sue Camplin
Regional Night Patrol Support Team (McDonnell Shire)	Richard Khan Jenny Foster
Store Managers	Mike Tickner Rewa Angel
Clinic Nurse	Sue Garlick
Other Northern Territory interviews	
Government Business Manager, Mutijulu	Richard Trevena
Principal Policy Advisor, Chief Minister's Office	Justin O'Brien
Leader, Youth At Risk Team, Department of Family and Children's Services	Megan Murdock
Policy Officer, Alcohol and Other Drugs Program, Department of Health and Community Services	Annemarie Leutwiler
Program Manager, Drug and Alcohol Services Association, Alice Springs	Sabine Wedemeyer
Bush Mob, Alice Springs	Will McGregor

South Australia	
SA Department of Families and Communities	Peter Kaye
ICC Port Augusta (Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts)	Marilyn Leverington
FaHCSIA	Meryl Zweck Vicky Toovey
Drug and Alcohol Service of South Australia	Kim Petersen
AGD	James Armitage
Western Australia	
FaHCSIA	Ann Maree Bloomfield Jill Mills
ICC Kalgoorlie	Adrian Brahim
AGD	Carl Lincoln