
Reviewing the Service Performance of Australian Governments*

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The Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision is a historic and unique undertaking in measuring the comparative service performance of governments. The Review has been made possible only by a very high level of cooperation across many service agencies in all jurisdictions around the country.

That cooperation is itself a reflection of wider recognition by Australian governments of the contribution that such an exercise can make in assisting them to improve services to the community.

Anyone who has grappled with the Review's annual publication, the *Report on Government Services* – or 'Blue Book' as it is known – will appreciate that this is no small undertaking. The Blue Book provides detailed information on the effectiveness and efficiency of a dozen or so areas of government service delivery. These include services like education, health and aged care, that are vital to the living standards of Australians. How governments perform in delivering those services is, therefore, an important issue for the community. The consequent political sensitivities underline the significance of governments' commitment to the Review.

I will begin by briefly outlining where the Review came from and why, and how it is all put together. I will cover:

- the background to the Review and its rationale;
- the guiding principles of the Review and how it operates;

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- the coverage and scope of the Review;
 - the ‘efficiency and effectiveness’ framework that is at the core of its reporting;
 - the development of performance indicators;
 - and the particular task, recently endorsed by Heads of Government, of improving reporting on services to indigenous people.

Then I would like to talk about some aspects of the Review in greater depth. The Review is not without its critics. I wish to explore some of the issues that have been raised, including recent well-publicised criticisms by senior members of the NSW judiciary. Finally, I will come to some of the challenges that face the Review in the future.

Why measure performance?

The Review was established in 1993 by Heads of Government in recognition of two things: the importance of government-provided services to community living standards, and the scope for different jurisdictions to learn from each other in improving service delivery and achieving better outcomes.

On the first point, the Review embraces services as diverse as education, health, justice, emergency management, public housing and community services spanning child care to aged care. Together, they add up to over \$65 billion in expenditure (or around one-third of total government spending). That’s equivalent to around 10 per cent of Australia’s GDP.

While all Australians benefit from these services in one way or another, they are particularly important to the less privileged. They also serve broader community purposes which transcend the needs of particular users, including the need for high standards of public health, citizenship and ‘law and order’, without which no society or economy can function effectively.

The services covered by the Review have traditionally been provided by governments because the private sector was generally seen as either not being up to the job (housing) or simply inappropriate (justice). With the passage of time and improved capacity of private provision, there has been some reassessment of where the appropriate boundaries lie. We have also seen the development of funding and delivery systems which effectively integrate public and private roles, according to their respective strengths.

However, assessing the performance of government in delivering services for which there is (or can be) no well developed market, and where criteria such as access and

equity loom large, is no simple matter. Individually governments can set objectives and collect information which can at least reveal trends in their individual performance over time, but how do they know what is *potentially* achievable or, to use an overworked expression, ‘best practice’?

Federations provide constituent governments with an important mechanism for doing just that – to compare performance and learn from what other jurisdictions are doing and how they are doing it. Such comparisons are facilitated in Federal systems by commonalities in institutional and governance arrangements, community expectations and other elements that bedevil international comparisons.

That said, the ability to realise the potential for inter-jurisdictional learning depends on having access to consistent and comparable data. That is where the Review comes in.

The Review was established in an era of reform. It was congruent with the other reforms taking place in the public sector as governments became more focussed on getting greater value out of taxpayers’ dollars – more focussed also on what sort of outcomes they were looking for and whether they were being achieved. Heads of government saw an opportunity to learn from each other in improving service delivery and getting better outcomes. But at that time much of the data which existed were fragmented and lacking in consistency. More systematic comparative data were seen as essential, and the Review was set up to provide it.

This process has been derided by some as part and parcel of the much maligned ‘economic rationalism’ or (even worse) ‘new managerialism’. Putting ‘-isms’ on the end of words can indeed make them sound sinister and ideological. But the reality is that governments were genuinely motivated by the need to provide a more sustainable basis for raising the living standards of their citizens. By the mid-1980s, irrational economic policies and tolerance of under-performance by old-style managers were simply no longer viable.

How the Review is structured

Such a large and interactive process, covering so many areas and levels of government, obviously requires a carefully designed structure. The structure which governments devised has elements of both ‘tops down’ and ‘bottoms up’ approaches. It is a whole-of-government enterprise involving people from line agencies through to central agencies (see slide).

A Steering Committee comprising senior representatives from central agencies in the Commonwealth, States and Territories has overall responsibility for the Review.

It is they who make the decisions about what will be included in the Report and have responsibility for signing it off.

Supporting the Steering Committee are working groups for each of the 12 sectors. They comprise representatives from the 80 or so relevant line agencies in all jurisdictions and form the “engine room” of the Review. Many working groups also have observers from various statistical agencies – like the ABS and Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – who provide much of the data in the Report.

The Industry Commission was originally asked to chair the Review and provide its secretariat, and the Productivity Commission has continued those functions. In both of its roles – that is, Chair and secretariat – the Commission brings to the Review the advantage of its statutory independence, the transparency of its processes, and a community-wide focus. As Chairman of the Commission, it has been my responsibility to assume the role of Chair of the Review’s Steering Committee. I should emphasise though that I am speaking on my own account and not for the Steering Committee.

Some guiding principles

The Review’s task is to provide objective information relevant to assessing government performance. The aim is to facilitate well informed judgments and sound public policy on government service provision.

There are three broad principles underpinning the work of the Review:

- A focus on *outcomes*. The Review’s role is to shine light on the extent to which the objectives of these services have been met. In practice, it is generally easier to report on outputs and their characteristics than high level outcomes. Nevertheless, the Review’s approach represents a major departure from the traditional focus on reporting on *inputs* – that is, on what resources were used rather than how effectively.
- A concern for *completeness*. The performance indicator frameworks are developed with a view to assessing performance against all important objectives. This also facilitates a more robust assessment – as there are many dimensions of performance.
- And thirdly, for obvious reasons, the Review seeks *comparability*. Wherever possible the Blue Book presents data which are comparable across all jurisdictions. Indeed, given the objectives of this national review, reporting comparable data has a higher priority than using a better indicator that would allow no comparisons to be made.

There are two main reasons for the focus on comparative information:

- the first is to enhance incentives for agencies to address substandard performance, by promoting transparency of differences in performance; and
- the second is to enable agencies to identify peers in other jurisdictions that are delivering better or more cost-effective services, from which they can learn.

The coverage and scope of the Review

Since the release of the first *Report on Government Services* in 1995, the scope of the Report has expanded considerably as more data have become available. For example, in the beginning there was only one health chapter with coverage limited to public acute care hospitals. The health section of the Report now also covers health management issues and general practice. In the future, we hope that it will encompass community care as well.

The Review now covers sixteen individual service delivery areas, which can be grouped under six broader categories.

- In the area of *education*, it covers schools and vocational education and training.
- In *health*, as just noted, the Review covers public hospitals, general practice and key health management issues (mental health and breast cancer).
- The *justice* section covers police services, court administration and corrective services.
- And the *community services* part of the Review covers aged care services, services for people with a disability, children's services, and protection and support services.
- The Review also has chapters on *emergency management* (fire, ambulance) and *housing* (public and community, plus rent assistance).

I'm often asked why we cover some areas of government service delivery but not others – for example, why not include employment services or transport? For a start the focus is on social services rather than *economic* infrastructure, so areas like transport, energy or communications are ruled out. These have already been the subject of a separate, but comparable exercise in State/Commonwealth performance monitoring. That process produced the series of Red Books, through the 1990s, which the Commission has continued on its own account in a modified form.

As for including other possible services in the social domain, while there are no hard and fast rules, the Review has generally given priority to those services which are provided by all States and Territories. Generally the Commonwealth will also

have some responsibility in such areas, though the mix varies considerably from one service to another. So we don't cover employment services, for example, because they are predominantly a Commonwealth responsibility. (That doesn't necessarily mean that such services escape performance scrutiny. For example, the Productivity Commission will shortly be issuing a draft report on the Job Network, as part of its nine month public inquiry.)

The 'efficiency *and* effectiveness' framework

For each sector that the Review reports on, a performance indicator framework has been developed. Within this framework, performance is reported in terms of efficiency *and* effectiveness.

This should dispel any perception that the Review is a mere bean-counting exercise. If anything, more attention is given in its reporting to the effectiveness of government services. The framework seeks to draw a picture for the reader about performance in all of its dimensions. Even where no data are currently available, we will include a necessary indicator in anticipation of being able to complete it more fully in future reports.

So what do these two concepts mean?

- *Efficiency* relates to how well organisations use their resources to produce units of services. The generally used indicator of efficiency is the level of (government) inputs per unit of output.
- *Effectiveness* relates to how well a service achieves governments' agreed objectives. Effectiveness indicators in the Blue Book include:
 - access and equity;
 - appropriateness;
 - quality; and
 - actual outcomes.

As anyone in the public sector will know, service provision can sometimes involve a tradeoff between effectiveness and measured efficiency. A change in service delivery may increase the level of resources per unit of output (resulting in what might look like a decrease in efficiency) but lead to better overall outcomes. For example, the accessibility or quality of the service may improve, resulting in a more than proportionate benefit to the community.

The Review itself does not seek to analyse such trade-offs. Its role is to present objective information that allows closer analysis of this kind, but not to make

judgements about how individual governments are performing. This may seem like a “cop out”. But it was always intended that the Blue Book would be an information source; not a policy document. From a practical standpoint, it is already a large tome – including analysis which led to judgements would make it a great deal bigger, and a lot slower to produce. But the main reason for not taking the extra step is that that is not something for which a cooperative inter-governmental exercise – requiring a measure of consensus – is suited. The more judgemental reviews need to take place within jurisdictions, where detailed contextual information is available, or by bodies such as the Productivity Commission, which (in its own right) can pursue an intensive and independent assessment.

Developing performance indicators

The performance indicator frameworks are developed by the individual working groups. For example, the health working group constructed the reporting framework for public acute hospitals shown in the slide. Thus, for example, quality of care – as a key dimension of effectiveness – has three sets of indicators, relating to patient satisfaction, the incidence of ‘misadventure’ and process/accreditation.

While the ultimate aim is to provide quality data that are comparable and timely, reporting in all service areas has been a journey of (continuous) improvement, sometimes from very patchy beginnings. In the hospitals framework, for example, some indicators are still marked for future development.

I’ll come back to this later when I talk about some of the issues which have been raised about the Review. For now, suffice to say that great importance is placed on developing indicator frameworks which will provide a picture of what performance information you will need to assess whether objectives are being met – even if all of that information isn’t immediately available.

Improving Indigenous reporting

In May 1997, the Prime Minister asked the Review to give particular attention to the performance of mainstream services in meeting the needs of Indigenous Australians. This request was reinforced by COAG in November 2000 when heads of government agreed that ministerial councils should develop action plans, performance reporting strategies and benchmarks – to facilitate review of progress.

Collecting such data presents some challenges. The task is complicated by the administrative processes for many data collections that do not distinguish between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The method and level of identification of

Indigenous people varies across jurisdictions. Many Indigenous people seeking and receiving government services are not recorded or only sometimes recorded. Sometimes there's a box to tick on a self-identification basis – sometimes there's a box which an administrator fills on a sight basis – sometimes there's no box at all. In some areas, notably justice, there are sensitivities about the potential for identification to be seen as prejudicial.

While some progress was made in the 2002 Report, there are still major gaps. We have no separate data at all for Indigenous people in the areas of general practice, breast cancer, mental health, court administration, fire services, and supported accommodation (see slide).

But we are making headway. In the 2002 Report we reported for the first time on ambulance services, juvenile justice and Commonwealth Rent Assistance. And in the housing area we have now reported against a full performance indicator framework for the Aboriginal Rental Housing Program – the first *targeted* indigenous program to be covered.

With the efforts being made by ministerial councils to make progress in this area, I look forward to further improvements – both to coverage and quality – in future reports.

Common misunderstandings about the Review

“It's the Productivity Commission's Report”

If you have seen or heard media reports on the 2002 Report (and it's a bit hard to miss them) you could be forgiven for thinking that the Blue Book is a Productivity Commission creation. As explained earlier, that is clearly not the case – yes, I am the Chair and yes, we do provide the Secretariat which pulls the Report together each year – but its ownership resides firmly with Commonwealth, State and Territory governments. Nothing goes into it on which they have not broadly agreed.

I admit that this can be a bit confusing, especially when comments by governments themselves attribute the report to the Productivity Commission. Depending on the results in question, governments may either use the Productivity Commission's involvement to distance themselves from the Report's findings or to endorse their performance record.

It is perhaps inevitable that the Productivity Commission's role will be portrayed in this way– the Commission's involvement contributes to the Report's objectivity and provides it with some authority as an independently produced document.

On that matter, with some recent press hyperbole in mind, I'd like to make one small point. When you look closely at the performance of individual jurisdictions over the various sectors, it becomes apparent that they all perform well in some areas or facets of a given service and not so well in others. Overall, there are no "star" jurisdictions and no "duds" either. There are so many factors that are important in appraising those performance results – for example, population, demographics, geography – that each jurisdiction has a particular story to tell.

I should also note that while the Productivity Commission provides the Secretariat for the Review, the Report has become increasingly important as a resource for its own research into social issues. As many of you would be aware, these days the Commission's research and inquiries range over a variety of important social as well as economic topics. The Gambling Report is perhaps the most visible example. But we have also undertaken projects in the areas of health, education, public housing and other government services.

"It is a benchmarking Report"

This is a common misunderstanding about the Report, and in some respects goes to different conceptions about what benchmarking is. For example, some people see benchmarking as a way of identifying best practice, while others see it as setting a minimum standard to be achieved. I'm not going to go into the merits or otherwise of these approaches – what I can say is that the *Report on Government Services* does not in itself purport to establish benchmarks of best practice.

Having said that, the Report has become a useful vehicle by which governments can determine their own relevant benchmarks. They may need to make adjustments for those differences which the Review is careful to explain, but the data provide a good starting point. They may go about this task by looking at their performance in comparison to other jurisdictions which are of like size, or deliver kindred services; or the Report may lead them to ask questions about where and how they can do things better and to consult more closely with other governments.

Some criticisms of the Review

"The data are imperfect"

Certainly some of the data in the Report *are* less than perfect. They may be lacking in comparability, completeness, or timeliness; but that doesn't mean they are not worth reporting – provided any such deficiencies are clearly explained.

The Review goes to considerable lengths to obtain data of consistency and quality. Each working group has a data manual which sets out in detail, the counting rules and definitions for each set of data to be provided. All jurisdictions, having agreed on the manuals, then strive to provide their data in a way that is consistent with the manual, overseen by the working groups and Steering Committee.

A great deal of the Report's data is provided by specialist organisations like the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. They also serve as expert observers on working groups and undertake data collection and manipulation on behalf of the Review. Data provided by such bodies have been through a validation process – even so, they will often include caveats.

We are focussed on the ultimate objective of providing robust, comparable data. But the Steering Committee will also publish data that are not initially as good as they could be. We do this because having data that are up to date is usually more important than having perfect but outdated data. It also provides a basis for governments, and people in the field, to improve their reporting.

However, it should also be acknowledged that when it comes to data, *perfection* is not attainable. For example, there can only ever be degrees of comparability. Geographic or demographic differences will influence measured performance in ways that can be hard to allow for. And, despite many similarities, there will also be some differences in the nature of particular services being delivered across jurisdictions. The real test is whether available data can provide useful insights into comparative performance.

Once data collections are in place, governments are able to monitor trends and progress (or lack of it) over time. This is of value in assessing individual performance trends even where there is limited scope for comparisons across jurisdictions. Getting those data collections up and running can take time – they need to be developed and tested – and sometimes that means starting with less and working up to more. Over time we can fill in the gaps, so that as every year goes by we have a more accurate and complete picture. Such continuous improvement is one of the key values underpinning the Review.

Another criticism, that fortunately we don't hear often, is that a jurisdiction may only look bad because other jurisdictions have scope to falsify the information they report. Interestingly, when we investigated a recent claim along those lines, we found that, not only had the other jurisdictions not cheated, but there had been (unintended) errors made in the supply of data by the jurisdiction of the accuser. The Review must proceed on the basis that all involved are acting in good faith, and I have found no reason during the time that I have chaired it to doubt that that is the case.

I acknowledge the danger that data can be misused, especially by the media. We do our best to clarify and qualify the data. But, not everyone – least of all the media – takes the time to look past the pictures and read the words.

“There are gaps in some important areas.”

While most participants in the review accept that performance reporting and transparency of government spending is important, there are still some pockets of resistance to supplying the necessary data. The school education sector comes to mind, but it is by no means alone.

The school sector has made some progress towards comparative reporting of learning outcomes over recent years, following agreement back in 1999 by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA, 1999). The key hurdle of achieving some consistency in data collection methodologies across jurisdictions has now been overcome. But there is still a significant gap between what MCEETYA has agreed to report and what is being delivered. For example, years 3 and 5 writing and spelling outcomes for 1999 were foreshadowed in the early stages of the process, but it is still uncertain when the data will be released.

There is a substantial time lag between collection and publication of results. For example, the 2002 report has only been able to report reading outcomes for year 5 students using 1999 data, which became available only in August 2001. This means it has taken more than 18 months to analyse and agree on the presentation of the data. It is unclear at this stage when the 2000 results will become available and the extent of reporting.

Compare this to the efforts of the Australian Council for Educational Research who have undertaken similar work for the OECD’s Program for International Student Assessments on reading, mathematical and scientific literacy. That study involved 32 countries and also published results by State and Territory for Australia. Students were surveyed and tested in 2000, with results available in December 2001 (OECD, 2001).

I would hope that we too will soon be able to provide a more comprehensive and up-to-date picture of learning outcomes for schools. We ought to be able to report on our own patch at least as well as an international organisation.

“Some activities cannot or should not be measured for performance”

Most service areas in different jurisdictions see themselves as special. But claims that “we are too different” or that the services are “not amenable to quantification” have diminished over time as people, sitting around the table, have come to understand the more basic similarities.

However it would be fair to say that the Review and what it stands for have attracted some vocal critics over the years. Perhaps the most hostile of these has been the Evatt Foundation, which used its *State of Australia* report in the first few years of the Review’s life to launch scathing attacks both on the project in general and on the integrity of its secretariat in particular. To demonstrate how important it is not to be too thin-skinned in this business, I give you a sample of their invective:

This finally, is the problem that bedevils any assessment of the Productivity Commission’s performance [in the Review]: how much of its nonsense is the result of a deliberate political agenda and how much of it is due to it having unforgivably stupid and ignorant people working for or directing it? (Evatt Foundation, 1997)

Clearly the Review’s activities in shining light on the efficiency and effectiveness of government services are not always welcome!

The most recent public example of that is in the area of Court Administration. For example, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of NSW recently had this to say about the Review:

All aspects of this process are being pursued with a single ideology and a single methodology. A system of performance benchmarking is established, pursuant to which performance indicators are developed and published. In the case of the judicial system, the terminology is misleading, perhaps dangerously so. The courts do not deliver a ‘service’. The courts administer justice in accordance with law. They no more deliver a ‘service’ in the form of judgements, than the Parliaments deliver a ‘service’ in the form of statutes. (Spigelman, 2000)

I would agree that the Review’s processes derive from a common purpose – I’ve already explained that at some length – but it has no ideological basis. With eight governments involved that would be an achievement indeed! And with 12 different service sectors sourcing data from a range of providers, you could only say it had a single methodology in the very broadest terms.

Also, as I have explained, there is no system of establishing performance benchmarks. It is up to governments and their agencies to decide whether they want to use data in the report for benchmarking purposes, and how.

But I *do* agree that it would be inappropriate and dangerous to consider legal judgments as a service, at least in the conventional sense involving a client or

customer relationship. I'm not sure that many of those who lose out from a judicial decision would consider themselves well served. In a much broader sense, however, the justice system certainly does provide a service to the community. As I've previously observed, society could not function effectively without it.

In practice, as everyone knows, the Review does not report on judgements. But it *does* seek to report on court administration – how well the courts go about their business. Anyone who has found themselves attending the pleasure of the court system will understand why that is a worthwhile task. The value of courts to society lies not just in the quality of the judgements that are ultimately made, but also in the processes that produce them. Justice greatly delayed, or achieved at excessive social cost, has a diminished value to society.

This is reflected in long-established objectives for court administration, against which the Review seeks to report; namely,

- to be open and accessible;
- to process matters in an expeditious and timely manner;
- to provide due process and equal protection before the law; and
- to be independent yet publicly accountable for performance (Commission on Trial Performance Standards, 1989).

The Judges' objections

Objections from sections of the judiciary to such performance measurement appear to be of two principal kinds. The first relates to its possible implications for the independence of the courts; the second, to the feasibility of obtaining meaningful and comparable information.

There can be no question as to the critical importance of judicial independence. Judges must be able to make unconstrained judgements. In order to do that, they not only need separate powers and secure tenure, but also adequate incomes and administrative resources.

The resources made available to courts need to account for what NSW Chief Justice Spigelman has described as the 'inefficiency' of justice administration compared with some other systems of decision-making (Spigelman, 2001). But that does not negate the value of comparisons of the efficiency of the system in different jurisdictions.

Moreover, as already emphasised, the Review is concerned at least as much with measures of effectiveness as with costs of provision. While the separation of powers

is fundamental to judicial independence, it is difficult to see how requirements to report on such matters as court delays, finalisations or lodgements could involve a significant conflict. Indeed, without adequate transparency and accountability, the stature of the courts could ultimately be eroded.

Thus the Chief Justice of Australia, Murray Gleeson, has made the following observation:

“The current emphasis on court management is natural and appropriate. The operations of courts involve the expenditure of scarce public resources, and governments are entitled to reasonable assurance that those resources are being applied efficiently and effectively, and are dealt with in a manner that responds to the demands of accountability. Those demands are not inconsistent with the imperative of independence; although the appropriate resolution of the two might occasionally involve some difficulty.” (Gleeson, 2001)

Gleeson concludes his discussion with what could be cited as the credo for the Review:

“Managers have a lot to teach us about how to be more effective in the application of the resources we are given. We have a lot to teach them about the demands of justice, and due process of law. The public will benefit if we learn from each other.”

The second concern voiced by some judicial critics of the Review relates to what is perceived to be a lack of comparability in data from different jurisdictions. As noted previously, *perfect* comparability is typically unattainable and that is not a good reason for forgoing the reporting process. There are differences among jurisdictions, but many of these can be accounted for in the methodologies used to collect data.

However, the NSW District Court’s Chief Judge recently launched what a journalist described as a ‘blistering attack’ on the Review’s methods, in an interview reported in *The Australian Financial Review*. Justice Blanch is quoted as saying that the Productivity Commission

“do not do anything to ensure that the data they are collecting is the same in respect of each jurisdiction.” (AFR, 2002)

The facts are that data are collected on a mutually agreed basis by appropriate representatives of all nine Australian governments. Methodologies are documented in data manuals that are common to all (in similar fashion to the ABS and other specialist data agencies). That is not to say that errors might not occasionally be made, but any such errors are often detected as part of the process of data scrutiny in putting the report together. Certainly any deliberate attempt by a jurisdiction to falsify the data would be a risky strategy and, as noted previously, I am aware of no evidence to support such an allegation (quite the contrary).

A pattern that *is* strongly apparent, however, is for those jurisdictions that don't show up too well in the Blue Book's numbers to 'shoot the messenger'. For me, one test of whether such criticism is likely to be valid is to observe how those who fare better treat the same results. To give one relevant example, Victoria's Chief Justice has recently and publicly endorsed the Review's performance indicators in arguing the need for additional appointments to the Victorian Supreme Court. Other examples could be given. Indeed, sometimes a turnaround in attitude will occur within the very same jurisdiction – as has happened this year in response to the improved performance of the NSW Supreme Court. The Attorney-General for NSW observed on release of the 2002 Report:

“The Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services revealed a 32 per cent improvement in the processing time for criminal matters in the NSW Supreme Court, with a 30 per cent improvement in civil matters ...

Rigorous strategies implemented in the last few years to reduce court delays are starting to pay off ...” (AAP, 2002)

A great deal more could be said, but I will conclude on this note. Courts need to be accessed by the poorest and most vulnerable people in our society, as well as by the richest and most privileged. That the services provided should be accessible, equitable and timely is widely accepted – and embedded in the objectives. It is in everybody's interests that there be transparency in the courts' administrative performance, and accountability for the resources used. The 'quality of mercy' we rightly leave to the judges.

Challenges for the future

The major challenge that the Review faces is the imperative to ensure that the focus on continuous improvement is maintained. This does not mean that the Report should get bigger and bigger. On the contrary, improving the report requires ongoing review of what we are doing, eliminating what has become redundant, and making sure that the contents continue to reflect the objectives that governments seek to achieve. And, most importantly, that it continues to be useful to governments, the media and wider general public.

I mentioned the uniqueness of the Report at the beginning of my address. I think this also presents us with a real challenge for the future. At the moment the chapters present a variety of discrete sets of data relating to particular service areas. But it is hoped that in the future it may be possible to make some useful linkages among these; for example, by linking the data in the health and aged care chapters – or in protection and support services and housing. One area which is ripe for those sorts of linkages is juvenile justice, which could conceivably draw from a number of

chapters in the Report. There are significant data issues to be overcome in order to achieve this, but I think we are moving closer to that goal.

Another area which I have also mentioned already is the need to improve the reporting in the area of Indigenous data. There are many challenges. The lack of availability and poor quality of data are issues that all jurisdictions need to address. Governments have already set the agenda here – they want better, more comprehensive information so that services can be delivered when and where they are needed. The Review has an important role to play.

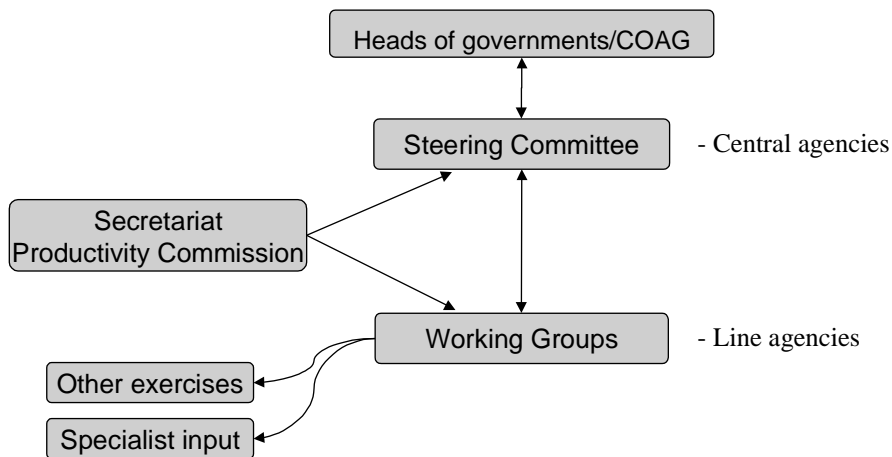
A further challenge is improving the reporting on services to rural and remote areas. At the moment, there are some real gaps which are proving difficult to fill. We are building on this gradually. Again, the availability and quality of data are real issues. But it is, I think, one of the strengths of the Review that it doesn't stand back from issues which can seem daunting when you look at them from across the wide range of service sectors.

It is indeed a major exercise, and one that as I've said could not have taken place without an outstanding level of cooperation across all Australian governments. The reaffirmation of COAG's support for the Review last year has been an important milestone, given that heads of government have had several years to reflect on the worthiness of the project.

Ultimately what all the participants in the Review are looking for is the ability to develop better policies and achieve better outcomes for the community. If the Report increases the level of debate on some issues; if it sends people back to the drawing board to see how they can do things better; if it draws a picture for policy makers and the community to improve understanding of our likenesses and differences – and I believe it does all of these things – then the Report has achieved a great deal.



Structure of the Review



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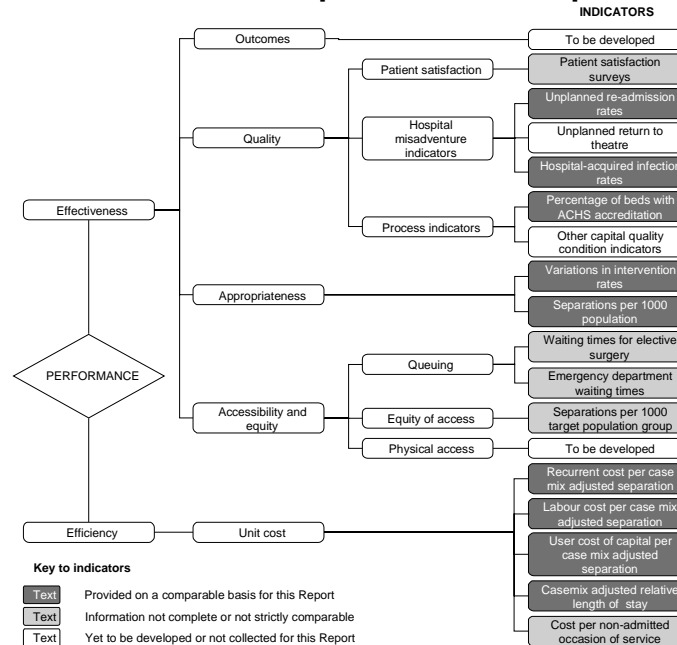


Report coverage

- School education
- Vocational education
- Health (acute, GPs, mental health & breast cancer)
- Police
- Courts
- Corrective services
- Emergency management
- Aged care
- Disabilities
- Children's services
- Protection and support
- Housing (public, community & rent assistance)

4

The PI framework for public acute hospitals



Reporting of at least one comparable data item on Indigenous people in the 2002 Report



Government
Services Review

Education

- . School education ✓
- . VET ✓

Health

- . Public hospitals ✓*
- . Maternity Services x
- . General Practice x
- . Breast cancer x
- . Mental health ✓

Justice

- . Police services ✓
- . Court administration x
- . Corrective services ✓

Emergency management

- . Fire services x
- . Ambulance services ✓*

Community services

- . Juvenile justice ✓*
- . Aged care services ✓
- . Services for people with a disability ✓
- . Children's Services ✓*
- . Child protection and out-of-home care ✓
- . Supported accommodation x

Housing assistance

- . Public housing x
- . Community housing x
- . Aboriginal Rental Housing Program ✓
- . Commonwealth Rent Assistance ✓

✓ At least one national data item is available. x No comparable data are available (although jurisdictions may report data specific to their jurisdiction). * Descriptive data only

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