

INTRODUCING COMPETITION AND INFORMED USER CHOICE INTO HUMAN SERVICES: IDENTIFYING SECTORS FOR REFORM – PRELIMINARY FINDINGS REPORT

The Regional Services Reform Unit within the Western Australian Government provides the following information in relation to the preliminary findings report.

Our submission deals primarily with human services in remote indigenous communities (Chapter 7 of the Report). However our response encompasses issues covered elsewhere in the preliminary findings report, including social housing and grant-based family and community services.

We agree with preliminary findings 7.1 and 8.1. However we are of the view that concepts of competition or contestability are not particularly relevant to the delivery of human services to indigenous Australians living in remote communities in Western Australia, which are characterized by:

- Small and highly dispersed populations;
- Little or nil market-based economy, including a private housing market;
- Long-term social and economic disadvantage; and
- Unique and highly-localized cultural and language blocs within a region.

More often than not the immediate challenge in a remote community is the absence or infrequency of a local service. Different approaches will be required to build capacity, capability and sustainability in remote service delivery, such as:

- greater coordination and collaboration between the State and Commonwealth Governments and within each Government; and
- Longer, bigger and fewer service contracts being issued to regionally-based service providers.

We agree that the effectiveness of human services could be improved by focusing on the needs and preferences of the user. Through regional services reform, the Western Australian Government had identified that government-funded services for remote areas will, over time, be refocused on:

- outcomes rather than outputs;
- the needs and circumstances of regions and remote communities;
- the needs of Aboriginal families, including cultural dimensions, kinship obligations and language preferences; and
- supporting a better start for Aboriginal children and reducing the risk of higher-cost interventions in adulthood.

To trial and support these changes, the Western Australian Government has committed to 10 priority actions in the first two years of the reform. These include the spatial mapping of services, and projects to strengthen place-based services and the involvement of remote communities in the design and delivery of services. More information is available

at: <http://regionalservicesreform.wa.gov.au/>