
Submission to the Productivity Commission on the Preliminary Findings Report: Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Identifying Sectors for Reform

27 October 2016

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This submission is primarily focused on the Productivity Commission’s chapter on human services in remote Indigenous communities. The Centre for Independent Studies Indigenous Research Program recently released a report, *Mapping the Indigenous Program and Funding Maze*,¹ that highlights issues with the way programs and services are currently delivered to remote Indigenous communities. We note that the Productivity Commission has referenced this report in relation to program evaluations, but believe there are further learnings from our research that could be of benefit to the Productivity Commission.

The Preliminary Findings Report makes the point that “comprehensive, comparable data on government expenditure for remote communities are not readily available, due to the complex and fragmented nature of funding arrangements” and that better coordination and service integration is needed.² The Report also notes that more stable policy settings are needed as Indigenous people and communities are often victims of the political cycle and the whims of politicians.³ Each new government wants to put their own stamp on a particular policy or program. But new policies often recycle failed policies of the past, or throw good programs out with the ‘bathwater’. The end result is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have become dependent on government “...to pick their favoured programs...and determine resource allocations”.⁴ Rather than leading to improved outcomes, such top-down government controlled measures have served only to further disempower Indigenous people.

In seeking to improve how human services in remote Indigenous communities are delivered, we would like to make the following points:

- To improve Indigenous outcomes, there needs to be better management of overall funding and a strategy to coordinate how programs are delivered. We agree with the Preliminary Findings Report to “bundle services through tendering processes” and would like to note some recent work the NSW government is doing to adopt a standard human services contract and NGO Registration scheme for human services.⁵
- There must be a mechanism to enable more stable policy settings and greater Indigenous control in addressing the issues affecting Indigenous communities, such as the Empowered Communities recommendation for an Indigenous Policy Productivity Council (IPPC) that would

allow for policy and programs to have longevity beyond the political cycle.⁶

- High levels of Indigenous disadvantage are not related to Indigeneity but are the result of ineffective policies and lack of opportunity — specifically in relation to education, employment and private enterprise. Although there are issues of economy of scale in remote communities, there are legislative changes that could be made to enable private enterprise on Indigenous land. The latest Social Justice and Native Title report recommends identifying options for leveraging Indigenous property rights for economic development purposes.⁷ See also our reports on the need for private property rights on remote Indigenous land — *Private Housing on Indigenous Land* and *Healthy Stores, Healthy Communities: The Impact of Outback Stores on Remote Indigenous Australians*.⁸

The Centre for Independent Studies (CIS)

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¹ Hudson, S, 2016 Mapping the Indigenous Program and Funding Maze, The Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney available at <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2016/09/rr18.pdf>? accessed 24 October 2016.

² Productivity Commission, 2016, Introducing Competition and Informed User Choice into Human Services: Identifying Sectors for Reform, Preliminary Findings Report, page 120

³ As above, page 128

⁴ Empowered Communities, 2015, Empowered Communities Design Report, Wunan Foundation Inc, page 6

⁵ NSW Government, 2016 Procurement available at <http://www.procurement.nsw.gov.au/before-you-supply/ngos-providing-human-services> accessed 26 October 2016

⁶ Empowered Communities, 2015, Empowered Communities Design Report, Wunan Foundation Inc,

⁷ The Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015, *Social Justice and Native Title Report 2015*

⁸ Hughes, H, Hughes, M and Hudson, S, 2010 Private Housing on Indigenous Land, Policy Monograph 113, The Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney available at <https://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2015/07/pm113.pdf>? accessed 10 August 2016 and Hudson, S, 2010 Healthy Stores, Healthy Communities: The Impact of Outback Stores on Remote Indigenous Australians, Issues Analysis 122, The Centre for Independent Studies, Sydney available at <http://www.cis.org.au/app/uploads/2015/07/ia122.pdf>? accessed 26 October 2016