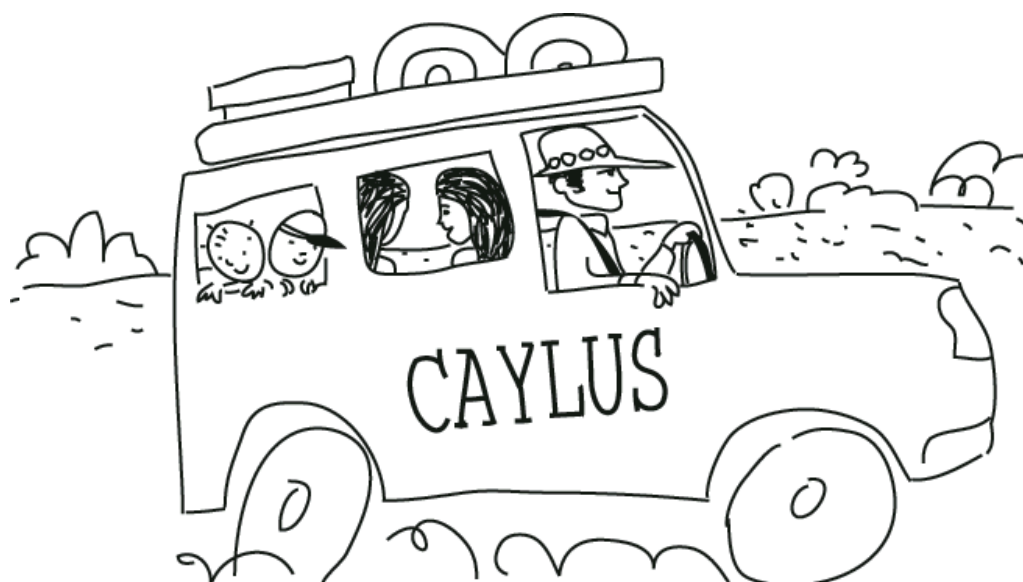


Feedback on the draft report of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory



Central Australian Youth Link-Up Service – Tangentyere Council  
December 2019

CAYLUS submitted to the Inquiry and highlighted the central role poverty plays in the disadvantage suffered by the Indigenous population of the NT, and the failure of Federal income security systems that is at the base of this poverty. The draft report does not address this basic problem which is the responsibility of the Commonwealth. To not address this failure will perpetuate the social problems that the various services are attempting to alleviate. We propose that until this basic level of support is provided, there will be no closing of the Gap.

The first paragraph of the draft report on page iv is as follows:

“Families and communities in the Northern Territory possess important strengths and heritage but many also face significant adversity. Children in the Northern Territory are four times more likely than Australian children overall to come into contact with the child protection system, and they face higher rates of socioeconomic disadvantage.”

We think the second sentence should read “Families and communities in the Northern Territory possess important strengths and heritage but many also face significant adversity. Children in the Northern Territory are four times more likely than Australian children overall to come into contact with the child protection system, **because** they face higher rates of socioeconomic disadvantage.”

This recognition of the basic cause of the issues faced by Indigenous children shows that the way forward to addressing the problems are to address the socioeconomic disadvantage.

The report alludes to this at the end of the next paragraph in the sentence “The problems are structural and bigger than any individual entity.” We concur and suggest the Commission should consider holding the Commonwealth to account over the failure of their income security system. The draft report in the section Terms of Reference (page v) states that “the Royal Commission found that investment is not rigorously tracked, monitored or evaluated to ensure it is appropriately distributed and directed.” We suggest that the Commission recommend that Commonwealth look into its investment through Centrelink and evaluates the effect of its policies and procedures in terms of the substantial damage done through impoverishing the Indigenous community. This impoverishment has happened through a range of policies that have effected the systematic withdrawal of welfare entitlements without

providing people with an alternative means to earn income and sustain themselves and their families. Recent dialogue around the need to increase welfare payments nationally shows that this is a problem that is effecting on welfare across Australia and not just in the NT. However as with a range of social issues, the effects of this withdrawal of welfare are particularly acute for families living in remote NT Communities.

On page 267 the draft report mentions a “shift to a public health approach” which would support strategies such as those proposed above through addressing the basic needs of the Indigenous population. Any health professional will know that Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a good analytical tool for evaluation of the range of strategies proposed. Until the base of the pyramid is secure, there can be no progress in higher level engagements. Currently, the community suffers the effects of the failure of the Centrelink system and other systems in meeting the physiological needs of the Indigenous population in the NT. This is a Commonwealth responsibility and until it is addressed, no real progress can be made.

