

# Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

An alliance of the CLC, NLC, CAALAS, NAAJA and AMSANT

Human Services Inquiry  
Productivity Commission  
Locked bag 2, Collins East Street  
Melbourne VIC 8003

Lodged online via: <http://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/human-services/make-submission>

Tuesday 2 August 2016

To whom it may concern,

## **RE: Competitive tendering in NT service delivery**

I write on behalf of the Aboriginal Peak Organisations of the Northern Territory (APO NT) to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission on the Human Services Inquiry. I am grateful to the Commission for granting a submission to APO NT. Due to the recent Four Corners Report into juvenile detention in the Northern Territory, APO NT has had an unprecedented request for support, which has delayed completion of this submission.

Since the NT Intervention, APO NT has noted an increased presence of mainstream NGOs in service delivery and development work in Aboriginal communities in the NT, which has contributed to the fragmentation and loss of service delivery, lack of coordination with Aboriginal organisations, lack of genuine capacity development outcomes and indeed the gradual erosion, undermining and loss of Aboriginal controlled service organisations.

APO NT sought to avoid such counter-productive outcomes with the recent Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) funding round under its competitive tendering process, and conveyed our concerns to the Minister and departmental staff. In particular, we highlighted APO NT's work in conjunction with key NGOs over a number of years to develop a set of Partnership Principles for mainstream NGOs that aim to foster a partnership approach focused on increasing the capacity of Aboriginal controlled organisations and service delivery. A copy of the NGO Partnership Principles can be viewed in **Attachment A** and a list of the eighteen NGOs that have endorsed the Principles can be found in **Attachment B**.

At an APO NT forum held in 2014, between Aboriginal NGOs and mainstream NGOs seeking to operationalise the Principles, representatives from mainstream NGOs re-confirmed their desire to work together with Aboriginal organisations and communities to promote and improve Aboriginal community control of service delivery and other initiatives. The outcomes of this forum are attached, **Attachment C** and **Attachment D**.

The IAS tender process was an opportunity for government and mainstream organisations to put the NGO Partnership Principles into practice. APO NT wrote to Minister Scullion on 10 September 2014 to seek the Minister's support to ensure that the tender process would result in an increase in services and programs delivered by Aboriginal organisations, employing Aboriginal people, and that Aboriginal organisations currently delivering services are not disadvantaged through the tendering process. APO NT also requested to meet with the Minister to discuss how safeguards could be in place to ensure Aboriginal organisations weren't disadvantaged; how the cultural competence and integrity of the process will be ensured; and how the Principles could be advanced.

APO NT understands that applying an open competitive tendering process to Aboriginal specific areas of service delivery, such as Aboriginal primary health care, Aboriginal legal services and

activities based on Aboriginal land, such as rangers programs, is inherently counter-productive. The Aboriginal controlled organisations delivering these services are not only best suited for doing so, but provide the priority outcomes that the Government is seeking in terms of sustainable Aboriginal employment as well as experience and engagement in governance and management, and the development of community self-reliance and responsibility. Government investment would be better placed in supporting and funding the further development of these organisations based on demonstrated outcomes and quality assurance in governance, management and service delivery.

Such an approach would allow longer term funding and a 'core services' approach, based on equity and evidence-based needs assessment, as is currently exemplified by the successful Aboriginal community controlled primary health care sector.

APO NT believes that grass roots Aboriginal organisations should always be regarded as the first priority for delivering services to Aboriginal communities.

However, where there are currently insufficient Aboriginal organisations or Aboriginal capacity to deliver specific services or programs, APO NT believes that better outcomes can be achieved through an approach that seeks to leverage government investment to develop additional Aboriginal capacity and service delivery organisations through partnership approaches, such as outlined in relation to the APO NT NGO Partnership Principles. APO NT has demonstrated the considerable goodwill and willingness of mainstream NGO service providers to accept and support such an approach. What is missing is government support and commitment to ensure that its processes of investment and tendering enable and favour such outcomes.

In summary, APO NT does not support a competitive tendering approach to funding service delivery to Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory. Many Aboriginal organisations do not have the capacity or resources to compete directly with larger not-for-profit organisations. Instead of enforcing competition, the Government should be promoting cooperative and strategic collaborative arrangements. This can be achieved by incorporating the APO NT NGO Partnership Principles in tendering processes to encourage non-Aboriginal NGOs and other providers to adopt the principles when considering tendering for service provision, are made fully aware of context in which they intent of working and to achieve the expansion of Aboriginal controlled organisations delivering services and programs to Aboriginal communities.

For further information relating to this submission and to the Partnership Principles, please contact the APO NT Coordinator, Brionee Noonan via email: \_\_\_\_\_ or via phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Yours sincerely,

John Paterson

On behalf of the APO NT CEO's

<b>John Paterson</b> CEO, AMSANT	<b>Joe Morrison</b> CEO, NLC	<b>David Ross</b> Director, CLC	<b>Priscilla Collins</b> CEO, NAAJA	<b>Eileen Van Iersel</b> CEO, CAALAS
-------------------------------------	---------------------------------	------------------------------------	--	---