



**Australian Government**

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**Department of Families, Housing,  
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs**

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# Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory

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January 2009 to June 2009  
Whole of Government Monitoring Report

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Part One  
Overview of Measures

## Contents

Report Structure.....	3
1. Background .....	4
The Review of the NTER.....	4
Future Directions.....	5
The Redesign of the NTER.....	5
Evaluation and Monitoring of the NTER.....	6
Monitoring .....	6
Impact Studies .....	6
2. NTER Measures.....	8
3. Key Information.....	10
Improving Child and Family Health.....	10
Enhancing Education.....	11
Supporting Families .....	11
Promoting Law and Order .....	12
Welfare Reform and Employment .....	13
Coordination .....	15
4. Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory.....	15
Improving Child and Family Health.....	19
Improving Child and Family Health.....	19
Improving Child and Family Health – Monitoring and Evaluation ...	20
Indigenous Health and Related Measures .....	21
Enhancing Education .....	22
Quality Teaching and Accelerated Literacy .....	22

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<b>School Nutrition Program .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>School Nutrition Program – Monitoring and Evaluation .....</b>	<b>23</b>
School Nutrition Program - Performance Audit.....	24
<b>Supporting Families.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Family Support Package .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Playgroups .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Early Childhood .....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Crèches.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Youth Diversion .....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Promoting Law and Order.....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Police.....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Law and Order .....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Welfare Reform and Employment.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Income Management.....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Income Management – Monitoring and Evaluation .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Financial Support Services .....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Coordination .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Coordination and Policy Advice.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Community Engagement Measure.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Commonwealth Ombudsman Support for the NTER .....</b>	<b>38</b>

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# Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory

## Two Year Whole of Government Monitoring Report

### Report Structure

This Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory (previously the Northern Territory Emergency Response) Monitoring Report provides an analysis of data captured between 1 January 2009 and 30 June 2009. However, in many instances information is provided for the entire period 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2009.

The monitoring report has two parts.

#### **i. Part One**

Part One of the Monitoring Report provides a background on the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), including the independent review, and the Government response to the review. It also provides a summary of key findings of the performance information for the first two years of the NTER. Lastly, Part One of the Monitoring Report also includes a summary of the 2009-10 Commonwealth Budget in relation to the measures initiated under the NTER.

#### **ii. Part Two**

Part Two of the Monitoring Report brings together information against each measure and includes achievements and progress to date against targets and/or milestones. It also includes what has not been achieved and any 'lessons learned' or impacts.

## 1. Background

The Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) was announced by the previous Australian Government in June 2007 in response to reports of abuse and neglect of children outlined in the *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* “*Little Children are Sacred*”<sup>1</sup> report. The report made it clear that child abuse in Indigenous communities throughout the Northern Territory was at crisis levels.

The present Government takes the view that Indigenous children are entitled to the same level of protection and support as other children in our society.

The NTER has a wide range of measures that are primarily designed to:

- protect children and make communities safe, and
- create a better future for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

The Australian Commonwealth Government has publicly committed to continuing and strengthening the NTER to ensure the protection of women and children, reduce alcohol fuelled violence and promote personal responsibility and community norms in Indigenous communities. The legislated period of the NTER is five years.

### The Review of the NTER

In October 2008, the Australian Government released the report of the independent Review of the NTER<sup>2</sup> which found that the situation in remote NT communities and town camps remained sufficiently acute to be described as a national emergency. The Australian Government provided its interim response to the Review Board’s Report on 23 October 2008, accepting the Review Board’s three overarching recommendations that:

- the Australian and Northern Territory Governments recognise as a matter of urgent national significance the continuing need to address the unacceptably high levels of disadvantage and social dislocation experienced by remote communities and town camps in the Northern Territory;
- Governments reset their relationship with Indigenous people based on genuine consultation, engagement and partnership; and

<sup>1</sup> *Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle* “*Little Children are Sacred*” Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, 2007  
[http://www.inquirysaac.nt.gov.au/pdf/bjpacsa\\_final\\_report.pdf](http://www.inquirysaac.nt.gov.au/pdf/bjpacsa_final_report.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Territory Emergency Response, Report of the NTER Review Board*, October 2008  
<http://www.nterreview.gov.au/report.htm>

- Government actions respect Australian human right obligations and conform with the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (RDA)*.

The Government also committed to introducing legislation into the Parliament in October 2009 to remove the provisions that exclude the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act.

## Future Directions

On 21 May 2009, the Australian and Northern Territory Governments released a joint response to the recommendations of the NTER Review Board, providing a more detailed summary of the actions agreed by both governments on each of the seven NTER measures<sup>3</sup>.

On the same day, the Government also released the Future Discussions Paper<sup>4</sup>, a discussion paper setting out proposals for the measures affected by the RDA as a starting point for discussion.

## The Redesign of the NTER

From June to late August 2009, the Australian Government consulted with Indigenous people in the Northern Territory about future directions for the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER).

The specific measures under discussion were income management, alcohol bans, prohibited material, including the audit of publicly funded computers, five-year leases, community stores' licensing and the powers of the Australian Crime Commission.

The consultations involved all of the communities and town camps affected by the NTER. There have been more than 500 community consultations as well as workshops with regional leaders and Indigenous organisations in the Northern Territory.

The feedback received from these consultations will inform the Government's legislative strategy. The Government has committed to report back on the results of the consultations.

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<sup>3</sup> Australian Government and Northern Territory Government Response to the Report of the NTER Review Board, May 2009

[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter\\_reports/response\\_to\\_reportNTER/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter_reports/response_to_reportNTER/Pages/default.aspx)

<sup>4</sup> Future Directions for the Northern Territory Emergency Response, Discussion Paper, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2009.

[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter\\_reports/future\\_directions\\_discussion\\_paper/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter_reports/future_directions_discussion_paper/Pages/default.aspx)

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## Evaluation and Monitoring of the NTER

The NTER Evaluation Strategy - now the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory (CtG NT) Evaluation Strategy – will provide ongoing assessment to reflect phases of the NTER and capture the whole of government effort.

The Evaluation Strategy has multiple elements to capture information relating to the short, medium and long term effects of the NTER. Elements of the strategy include monitoring, impact studies and the NTER outcome evaluation in 2011.

### Monitoring

Much of the data in this Monitoring Report necessarily focuses on output measures such as an increased police presence. The report also goes beyond this to look at incidences of reported crime. However these data are limited both because crime may be under-reported and because factors such as increasing the number of police can result in an increase in reported crime, while the actual incidence of crime may have remained unchanged or have fallen.

While policy interventions designed to improve the operation of communities can have a significant effect in this period, this is the exception rather than the rule. It will take a concerted multi-year effort to achieve significant lasting change. While it is generally difficult to report on outcomes at this stage, some outcome data are included in this report such as number of jobs under the Jobs Package in communities.

### Impact Studies

The Closing the Gap in the NT National Partnership Agreement commits the Australian and NT Governments to jointly evaluate the programs and services under the agreement in 2011-12.

A draft Evaluation Strategy was prepared at the end of 2007 following the announcement of the NTER to guide monitoring, reporting and research for the evaluation. It is currently being reviewed in the light of the expanded focus of the National Partnership. The draft strategy includes several elements designed to provide an incremental evidence base relating to the short, medium and long term effects of the NTER.

Under the Evaluation Strategy:

- **Surveys of Government Business Managers** are undertaken annually. Departments are responsible for evaluation of individual measures, (such as child health checks or income management) and information from

these separate studies will be included in the NTER evaluation over the life of the National Partnership.

- **Impact studies** of places, from a sample of NTER communities, are planned for 2010 and 2011. An approach is being developed involving participatory research methods to engage local people in a two-way research partnership.
- An **independent outcome evaluation** will be undertaken in 2011-12 to examine the effectiveness of the NTER in improving the protection of vulnerable children and to examine the achievement of the objectives documented in the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership.

## 2. NTER Measures

The broadest NTER measures are:

Measure	Lead Commonwealth Portfolio
<b>Improving Child and Family Health</b>	Department of Health and Ageing
<b>Enhancing Education</b>	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
<b>Supporting Families</b>	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs  Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
<b>Promoting Law and Order</b>	Attorney-General's Department
<b>Housing and Land Reform</b>	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
<b>Welfare Reform and Employment</b>	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations  Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
<b>Coordination</b>	Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs  Ombudsman's Office

• **Table 2.1** NTER Measures by Portfolio

The full suite of NTER measures have been implemented progressively in the prescribed areas specified in the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007* (NTNER Act). These areas generally have more than 100 residents and are known as the NTER communities<sup>5</sup>. Some of the critical and sensitive measures, such as the introduction of income management under the Welfare and Employment Reform measure, apply to smaller communities such as outstations and town camps in the prescribed areas. Prescribed areas include

<sup>5</sup> The term 'community' is commonly used to refer to the Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory that are located within the NTER areas in which the NTER measures apply.

all Aboriginal land granted under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*.

The Australian Government's response to the independent review of the NTER included a continuation until 30 June 2012 of measures commenced in 2007 under the NTER and relevant legislation. The ongoing measures will be managed under the *Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory - National Partnership Agreement*<sup>6</sup> to strengthen and consolidate existing investment made under the NTER within the framework of the Remote Service Delivery Strategy and the Northern Territory Government's *Working Future*<sup>7</sup> plan.

The partnership transitions the NTER to a three year development phase that will maintain and strengthen core NTER measures, while placing a greater emphasis on community engagement and partnerships, building capability and leadership within Indigenous communities. The partnership will also build the capacity of the Northern Territory Government in areas of the protection of vulnerable children, and provision of law and order, quality education and health services to residents of the prescribed communities.

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<sup>6</sup> [http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov\\_agreements/federal\\_financial\\_relations/index.cfm](http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/index.cfm)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.workingfuture.nt.gov.au/>

### 3. Key Information

The following summarises the key information for each of the measures.

#### Improving Child and Family Health

- A total of **10,603 Child Health Checks (CHCs)** were carried out between July 2007 and 30 June 2009.
- Overall **69% of children who received a CHC were referred** to at least one specialist service.
- Of the 7,317 children who were referred, **39% were referred to additional primary health care, and 34% for dental services.**
- The data show that follow-up in **primary health care has reached over 78% of children** who have received CHCs.
- Over **1,356 audiology checks were provided to 1,208 children** and **2,060 dental services were provided to 1,440 children.**
- Between January and June 2009, the Mobile Outreach Service (MOS) teams made **83 visits to 42 communities and town camps.** In total, from April 2008 to 30 July 2009 the MOS teams have made **149 visits to 46 communities and town camps** across the NT.
- Between January and June 2009, the MOS teams provided **133 case-related services** to children and/or their family members.
- In the period 1 January to 30 June 2009, the Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) placed **93 health professionals** throughout the Northern Territory – **8 general practitioners, 76 nurses and 9 Allied health professionals.**
- Under the Alcohol and other Drugs (AOD) Response, **28 outreach workers** in primary care and substance use were deployed.

## Enhancing Education

- Attendance rates for primary and Secondary schools in June 2009 improved compared to June 2008 outcomes:
  - There was an improvement of 2.1 percentage points for primary students
  - There was an improvement of 3.5 percentage points for secondary students
- As at June 2008, **55 schools** were supported by the School Nutrition Program.
- As at June 2009, **68 schools** were supported by the School Nutrition Program<sup>8</sup>.

## Supporting Families

- As at June 2009, there were **19 out of 22 Safe Places**<sup>9</sup> operational. As of 28 August 2009 there were **21 out of 22** Safe Places operational.
- In the period 1 January 2009 to 30 June 2009, the Safe Places were visited 94 times by 151 people.
- There were 21 Supervision and Monitoring visits to 13 Safe Places made by NTG Operational staff.
- As at 30 June 2009 there were 18 full time staff, 9 part-time staff and 40 casual workers employed in Safe Places - 100% of these staff are Indigenous.
- As of May 2009, there were **13 Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Workers (RAFCWs)** employed and operational in nine communities. From 1 February to 1 May 2009, **162 referrals were received by RAFCWs.**
- As at the end of May 2009, as part of the Child Nutrition Program **13 prevention and intervention sessions were delivered to 111 participants, and assisted 75 children and their families** with essential food and health requirements in emergencies.

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<sup>8</sup> School Nutrition Program refers only to those schools which directly benefit from the services of an Australian Government funded School Nutrition Program provider. This measure does not include any other nutrition programs that may be operating without Australian Government funding.

<sup>9</sup> The main purpose of the Safe Places is to provide a safe place for families to go when fleeing family violence. Each Safe Place facility is either a women's Safe House or a men's Cooling-Off Place.

- From January 2009 to May 2009, **50 parents and caregivers participated in the Invest to Grow Child Nutrition Program.**
- In total, from June 2008 to June 2009, 61 Youth Diversion projects were implemented. In the January to June 2009 period 33 Youth Diversion projects were implemented.

## Promoting Law and Order

- As at June 2009, **61 additional police have been deployed to NTER communities;** 43 Australian Federal Police (AFP) and interstate police, and 18 NT Police.
- **Four permanent police station upgrades** have been completed.
- **Themis Stations:** Eighteen Themis Stations have been installed in NT communities and are currently operational. A permanent police station opened on 9 March 2009 in Galiwinku, replacing the Themis Station. The Galiwinku Themis Station infrastructure was transported to other communities; the custodial facilities became part of the establishment of a Themis station at Finke<sup>10</sup>
- As at 30 June 2009 there were **80 active night patrols in 72 NTER communities.**
- For the period 1 January to 31 March 2009 the total number of people (men and women) **transported by a night patrol service was approximately 39,000<sup>11</sup>.**
- The number of alcohol related incidents **increased 29% or almost 900** in the NTER Communities between 2007-08 and 2008-09<sup>12</sup>.
- The level of **domestic violence** reported to police across the NTER communities remains high (**2,058 incidents in 2008-09**)
- The number of **convictions for assault in the NTER communities is significantly higher in 2008-09** than in the previous three years.
- **For NTER communities, hospital separations** for all injury related categories considered as resulting from assault or interpersonal violence **dropped by 6%** since the introduction of the NTER measures.

<sup>10</sup> The 18 THEMIS communities include Alpururulam, Arparra (Utopia), Bulman, Galiwinku, Gapuwiyak, Haasts Bluff, Imanpa, Minjilang, Minyerri, Mutitjulu, Numbulwar, Nyirripi, Peppimenarti, Ramingining, Santa Teresa, Willowra, Yarralin and Waruwu.

<sup>11</sup> Note: This figure is based on information provided by service providers, data collection is problematic and continues to be refined

<sup>12</sup> Police and Justice Data fro NTER communities do not include Town Camps.

- The number of **sexual assault lodgements** for NTER communities **was very similar** (57) across 2007-08 to its level for the previous two years (52).
- The number of **convictions for child sexual assaults** committed in the NTER communities in the two years **since the introduction of the NTER measures is 22**; there were 15 convictions in the two years prior to the NTER.
- The number of **confirmed incidence of child abuse** in the NTER communities **rose from 66 in 2006-07 to 227 in 2008-09**.
- Between 1 January 2009 and 30 June 2009 legal service providers handled **625 NTER related matters, including 154 advices, 197 duty lawyer services and 274 cases**.
- Legal service providers undertook **90 outreach visits to communities**.
- In the period 1 January to 30 June 2009 **2,934 people sought access to an interpreter** which is a 38% increase for the same period in 2008.
- The number of hours interpreting provided for the NTER for the period totalled **1,468 hours**.

## Welfare Reform and Employment

- As at 30 June 2009, **73 communities and ten town camp regions were participating in income management**.
- As at 26 June 2009, since July 2007 **a total of \$197.7 million had been income managed and \$198.5 million had been spent**. Most money was allocated to food (65.4%), community housing rent (8.4%), clothing and footwear (5.9%) and store cards (5.3%). School nutrition accounted for 2.9%.
- As at 26 June 2009, **95.9% (14,556 out of 15,182) income managed customers had a BasicsCard**. Customers have **spent \$74.25 million** through these BasicCards – primarily on food (70.0%) and clothing (19.8%).
- At 24 June 2009, a total of **85 community stores have been licensed**.
- As at June 2009, approximately **7,000 job seekers have been referred to Job Network services**.
- As at June 2009, there have been a total of **1,705 referrals to the Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program and 282 clients commenced in training**.

- The Northern Territory jobs package has exceeded original funded positions targets with over 2,090 positions funded. This number is composed of 1,683 jobs in Australian Government service delivery and 407 in local government service delivery.
- DEEWR facilitated an Agency data review to confirm the number of positions filled. At 30 June 2009, 1,752 positions were confirmed as filled in Australian Government or local government service delivery
- Between January and June 2009 there were **217 Job Placements** in the prescribed communities, town camps and outstations.
- Between 1 July 2007 and 30 June 2009, there have been **a total of 1,782 Job Placements**.
- Since the NTER commenced, there have been **a total of 156 Work for the Dole (WfD) activities delivered across the NTER communities**. Of these 109 have been delivered to 57 of the prescribed communities, 43 to town camps, and four to outstations. There have been a total of 2,602 commencements against these activities.
- For the period 1 January 2008 to 30 June 2008, **a total of 23 activities were delivered to the NTER communities** which is comparative to the same period January to June in 2009 which delivered **a total of 21 activities**.
- In total, from **1 August 2007 to 30 June 2009, there have been 494 STEP and 2,229 STEP ERS commencements**. Of the 494 STEP commencements, there were 360 employment commencements. Of the 2,229 STEP ERS commencements, there were 260 employment commencements.
- As at 30 June 2009 there were **1,705 referrals to Language, Literacy and Numeracy Program (LLNP)** in the NTER of which 1,596 have been actioned by LLNP providers.
- In the period between 1 January and 30 June 2009, **Community Development Employment Project participant numbers in the NT increased (8%)**.
- At the end of June 2009 the total number of **CDEP participants in the NT was at 5,897**.
- At 20 September 2009 there are **5,163 CDEP participants in the NT**.

- As at 24 June 2009, **22 Community Employment Brokers (CEB) were servicing 37 communities** and associated outstations.
- As at 1 April 2009, **29 CEBs service 61 communities**, associated outstations and two town camp regions.

## Coordination

- As at 30 June 2009, there were **59 GBMs servicing 72 communities** and town camps.
- During the period 1 January 2009 to 30 June 2009 there were **21 Indigenous Engagement Officers in 21 communities** across the NT.
- Between January and June 2009 there were **280 active interpreters**.
- Between January and June 2009, **2899 interpreting sessions were delivered** by trained interpreters: an 11.5% increase by comparison with the period July to December 2008.
- From January to June 2009, **the Ombudsman's office received 214 complaints about the NTER** and other Indigenous programs in the Northern Territory. The majority of the complaints were taken during **the 43 outreach visits** conducted by the Ombudsman's office.

## 4. Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory

The 2009-10 Commonwealth Budget provided funding of \$807.4 million to continue the measures initiated under the NTER. The Australian Government is moving the NTER to a sustainable development phase to ensure measures will be effective in the long term. This includes stronger engagement and partnership with Indigenous communities.

Measures such as compulsory income management and alcohol and pornography controls are being redesigned in consultation with Indigenous communities to ensure they are either clearly a special measure under the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* or are non-discriminatory.

The Australian Government introduced legislation into Parliament on 18 March 2009 to ensure people subject to income management have access to the full range of appeal rights, including through the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

The Australian Government has also asked the Northern Territory Valuer-General to determine a reasonable rent for all existing five-year leases that were

compulsorily acquired by the previous Government. This process is nearing completion and payment will then commence.

The following section contains information on how the measures are progressing from the NTER to Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory, as well as summaries on what has been achieved to date.

2009-10 Budget Measure	Description
<b>Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory</b>	<b>A funding package of \$807.4 million over three years to close the gap in the Northern Territory and support the safety of women and children.</b>
<b>Improving Child and Family Health - Indigenous health and related services</b>	\$131.1 million over three years to continue the expanded primary health care and health-related services. The continued regional reform of remote Indigenous primary health care services will ensure these services provide comprehensive and coordinated care. It will also continue the Remote Area Health Corps, and fund follow-up services for dental and ear, nose and throat conditions identified through the NTER child health checks and expand the Mobile Outreach Service. Alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation services will be continued.
<b>Enhancing Education – Quality Teaching and Accelerated Literacy</b>	\$45.7 million over three years to overcome barriers to accelerating literacy and numeracy achievement by Indigenous students in the Northern Territory, provide professional development for staff, increase retention of teachers and relieve pressure on existing school infrastructure. Funding for 15 classrooms will be provided from the Building the Education Revolution program.
<b>Enhancing Education – School Nutrition</b>	\$37.5 million over three years to improve Indigenous student attendance, performance and health by providing nutritious meals and the continued delivery of a breakfast and lunch program at 68 or more sites in communities along with the progressive establishment of sites in 45 town camps.
<b>Enhancing Education – Teacher Housing</b>	\$11.2 million over one year to attract and retain teachers by providing a contribution to the construction of 22 additional houses for teachers at schools in prescribed Indigenous communities.
<b>Family Support - Crèches</b>	\$9.1 million over three years to support operational funding for eight new crèches established under the Northern Territory Emergency Response; and construction and operation of a ninth crèche.
<b>Family Support - Early Childhood</b>	\$1.5 million over three years to continue funding three projects from the Invest to Grow Program and an Indigenous Children Program project which aim to build culturally strong parenting skills and stronger Indigenous families and communities.
<b>Family Support - Family Support</b>	\$32.9 million over three years for 22 safe places, 13 Remote

<b>Package</b>	Aboriginal Family and Community (RAFC) workers, and a Mobile Child Protection Team with 12 workers.
<b>Family Support - Playgroups</b>	\$2.8 million over three years to fund two existing and one additional Intensive Support Playgroup which deliver mobile playgroup services that can operate with little or no infrastructure; and three existing and two additional Locational Supported Playgroups, which focus on providing Indigenous parents/caregivers effective parenting support and Indigenous children with access to age appropriate play based activities.
<b>Promoting Law and Order - Law and Order</b>	\$80.2 million over three years to support existing law and order measures, through continuing: the Northern Territory Welfare Outreach Rights Projects; night patrol services in the 73 Northern Territory prescribed communities and expansion to an additional eight external communities; funding for the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service; and increasing legal assistance service provision to six communities.
<b>Promoting Law and Order - Policing</b>	\$156.6 million over three years to fund 66 additional police officers and related training, transportation, communication and freight costs; build five permanent police stations; continue operation of ten temporary police stations; and support activities linked to implementing and compliance of the alcohol and pornography laws.
<b>Promoting Law and Order - Youth Diversion</b>	\$28.4 million over three years to fund the Northern Territory Youth Development Network, establish a Community Responsive Youth Support and Recreation Fund for infrastructure, and youth services to address problem behaviours. Projects will involve consultation with communities and provide longer-term support for young people engaging in substance use and other high risk activities.
<b>Welfare Reform and Employment - Community Stores</b>	\$18.3 million over three years to continue assessing, licensing and monitoring stores; provide training and improve the capacity and operations of community stores; and provide food to communities where a store licence has been revoked.
<b>Welfare Reform and Employment - Income management – additional funding</b>	\$105.9 million to continue the compulsory income management including \$89.2 million for income management and associated Centrelink delivery costs and for the continued operation of the BasicsCard until 30 June 2010; \$4.9 million to continue financial management support services in 2009-10; and \$11.8 million for the development of a new point of sale delivery mechanism. The Government is also working to redesign income management in consultation with Indigenous communities so that it is consistent with the <i>Racial Discrimination Act 1975</i> .
<b>Welfare Reform and Employment - Language, literacy and numeracy training for Indigenous job seekers</b>	\$3.0 million over three years to continue the Language, Literacy and Numeracy (LLN) Program using community-based delivery to increase cost-efficiency. The program aims to assist Indigenous job-seekers to build their language, literacy and numeracy skills and become job

	ready.
<b>Coordination - Community Engagement</b>	\$34.6 million over three years to facilitate more effective engagement between the government and Indigenous people through providing: ongoing funding for 15 Indigenous Engagement Officers who are Indigenous community members; leadership development and engagement activities and developing a new Community Transition program to increase the capacity of Indigenous communities to engage in decision making; and audio, television and printed communication.
<b>Coordination - Commonwealth Ombudsman support</b>	\$3.3 million over four years (from 2008-09) for the Ombudsman's office to handle complaints; support complaint handling in Government agencies delivering programs to Indigenous communities; and identify systemic issues.
<b>Coordination - Field operations</b>	\$84.1 million over three years for 50 Government Business Managers; four staff to establish a Regional Operations Centre in Alice Springs; and interpreter services and cultural competency training for Government staff.
<b>Coordination - Local priorities fund</b>	\$10.0 million in 2009-10 to address minor service and infrastructure gaps as part of the planning and community engagement process.

# Improving Child and Family Health

## Improving Child and Family Health

During the reporting period 1 January to 30 June 2009, the health components of the NTER continued the transition from the emergency response phase towards sustained expansion and enhancement of primary health care and related services.

The area of largest health investment is in the expansion and reform of primary health care through the **Expanding Health Service Delivery Initiative (EHSDI)**. Funding of \$38.9m was provided in 2008-09. From January to June 2009, the focus of the reform process was the establishment five new regional Health Service Delivery Area Steering Committees. Also in this period the Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) placed 93 health professionals throughout the NT, taking the total number of health professionals placed since October 2008 to 100. The EHSDI 2008-09 Investment Plan provides an agreed framework for health system reform based on cooperation between NT Aboriginal Health Forum (NT AHF) partners (the Department of Health and Ageing, the Northern Territory Department of Health and Families and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory). This has been consolidated in the 2009 Federal Budget with funding for the EHSDI program continuing until 2011-12.

During the first year of the NTER, the primary focus of attention was the implementation of the **Child Health Check Initiative (CHCI)**. The period January to June 2009 represents the final stage of this initiative as a discrete program. The focus of attention was on the provision of follow-up care to children who had referrals from checks in earlier time periods, in particular, hearing and oral health follow-up. The data show that while follow-up in primary health care has reached 78% of children, follow-up in more specialised areas which require the deployment of special facilities and staff is progressing more slowly. In recognition of this, funding for Ear, Nose and Throat specialist consultations and surgery has been funded for another year through the 2009 Federal Budget while dental follow-up will continue until 2011-12.

The delivery of the **Sexual Assault Mobile Outreach Service (MOS)** commenced in April 2008. From April to June 2008, MOS developed a service model and delivered sexual assault counselling and support services to children, adolescents and their families in remote communities and town camps across the Northern Territory. Under a four year funding agreement (2008-09 to 2011-12) MOS teams expanded the reach of services to respond to child sexual assault and related trauma in remote communities.

New data collection and management tools were developed for NT Department of Health and Families (NT DHF) by the Australian Government in late 2008 and were finalised in December 2008. Data from NT DHF indicate that in the six month period 1 January to 30 June 2009, MOS teams made a total of 83 visits to 42 communities and town camps across remote regions of the NT. These visits comprised of one or more of the following: casework services to children and families; professional development to service providers; and/or community education to community members.

Key elements of the **Alcohol and other Drugs (AOD) Response** introduced in 2007-08 were continued in 2008-09 with \$2.6 million allocated under the *Closing the Gap – NT – Follow Up Care* measure. This included increasing the AOD workforce in the primary health care setting, increasing the capacity for substance use treatment and rehabilitation services, delivery of workforce support and development initiatives, and an independent evaluation of the AOD response.

## Improving Child and Family Health – Monitoring and Evaluation

The Progress of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Child Health Check Initiative: Preliminary Results from the Child Health Check and Follow-up data collections provides information on the number and types of health conditions identified and the number and types of referrals made as part of the child health checks<sup>13</sup>. It also includes results from the follow-up Child Health Check Initiative data collections, the purpose of which is to measure the extent to which children who had a child health check have received the follow-up care that they need.

The checks analysed for this report were undertaken from July 2007 to October 2008.

The Progress of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Child Health Check Initiative: Health Conditions and Referrals provides information on the number and types of health conditions identified and the number and types of referrals made as part of the child health checks<sup>14</sup>. The checks analysed for this report were undertaken from July 2007 to May 2008.

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<sup>13</sup> Progress of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Child Health Check Initiative: preliminary results from the Child Health Check and follow-up data collections. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, December 2008. <http://www.healthactive.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-oatsih-nt-08ProgRep>

<sup>14</sup> Progress of the Northern Territory Emergency Response Child Health Check Initiative: Health Conditions and Referrals, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, May 2008. <http://www.healthactive.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/nterchciProgressReport>

An independent evaluation of the Child Health Check Initiative and the Expanded Health Services Delivery Initiative is being conducted during 2008-09 and 2009-10

## Indigenous Health and Related Measures

### *Key Elements*

As part of Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory, funding is being provided for **increased primary health care and health-related services**. In particular, the measure provides for continued regional reform of remote Indigenous primary care health services to ensure they provide comprehensive and coordinated care. Through the continued operation of the **Remote Area Health Corps**, the measure will also deliver and support more doctors, nurses and other health professionals.

The measure also provides for the completion of follow up services for dental and ear, nose and throat conditions that were identified through NTER child health checks. In addition, the measure provides for the expansion of the current Mobile Outreach Service to respond to child abuse-related trauma and for the continuation of alcohol and other drug treatment and rehabilitation services.

Through these elements, the measure will assist in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous child mortality and life expectancy outcomes.

### *Background*

The NTER child health checks identified a large unmet need for primary health care services, with over 88 per cent of children having one or more health conditions identified and over 69 per cent of children receiving referrals for follow up care.

Many of the health conditions identified through the health checks can be prevented or moderated in their impact by primary health care.

Primary health care service delivery for Indigenous Australians in remote Northern Territory communities continues to require expansion to ensure there is access to services and enough health professionals to deliver care. Continued alcohol and other drug treatment services are also needed.

Indigenous Australians living in remote areas of the Northern Territory will benefit through the continued expansion of primary health care and also through the expected completion of child health check follow up care, and through expanded child abuse-related trauma services and continued alcohol and other drug treatment services.

The initiative builds on Government funding to deliver child health checks and follow up care to expand primary health care for remote Northern Territory Indigenous communities.

## Enhancing Education

### Quality Teaching and Accelerated Literacy

#### *Key Elements*

The **Quality Teaching Package** and the **Accelerated Literacy initiative** assist remote schools in the Northern Territory to address the poor education outcomes of Indigenous students in the NTER communities.

This measure supports the Government's commitment to close the gap in Indigenous educational disadvantage, by improving literacy and numeracy skills of students and developing a high performing education workforce, with an emphasis on developing a local Indigenous education workforce in remote schools in the Northern Territory.

#### *Background*

Schools in remote areas of Northern Territory are usually small, are staffed by less experienced teachers and have high staff turnover.

The Quality Teaching Package aims to improve teaching standards and educational outcomes in remote schools by increasing the skills of the education workforce with a priority focus on Indigenous staff.

The Accelerated Literacy initiative supports schools to develop good teaching practices at the local level to deliver sustained improvement in literacy and numeracy achievement. This initiative will build on the 2008 COAG Quality Teaching Package and Accelerated Literacy initiative.

### School Nutrition Program

#### *Key Elements*

The key elements of the program are:

- The provision of breakfast and/or lunch for students attending schools located in the Northern Territory prescribed communities.
- The employment of 129 Indigenous people in full and part-time positions to deliver the program.

- Initiatives to promote good nutrition and food preparation skills amongst community members.

The **School Nutrition Program** contributes to achieving Closing the Gap priorities by improving student engagement and attendance leading to better literacy and numeracy outcomes for remote Indigenous children.

#### *Background*

The School Nutrition Program helps meet the needs of remote Indigenous communities, where schools have reported that children were not receiving a nutritious breakfast or lunch each day. This resulted in students who were tired, unable to concentrate, and not 'ready to learn'.

The Program provides for staffing and administrative costs involved in providing meals for students. Meal costs are met by the parents or carers of children from either income managed funds, or via private payment arrangements. In addition to meeting the nutritional needs of school-aged children in prescribed communities, the program employs 154 people (129, or around 83.8% of whom are local Indigenous people).

The program benefits an estimated 8,000 children currently enrolled in schools in prescribed communities. Indirectly the program also benefits the families of the students and the broader community through improved knowledge of nutrition and via employment opportunities.

## School Nutrition Program – Monitoring and Evaluation

### School Nutrition Program – Survey of Stakeholders

DEEWR conducted a **survey of SNP stakeholders** between March and June 2009<sup>15</sup>. The purpose of the survey was to inform SNP policy development and the Department's efforts to continuously improve program management. Four stakeholder groups were surveyed – parents of eligible children, program providers, Government Business Managers/Community Employment Brokers and school principals.

#### *Key Findings*

- 72.2% of parents surveyed believe that the SNP represents good value for money and 92.4% reported that they were satisfied with the program overall.

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<sup>15</sup> Findings from the School Nutrition Program Stakeholder Survey (March to June 2009), Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, August 2009  
<http://www.deewr.gov.au/Schooling/Pages/TheSchoolNutritionProgram.aspx>

- Over 80% of all parents, providers and school principals surveyed reported that the SNP had a positive impact on students' general behaviour.
- 86.8% of parents and 86.7% of school principals reported that the SNP had a positive impact on parental engagement with school.
- 100% of surveyed providers, 65.7% of parents and 58.8% of principals believed that the SNP has had a positive impact on student general health and wellbeing.
- 85.2% of GBMs and CEBs reported that the SNP has had a positive impact on families' and children's engagement with education, and 88.9% believe it has had a beneficial impact on children's general health and nutrition.
- 88.9% of providers, 94% of parents and 75% of principals considered that the SNP has had a positive impact on community understanding of the importance of good nutrition to their children's ability to learn.
- 78.2% of providers were satisfied or very satisfied with DEEWR's follow up to their queries, and 87% were satisfied or very satisfied with the general support they received from DEEWR.

#### School Nutrition Program - Performance Audit

The Department of Finance and Deregulation - Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs) conducted a **performance audit of the SNP** in 2008<sup>16</sup>. The report was published by the Minister for Finance and Deregulation on 25 September 2009.

The audit assessed whether SNP under NTER is operating efficiently and effectively and is progressing towards its intended outcomes. The main areas examined were governance arrangements, performance monitoring and reporting, progress towards implementation and challenges and lessons learnt.

#### *Key Findings*

The key findings of the performance audit are as follows:

- there are a number of positive practices and outcomes relating to program implementation

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<sup>16</sup> Performance Audit of the School Nutrition Program, Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs). June 2009. <http://www.finance.gov.au/oea/publications-and-reports.html>

- the achievement of SNP policy goal related to improving school attendance and engagement cannot be solely, or significantly, attributed to SNP
- there is a lack of adequate mechanisms to support effective program planning
- there are opportunities to improve a number of key elements that support good corporate governance arrangements
- the issue of payment for meals will need to be managed into the future
- the quality, completeness and reliability of current SNP performance data could be improved
- there is a need for a strategy by which, in time communities can take over the operation of their local SNP service, where there service is sustainable, or to be able to have an orderly exit.

## Supporting Families

### Family Support Package

#### *Key Elements*

The three existing elements of the Family Support Package in the Northern Territory include:

- **Safe Places** - 22 Safe Places in 15 remote communities plus Alice Springs and Darwin;
- **Mobile Child Protection Team** -10 highly qualified child protection workers, plus one Manager and one Administrative Officer; and
- **13 Remote Aboriginal Family & Community Workers.**

Protecting children and families and helping to build stronger and safer communities are key priorities, and fundamental to closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

#### *Background*

The Australian and Northern Territory Governments have been working collaboratively to fund and deliver this package since September 2007.

As part of the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory, **Safe Places**<sup>17</sup> are designed to address the multifaceted nature of the disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. The main purpose of the Safe Places is to provide a safe place for families to go when fleeing family violence. Each Safe Place facility is either a women's Safe House or a men's Cooling-Off Place.

The Safe Place facilities have a number of other functions including:

- group safety and well-being programs, which could include parenting programs, men's healing and well-being programs, behaviour change programs, and cultural healing programs;
- linkages with other local services and referrals to counselling, legal and support services; and
- short term crisis accommodation followed up by family interventions based on a plan developed in the Safe House, with the family itself.

Safe Places have been built or refurbished in: Ngukurr, Lajamanu, Nguiu, Kalkarindji, Apatula, Peppimenarti, Hermannsberg, Maningrida, Ramingining, Yarralin, Ti-Tree, Pmara Jutunta, Yuendumu, Beswick, Angurugu, Alice Springs and Darwin.

In addition to providing Safe Places for families experiencing violence, the Family Support Package also aims to increase the capacity of the Northern Territory Government's child protection workforce. The Australian Government has provided funding under this measure to the Northern Territory Government to continue to employ highly qualified child protection workers as part of a **Mobile Child Protection Team**.

**Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Workers (RAFCWs)** provide culturally appropriate liaison and referrals between the child protection system, services and Indigenous families. They also link people across a range of local services including police, night patrols, Safe Places, women's centres, health clinics, schools, youth centres and sexual assault referral centres.

## Playgroups

### *Key Elements*

Funding will continue for two existing **Intensive Support Playgroups (ISPs)** and three **Locational Supported Playgroups (LSPs)** in the Northern Territory. Services will also be expanded by funding an additional ISP and two additional

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<sup>17</sup> The main purpose of the Safe Places is to provide a safe place for families to go when fleeing family violence. Each Safe Place facility is either a women's Safe House or a men's Cooling-Off Place

LSPs making a total of eight playgroups in the Northern Territory. These playgroups for children from birth to five years old are facilitated by paid coordinators and integrate with other community services. ISPs also deliver mobile services across a number of sites.

This measure is part of the Supporting Families component of Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory. It supports strategic priorities in closing the gap targets for Indigenous people. Playgroups provide an effective 'soft entry' service point by which hard to reach children and their families can be linked to health, education and family support services. They also assist the transition to pre-school and school. They promote positive early childhood and development and contribute to increased child safety and well being. They provide extensive support to isolated and vulnerable families to stabilise their circumstances by building linkages to a wide range of community services.

The measure is being implemented in consultation with the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations and is aligned with other Closing the Gap measures to ensure an integrated approach to the implementation and delivery of early childhood and parenting assistance.

#### *Background*

The measure builds on the existing ISPs and LSPs which have been effective in strengthening the parenting skills of very disadvantaged Indigenous families and providing young Indigenous children with access to age and culturally appropriate activities. Supporting children and families at this critical developmental stage leads to improvements in life outcomes. Assistance will be increased to an estimated 410 vulnerable Indigenous families and children.

The existing playgroups are located in Katherine, Tennant Creek, Milingimbi, Numbulwar and Yuendumu. Katherine and Tennant Creek sites were established in 1997. Milingimbi, Numbulwar and Yuendumu commenced in 2009. Additional sites for the three additional playgroups are being selected in consultation with the Northern Territory Government, non-government organisations, local communities and other Australian Government agencies. The measures will run until June 2012.

These playgroups are a part of the Australian Governments broader Playgroup Program which funds over 8,000 Community Playgroups across Australia, over 100 Supported Playgroups to assist parents who experience barriers to accessing Community Playgroups, and additional ISPs and LSPs.

## Early Childhood

### *Key Elements*

Under the Early Childhood measure, four existing early childhood and family support projects in the Northern Territory will be expanded. These projects will include parenting skills, addressing family and child violence, child development and well being and linking families with other services such as housing, health and education.

This measure is part of the Supporting Families component of Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory. It relates to strategic priorities in closing the gap targets for Indigenous people. Early childhood and children's and family support services provide an ongoing opportunity for young children and their families to be in regular contact with people who are trained to identify and deal appropriately with cases of neglect and abuse.

The measure is being implemented in consultation with the Department of Health and Ageing, the Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations and is aligned with other Closing the Gap measures to ensure an integrated approach to the implementation and delivery of early childhood and parenting assistance.

### *Background*

These early childhood and family support projects have demonstrated success in supporting vulnerable Indigenous families to address complex issues such as substance abuse and family violence. Approximately 360 Indigenous children and their families will be assisted.

The Council for Aboriginal Alcohol Program Services Inc is providing services in a number of high needs locations across the Northern Territory. Core of Life's 'Pregnancy, Birth, Breastfeeding and Early Parenting program, Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation Child Nutrition program and Let's Start – Exploring Together for Indigenous Preschools are also delivered under the Family Support Program.

## Crèches

### *Key Elements*

The Australian Government's new agenda for Early Childhood Education and Child Care includes specific Indigenous components which interact and contribute to the Government's broader outcomes for Indigenous peoples through the Closing the Gap initiative. This includes improving access to high-

standard child care services for Indigenous Australians living in remote Northern Territory communities.

This measure will deliver:

- operational funding for eight new crèches already established;
- capital and operational funding for a ninth new crèche; and
- capital funding to complete upgrades to two more existing services.

Access to quality early childhood programs can improve the whole of life outcomes for young children through their exposure to early learning opportunities from an early age facilitating a smoother transition to school.

### *Background*

This measure supports and complements the work being undertaken through the broader early childhood agenda promoting access for remote Indigenous children to early childhood education and care.

Crèches provide children with the opportunity to engage in early learning and prepare for formal schooling. Crèches provide early childhood services to their communities and encourage local Indigenous women to engage in working and training in the early childhood area.

This proposal will build on and continue delivery of the work commenced previously under the Northern Territory Emergency Response crèche measure.

As a result of these initiatives, a total of nine new crèches will be established and 13 upgrades to existing crèches will be completed.

The crèches are being supported in communities where there is little or no other form of early learning or child care programs for children under five years. Crèches in these sites may in future provide the platform, in conjunction with state and territory government linkages, for the delivery of a range of early childhood programs for Indigenous children and their families supporting their early learning and care needs including universal access to pre-schools for Indigenous children.

## **Youth Diversion**

### *Key Elements*

The Youth Alcohol Diversion measure includes youth-focused recreational and social infrastructure services and activities that deliver safe, healthy and positive alternatives to substance abuse and other high risk behaviours. It will seed the

development of a sustainable network of youth services, in response to existing and emerging needs identified across targeted communities.

The measure contributes to the Government's strategic priorities in closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage by supporting the positive transition of young people to adulthood, by reducing substance misuse and contributing to the development of functional and resilient families.

### *Background*

The Review of the NTER recommended the development and implementation of a comprehensive strategy for youth development services, addressing both capital infrastructure and recurrent funding. This is in direct response to the high costs of providing such services in remote locations and because existing recreational infrastructure is often absent or in very poor condition.

This measure has two elements:

1. Funding for infrastructure and equipment, to allow for the refit/refurbishment of existing youth facilities, the construction of new infrastructure or the purchase of sporting equipment.
2. Youth activities and services to promote positive behaviours and provide support to young people and their families as a counterbalance to the negative effects of substance misuse.

The measure will be implemented over three years and will provide services and infrastructure to identified priority remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

The measure will target young people aged between 10 and 20 years, who make up over 30 per cent of the population in many of these communities. These young people will benefit from this measure through increased opportunities to engage in positive activities that will promote pathways to good health and wellbeing, community capacity building and participation in school, work and social networks.

Priority will be given to projects that build the capacity of young people and their families through involving them in the provision and ongoing management of the activities. Where possible, activities provided under this measure will also involve partnerships with community and regional bodies, including non-government service providers, corporate organisations, shires and the Northern Territory Government.

## Promoting Law and Order

The discussion and analysis for this section is based on data supplied by the Northern Territory Police and the Northern Territory Department of Justice.

The NTER was principally to address the safety and well-being of children. It is particularly difficult to collect and report outcomes for this objective. The short-term impact of the NTER may be to increase reported crime and it is important to 'see through' such a short-term effect. If people in the NTER areas are more able to report crimes, then in the long run, this is likely to have a positive effect as perpetrators will be more likely to be apprehended.

While data on assault and violent crime largely reflects crimes committed against adults, a general normalisation of violence is not good for children or adults and creates an environment in which crimes against children are more likely to occur. There is significant evidence that violence is normalised in many remote Indigenous communities.

The level of crime incidents reported in the Themis communities is high<sup>18</sup>. However, it is difficult to establish to what extent the number of incidents reported to police is related to an increased police presence. One way to do this is to establish the extent to which increased reporting is concentrated in Themis communities.

While this analysis can provide a broad guide, it is important to note that increased reporting has not just been occurring in Themis station communities. In some instances, an increased willingness to report incidents will have resulted in increased reporting in non-Themis communities.

There was a significant increase in the number of **alcohol-related incidents** reported to the police across the NTER communities, from 2,271 in 2006-07 to 3,047 in 2007-08. This may reflect the imposition of the alcohol bans, as alcohol-related incidents are now more likely to be recorded as the possession and consumption of alcohol is illegal across the NTER areas. It is worth noting that 34% of the increase in the number of alcohol-related incidents reported to police over this period was accounted for by the Themis communities.

The level of **domestic violence** reported to police across the NTER communities continues to increase with a 42% rise in domestic violence incidents from 2007-8 to 2008-9. From 2006-07 to 2008-09 there has been a 61% increase in the number of domestic violence incidents reported to police in the NTER communities.

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<sup>18</sup> Themis communities are where police stations were established as a result of the NTER.

The number of convictions for **child sexual assaults** committed in the NTER communities in the two years since the introduction of the NTER measures is 22. This compares to 14 convictions in the two years prior to the NTER. In 2005-06 and 2006-07 none of the convictions involved non Indigenous people. However, in the last two years (2007-08 and 2008-09) four non Indigenous people have been convicted for child sexual assault committed in the NTER communities.

Issues of child welfare go well beyond sexual abuse, indeed, sexual abuse is a subset of behaviours that can have a lasting negative effect on children's future. There is evidence that child neglect is a more common issue<sup>19</sup> than sexual assault in the NTER communities. This is confirmed by NT police data.

The total number of **confirmed incidences of child abuse** in the NTER communities rose, from 66 in 2006-07 to 227 in 2008-09. The 18 Themis communities accounted for around 39% of the increase in the number of child abuse reports made to police from 2006-07 to 2008-09.

## Police

It was announced on 6 October 2009 that five new permanent police stations will be built in Northern Territory priority locations under an agreement between the Australian and Northern Territory Governments. The locations were selected on the advice of the Northern Territory Police Commissioner. The Australian Government has allocated more than \$50 million over three years to the Northern Territory Government to build the stations in Gapuwiyak, Ramingining, Yarralin, Arlparra and Imanpa.

### *Key Elements*

Remote policing and substance abuse initiatives will continue to be implemented as part of the NTER. Funding will be provided to maintain the increased police presence and replace five temporary police facilities with permanent stations. Funding will also be provided for alcohol management plans, signage, licensing inspectors and other activities to reduce substance abuse.

### *Background*

Increased policing is a critical element to making communities safer, particularly for women and children. This measure represents a continuation of funding for promoting law and order activities and will help to ensure the protection of Indigenous children as part of the Australian Government's response to the "Little

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<sup>19</sup> Nettie Flaherty and Chris Goddard, Child neglect and the Little Children are Sacred Report, Children Australia, Volume 33, Number 1, 2008

Children are Sacred” Report. It is a key element of Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory.

## Law and Order

### *Key Elements*

The Australian Government will provide \$80.2 million for community justice measures as part of Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory to improve family and community safety. This includes the provision of night patrol services, interpreter services, legal assistance providers and the Welfare Rights Outreach Project.

### *Background*

The law and order measures are central to achieving the Government's Closing the Gap targets, in particular the safe communities building block.

**Night patrols** assist people at risk, including intoxicated people, juveniles, victims of violence and the homeless. The services patrol local community areas, identify people who may be at risk of coming into adverse contact with the criminal justice system and take them to an appropriate place, for example home or hospital.

The implementation of specific law and justice measures under the Northern Territory prescribed communities, has imposed increased demand on the existing resources of the **Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service (NTAIS)**. Additional funding was given to NTAIS for interpreting services in the 2009-10 Budget to communication with Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory with limited English to help them obtain access to information and advice regarding the Closing the Gap measures.

The funding also meets the Government's commitment to address the increased demand for **legal services** by Indigenous people following the introduction of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). Funding will allow legal assistance providers to assist high-need clients, including those requiring legal representation as a result of prosecutions in relation to measures introduced under the NTER. It will also provide assistance for clients requiring advice and support in regard to income management.

The **Welfare Rights Outreach Project** will receive funding to address the legal assistance needs of Indigenous clients relating to welfare payments issues.

# Welfare Reform and Employment

## Income Management

Approximately 15,500 individuals residing in prescribed areas in the Northern Territory, who receive income support and family payments, currently have their income managed.

Preliminary evidence suggests that communities within the Northern Territory subject to **income management** have experienced substantial benefits. A number of sources have identified that income management is having a positive impact, particularly for women and children, by increasing financial security for families on welfare and ensuring that a proportion of certain welfare payments are directed towards food, shelter and other essential family commitments.

Many Indigenous women and pensioners have reported that they have greater control over their finances, and are more able to provide for children as a result of income management. For this reason it is important that there is an orderly transition to a considered new policy consistent with the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975*.

The Government introduced legislation into Parliament on 18 March 2009 to ensure people subject to income management have access to the full range of appeal rights, including through the Social Security Appeals Tribunal and the Administrative Appeals Tribunal.

Financial management support services are provided to customers whose income is managed in the Northern Territory to help build financial resilience through the provision of money management education and support and financial counselling.

## Income Management – Monitoring and Evaluation

The Final Stores Post Licensing Monitoring Report sets out findings from FaHCSIA's review of community stores licensed for income management<sup>20</sup>. It investigates the impact of income management on community store operators and community residents who purchase food from the store using income-managed funds.

Income Management commenced in the first licensed community stores in September 2007 as part of the NTER. The interviews of store operators were conducted by officers from FaHCSIA. The interviews were conducted in three

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<sup>20</sup> Final Stores Post Licensing Monitoring Report, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs 2009.  
[http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter\\_reports/final\\_monitoring\\_report/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/nter_reports/final_monitoring_report/Pages/default.aspx)

rounds and were part of a process of routine monitoring of the first 18 months of store licensing. The findings in this report are based on 66 community stores that have been licensed, which includes all three rounds of interviews and synthesises all previous results.

The monitoring review of stores provides indications of positive results from store licensing and income management. Sixty-six store operators were interviewed. Store operators have first hand experience with the operation of income management and its effect on stores and communities, making them well-placed to comment on income management. It should be noted that the results are only observations, perceptions and opinions of store operators. Specifically, store operators report that:

**The overall impact of income management has been positive for communities.**

- Customer shopping habits have changed significantly in most stores, with 68.2% of store operators reporting an increase in the amount of healthy food purchased. This includes items such as fruit and vegetables, as well as dairy foods and meat.
- Responses suggest that sales of some goods, such as cigarettes, are unchanged (73.3% of operators who answered this question reported no change).
- Community residents, particularly women, are telling store operators that they now have more control over their money, with greater capacity to manage humbug.
- Initial mistrust and confusion about income management has abated over time.
  - Store operators are reporting that feedback is generally positive, especially from women, once people understand how it works.
  - Most operators reported that people had a good understanding of income management. Older people were said to have most difficulty understanding income management.

**The overall impact of income management has been positive for stores.**

- Many stores reported an increase in turnover (63.6%) with a consequent capacity to stock a wider range of goods, including fresh fruit and vegetables.

- Greater certainty about future turnover has meant that store operators are more confident about ordering in a wider range of goods.
- The transition to income management for stores was difficult in most cases, with increased workloads (50.1% of operators who answered the question). The workload became easier over time as the understanding of income management improved and automated processes were established.
- The support provided to store operators during the transition to income management through the on-site presence of Income Management Officers (IMOs) for the first few weeks of income management was helpful overall (65.2% of operators).

**The BasicsCard has been overwhelmingly seen as a positive by stores.**

- Eighty per cent of stores interviewed (after the introduction of the BasicsCard) stated that the BasicsCard is a good thing for stores and communities.
  - This is primarily because the BasicsCard allows income management customers more portability between stores and regions with their funds.
- Determining a customer's BasicsCard balance is a major issue for many stores. The BasicsCard balance issue can be burdensome for stores when customers do not know their balances as customers often try to purchase more than they can afford or use the store's phone to contact Centrelink about the balance.

## Financial Support Services

In recognition of the important role that **financial management support services** play in supporting welfare payment reform the Government funded a range of new and expanded services in 2008-09 to help people in prescribed communities build financial capability and resilience.

Services are free, voluntary and confidential and open to everyone, however, people who are being income managed are given priority.

Money management services are delivered in remote locations with high Indigenous populations, with assistance from a small number of financial counsellors to help with complex issues.

Financial counselling and money management information and education are service strategies funded under the Financial Management Program (FMP). The

FMP is an ongoing program that aims to build financial resilience and wellbeing for vulnerable people.

The FMP helps people across a range of income and financial literacy levels to manage their money, overcome financial adversity, participate in the social and economic lives of their communities and plan for the medium to long term.

Government priorities supported by the FMP include the response to the global financial crisis, welfare payment reform (including income management), Closing the Gap, social inclusion, protection of children at risk, gender equality, housing and problem gambling.

## Coordination

### Coordination and Policy Advice

#### *Key Elements*

The Australian Government supports ongoing leadership and continued coordination in relation to Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory.

This includes increased monitoring and evaluation, including a full evaluation of the impact of the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory measures in 2011-12.

#### *Background*

Ongoing leadership and coordination of the measures is necessary to support the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory, including continued provision of the management of governance arrangements, administrative support and policy advice.

A rigorous program evaluation framework is essential to understand the impact of the intervention in achieving the Governments targets in the Northern Territory. This measure will provide funding for: community profiles; impact studies and synopses; government activity monitoring; and a final evaluation report.

### Community Engagement Measure

#### *Key Elements*

The Australian Government supports ongoing engagement with Indigenous communities, with a particular focus on prescribed communities in the Northern Territory. Funding will be used to employ and develop the skills of 15 Indigenous community members to act as full-time Indigenous Engagement Officers (IEOs) in the Northern Territory. Additional funding will also deliver Community Engagement Workshops for members of prescribed communities on a local

government area basis; Leadership Development Workshops that will reinforce the work of IEOs by developing leadership skills in the wider community; and a Community Transition Program for each community with an IEO that will equip these communities to transition to the new environment.

Funding will also be used to develop a range of media and communication activities and tools in order to promote better engagement between the Government and Indigenous communities.

#### *Background*

The community engagement measure builds on the successes of the 2008-09 NTER - *Community Engagement* measure, which expires on 30 June 2009. Its purpose is to continue to engage and involve Indigenous people at the community and local level in policy development and service delivery. The measure continues the Government's response to concerns that there was no significant consultation during the initial roll out of the NTER. The measure also reflects the Government's commitment to resetting the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia through greater engagement and an evidence-based approach to Indigenous policy making, and responds to a key recommendation of the report of the NTER Review Board.

The measure will employ up to 15 local Indigenous people to assist selected communities in Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory. Their role will be to communicate information on the intervention to their communities, foster greater community input into Government decision making, and build trust between communities and the Government. Engagement Workshops, Leadership Development Workshops and Community Transition Programs will be used to build local capacity and distribute benefits throughout the wider community.

A range of media and communication activities and tools will also be developed to promote and support better engagement.

### **Commonwealth Ombudsman Support for the NTER**

#### *Key Elements*

The Commonwealth Ombudsman to continue independent oversight of Australian Government service delivery to Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The Ombudsman will achieve this through the delivery of effective complaint handling, the identification and resolution of broader systemic issues and by working collaboratively with Australian Government agencies to improve public administration, service delivery and to support complaint handling in relation to service delivery to Indigenous communities within those agencies.

Through this measure the Ombudsman's office to has a presence in remote Indigenous communities in order to provide information about the role of the Commonwealth Ombudsman, to obtain feedback from community residents about the delivery of Indigenous programs and to take complaints and provide information back to complainants about investigation outcomes and any broader issues

### *Background*

Experience to date indicates that many Indigenous Australians, especially those in remote communities, have had limited interaction with government agencies and are either confused by what is being implemented, the impact on them or how or who to complain to if they are dissatisfied. The Ombudsman is able to play a role as a 'neutral' third party to either provide further information or assurance about government programs or to receive and handle complaints.

Investigation of individual complaints and systemic issues by the Ombudsman is a cost effective way of providing review for individuals and communities affected by Australian Government programs. It also provides for early identification of broader systemic issues which often cut across agencies and jurisdictions. The Ombudsman provides an independent oversight role that is an essential safety net and risk management tool for government and Indigenous Australians and offers a whole of government focus on improving public administration in this area.

Through investigation of individual complaints and systemic issues, outreach activities and liaison with government agencies, the Ombudsman's office has identified and highlighted cross-agency issues and opportunities to improve the effectiveness of the programs for Indigenous Australians. The Ombudsman's office has a well developed working relationship with the Northern Territory Ombudsman. This measure will allow for a closer working relationship between Commonwealth and Territory Ombudsman offices in order to identify issues and effectively resolve complaints which involve multiple agencies and cross Commonwealth, Territory and local government jurisdictions.