

POLICY STATEMENT

Landmark Reform to the Welfare System, Reinstatement of the Racial Discrimination Act and Strengthening of the Northern Territory Emergency Response



Australian Government





Pedro Wonaeamirri

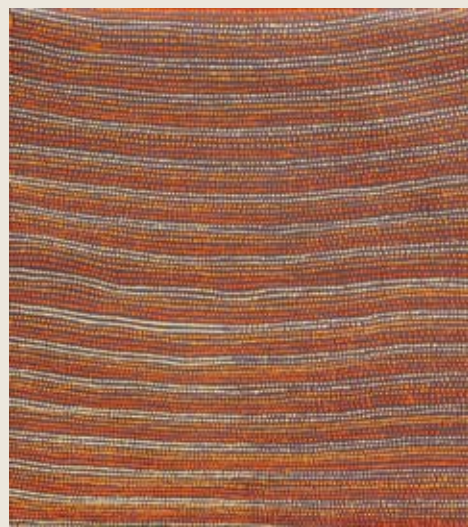
Jilamara 2009

Ochres on 600gsm weight paper 76cm x 57cm

Image courtesy Jilmara Arts & Crafts Association, Winnellie.

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Pedro Wonaeamirri is a Tiwi Islander artist who is carrying on the 'Jilamara' or 'good design' painting tradition of the Tiwi Islands. He uses the traditional painting comb, the pwoja, and natural ochres from around Milikapti in his work. The style and designs have been learnt and inspired from watching older generations of Tiwi painters and from looking at artworks in museums and galleries. The designs represent body scars and body painting for ceremonies. The body painting provides a disguise and protection from the spirits. Pedro is also a traditional dancer who performs in ceremonies and at major events. Pedro has a deep interest in Tiwi culture and in passing it on to younger generations.



Payu Napaltjarri

Untitled 2008

Acrylic on Belgian linen 61 x 55cm

Image courtesy Papunya Tula Artists, Alice Springs

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Payu Napaltjarri is a Pintupi artist. She was born in the western desert at Karliwarra Rockhole west of the Pollock Hills. In the 1960s her family came out of the desert and were brought by the welfare patrol to Papunya where they settled. Payu has also lived at Balgo and Kintore. Payu was married to Freddie West Tjakamarra, a founding member of Papunya Tula Artists. Payu returned with him to the western desert community of Kiwirrkura in Western Australia during the homelands movement. Payu is the mother of six children. Payu's art story, as with many Pintupi women's stories, concerns food gathering. It relates to a water source where women gathered to collect desert raisins and hold ceremonies. Payu and other members of her family have continued their association with Papunya Tula Artists.

POLICY STATEMENT: LANDMARK REFORM TO THE WELFARE SYSTEM, REINSTATEMENT OF THE RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ACT AND STRENGTHENING OF THE NORTHERN TERRITORY EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The Government is moving to introduce landmark reforms to the welfare system which, over time, will see the national roll out of a non-discriminatory scheme to income manage welfare payments in disadvantaged regions across Australia.

Simultaneously, the Government is moving to reinstate the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA) in relation to the operation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) and related legislation operating in the Northern Territory and Queensland. The removal of the RDA suspension, along with the redesign of relevant measures to ensure they conform with the RDA will strengthen the NTER and assist in resetting the Government's relationship with Aboriginal people nationally.

Income management is a key tool in the Government's broader welfare reforms designed to deliver on our commitment to a welfare system based on the principles of engagement, participation and responsibility.

The Government has already implemented a range of strategies in the interests of children including:

- the Cape York Welfare Reform trial in Queensland;
- income management for Child Protection in Western Australia;
- the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure in the Northern Territory and Queensland;
- Voluntary Income Management in Western Australia; and
- the Learn or Earn strategy, which puts requirements on parents and young people to participate in education, training or employment.

The Government is committed to progressively reforming the welfare and family payment system to foster individual responsibility and to provide a platform for people to move up and out of welfare dependence. Welfare should not be a destination or a way of life.

The Government's welfare reforms tackle the destructive, intergenerational cycle of passive welfare:

- By quarantining a proportion of the payments of welfare recipients and 100 per cent of lump sum payments, for welfare recipients in specified categories, to make sure money is spent on life's essentials and in the best interests of children;
- By offering evidence-based exemptions to individuals who demonstrate responsible parenting and to young people and long-term unemployed who take personal initiative through participation in education or training; and

- By offering matched-savings incentives and access to financial management support services and training for individuals who wish to improve their budgeting and savings skills.

Individuals will also be able to voluntarily sign up to the new income management scheme and will be eligible for incentives for each six months they participate in the scheme.

From 1 July, 2010, the new scheme will start across the Northern Territory, which has the highest proportion of severely disadvantaged communities in Australia.

The Government is committed to ensuring that its welfare reform agenda works for disadvantaged Australians and helps to fight the passive welfare that is destroying so many vulnerable people and communities. The welfare system needs to be seen as a two-way transaction. Governments have a responsibility to support people and families through hard times. In turn, welfare recipients have a responsibility to demonstrate personal responsibility and spend payments appropriately – on essentials like food, clothing and rent, not on alcohol and gambling.

The operation of the new income management scheme will be carefully evaluated and along with the ongoing evaluation of other income management trials currently underway in Western Australia and Queensland, this will inform the future national roll out to other severely disadvantaged regions.

In relation to the NTER, the Government believes that it has made a real difference to the wellbeing of Indigenous Territorians living in prescribed areas. This has been confirmed by what people have said in the NTER redesign consultations. Nevertheless, the Government recognises that much more needs to be done. Governments are addressing many decades of under-investment in essential infrastructure and basic government services. Reversing this will take sustained effort over at least the next decade.

The improvements achieved so far can only be sustained over the longer term through a combination of linked strategies.

A central requirement is a heightened focus on respectful engagement with Indigenous people, and close community involvement in developing and managing long-term solutions. In the NTER redesign consultations, people said they wanted to take greater ownership of solutions to problems, and were prepared to accept a greater level of personal and community responsibility.

The NTER will not achieve robust long-term outcomes if it continues to rely on the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act. The reinstatement of the RDA – coupled with effective partnership arrangements with communities – will serve to restore dignity to communities and give them the backing and incentive to become involved in driving long-term solutions.

The NTER is only part of the package of initiatives necessary to close the gap in the Northern Territory. Ongoing and increased investment in the provision of infrastructure and services is essential. Since the 2007 election, the

Australian Government has strengthened and expanded the allocation of resources to the Northern Territory Emergency Response, investing more than \$1.2 billion extra to help overcome decades of government failure. This is in addition to \$572 million in respect of the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program, assistance to the Alice Springs Transformation Strategy and funding allocated under the COAG National Partnership Agreements in the areas of health, education and remote service delivery. The Northern Territory has 15 of the 29 priority locations under the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership.

This Policy Statement includes two component parts:

- Part 1: The Government's position on future directions for the NTER, which outlines the measures it considers necessary to underpin the sustainable, long-term development phase of the NTER; and
- Part 2: A comprehensive outline of Government investment and strategies directed towards closing the gap in the Northern Territory.

PART 1.

AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S POSITION ON FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE NORTHERN TERRITORY EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The Government's decisions on future directions for the NTER are reflected in the legislation being introduced into the Parliament. This Statement sets out the basis for the Government's decisions for the information of those people affected by the NTER, in particular those who participated in the consultations, and outlines the Government's approach to improving outcomes for people in the Northern Territory.

In its response to the report of the independent NTER Review Board on 23 October 2008, the Government said that it would:

- recognise as a matter of urgent national significance the continuing need to address the unacceptably high levels of disadvantage and social dislocation experienced by remote communities and town camps in the Northern Territory;
- reset its relationship with Indigenous people based on genuine consultation, engagement and partnership; and
- respect Australian human rights obligations and reinstate the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (RDA).

The Government believes that exceptional disadvantage warrants long-term action, and is committed to closing the gap in the Northern Territory by working with Indigenous Australians to deliver long-term sustainable outcomes.

The NTER will never achieve robust long-term outcomes if measures rely on the suspension of the RDA.

The Government announced on 23 October 2008 that it would continue the key NTER measures, but would consult with Indigenous people about improving the measures and reinstating the RDA.

On 21 May 2009, as a starting point for discussion through the engagement process, the Government released a Discussion Paper titled *Future Directions for the Northern Territory Emergency Response* (the Discussion Paper) setting out proposals to redesign the following NTER measures:

- income management;
- alcohol restrictions;
- pornography restrictions;
- five-year leases;
- community store licensing;
- controls on use of publicly funded computers;
- law enforcement powers; and
- business management areas powers.

From June to the end of August 2009, the Australian Government conducted very extensive consultations with Indigenous people in the Northern Territory about future directions for the NTER. Some consultation meetings also took place in late May and early September.

The consultations involved people across the 73 communities affected by the NTER as well as several other Northern Territory Indigenous communities and town camps. There were over 500 consultation meetings in communities, attended by several thousand people, as well as workshops with regional leaders and stakeholder organisations. The majority of workshop participants were Indigenous people who either nominated as individuals or were selected by their community or organisation to speak on the community's or the organisation's behalf.

The consultations were conducted in the spirit of genuine consultation and engagement with Indigenous people. The Government has listened to what people had to say and carefully weighed up the feedback given to it during the consultations and the other evidence in reaching its position. Difficult choices have been made and some decisions will not please everyone but the Government will not avoid decisive action when it is necessary in the interests of children and to strengthen families. Sustainable long-term action is required because many of these communities remain under severe social pressure. Family and community violence, the wellbeing of children, the elderly and the vulnerable, and alcohol and drug misuse remain prominent in local people's everyday concerns.

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION ACT

The suspension of the RDA under the NTER will be lifted. The Government's proposed legislation provides that all the laws that suspend the operation of the RDA will be repealed from 31 December 2010, which allows the necessary time for the redesigned measures to be put in place and for an effective transition from existing to new arrangements.

The RDA implements the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (the Convention) as domestic law in Australia. The RDA requires that all people be treated equally before the law, regardless of their race, colour or ethnicity. The NTER measures can be consistent with the RDA in two ways. First, because they are non-discriminatory on the basis of race. Secondly, because they are what are known as "special measures" which help people of a particular race to enjoy their human rights equally with others. Under the Convention the Government has an obligation, when circumstances require, to take special measures for the purpose of guaranteeing the full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Special measures have a number of key features:

- the measure must result in a benefit to some or all members of a class of people;
- membership of this class must be based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin;

- the measure must be for the sole purpose of improving the situation of the beneficiaries so they can enjoy and exercise their human rights and fundamental freedoms equally with others;
- the protection given to the beneficiaries by the measure must be necessary in order to achieve this equal enjoyment of human rights and freedoms; and
- the measure must end as soon as it has achieved its aims.

The Government appreciates the significance of taking special measures to assist Indigenous Australians in the NTER communities and has given careful consideration to the matters set out above before proceeding with any of the special measures in the NTER redesign.

When legislation is changed there is a need to ensure an effective transition to the new arrangements. The Government will put in place appropriate transitional arrangements to protect the gains that have been achieved so far and avoid causing major disruption to communities and individuals.

The following is an outline of the Government's position in relation to each redesigned measure.

INCOME MANAGEMENT

Income management was introduced in prescribed areas in the Northern Territory to assist in improving people's lives, in particular children and women, by ensuring that welfare payments were used responsibly for key priority needs such as housing and food, and were less available to spend on alcohol, drugs, cigarettes and pornography.

The combination of high dependence on welfare in the NTER communities and high levels of alcohol and substance abuse were linked to the child safety issues described in the *Little Children are Sacred* report. Income management also aimed to protect vulnerable people from the practice of "humbugging" (being pressured for money).

NTER measure

Income management currently applies to most welfare payment recipients in prescribed areas (including communities, town camps and outstations) in the Northern Territory. Income management involves directing a proportion of a person's welfare payments to the purchase of priority items such as food, clothing and rent. Under the NTER income management arrangements, 50 per cent of most income support and family assistance payments, and 100 per cent of lump sum payments, are income managed.

Proposal put forward in the consultations

Two possible options were put forward as a starting point for discussion in the Discussion Paper.

Option 1 – Individuals would be able to apply for an exemption from income management based on an individual assessment.

Option 2 – No change to the current NTER income management arrangements.

What we heard

There was a wide variety of views expressed about income management. Where this issue was discussed, the majority of comments were that income management should continue and a minority said it should cease.

The consultations show that many people affected by income management indicated that it is delivering real benefits to children, women, older people, parents and families, and communities as a whole. The benefits identified include more money being spent on food, clothing and school-related expenses; assisting with saving for large or expensive items, like fridges and washing machines; less money being spent on alcohol, gambling, cigarettes and drugs; reduced levels of “humberging” and improved capacity for household budgeting.

Some people said that they felt that those who had proven their capacity to manage their money and who were responsible in caring for dependants, or had no dependants, should not be income managed. Others indicated a preference for a completely voluntary scheme.

Community leaders and stakeholder representatives who participated in the consultations also expressed a strong preference that communities themselves should actively be involved in making decisions about income management. Many people were interested in models such as the Family Responsibilities Commission operating in Cape York, which involves a whole of community approach to the development of social norms.

People affected by income management frequently stated that, if it was beneficial for Indigenous people, it would also benefit non-Indigenous people in similar situations. Many people who participated in the consultations did not understand why it only applied to Indigenous people.

What else we know

Although not covering all communities or people subject to the scheme, a recent evaluation of income management compiled by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and a Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) survey conducted as part of the 2008 independent review of the NTER noted that following the introduction of income management, an increased amount of money spent on food and an increase in the amount of food children were eating were evident. There were advantages for mothers with small children and large families, for grandparents and for communities. People felt that humberging had been reduced. There were also similar results in a Central Land Council Survey of six communities in early 2008.

The Northern Territory has the highest proportion of severely disadvantaged locations in Australia. It includes 24 of the 50 most disadvantaged locations measured by the Socio-Economic Indexes for Australia (SEIFA).

What we propose

Based on all that we have heard, and what the evidence is showing, the Government believes that income management is an effective tool for supporting individuals and families reliant on welfare who are living in communities under severe social pressure. The Government considers that many non-indigenous welfare recipients are similarly severely disengaged and at risk of harm.

The core purpose of income support is to provide for the welfare of individuals and families, and particularly children. Governments have a responsibility – particularly in relation to vulnerable and at risk citizens – to ensure income support payments are allocated in beneficial ways. The Government believes that the first call on welfare payments should be life essentials and the interests of children.

In the Government's view the substantial benefits that can be achieved for these individuals through income management include: putting food on the table; stabilising housing; ensuring key bills are paid; helping minimise harassment; and helping people save money. In this way, income management lays the foundations for pathways to economic and social participation through helping to stabilise household budgeting that assists people to meet the basic needs of life. We recognise that these are benefits which are relevant to Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people in similar situations.

The Government has been progressively developing a national reform agenda in relation to welfare recipients in disadvantaged regions and dysfunctional families and communities which extends beyond the Indigenous policy domain. The Government has implemented the following initiatives:

- the Cape York welfare reform trial in Queensland;
- income management for child protection in Western Australia;
- the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure in the Northern Territory and Queensland;
- voluntary income management in Western Australia; and
- the Learn or Earn strategy nationally which puts requirements on parents and young people to participate in education, training or employment.

From 1 July 2010, a new scheme of income management will commence across the Northern Territory – in urban, regional and remote areas – as a first step in a future national roll out of income management to disadvantaged regions. It is intended that the new income management scheme will be implemented across the Northern Territory by 31 December 2010. The RDA will apply in relation to the new scheme of income management from the commencement of implementation in July 2010.

The new income management scheme will progressively be extended across the Northern Territory, to targeted categories of people that the Government believes will particularly benefit from the help income management provides. Implementation in selected locations elsewhere in Australia will then proceed as informed by evidence developed from the Northern Territory experience.

The targeted categories of people are:

- people aged 15 to 24 who have been in receipt of youth allowance, newstart allowance, special benefit or parenting payment for more than 13 weeks in the last 26 weeks (disengaged youth);
- people aged 25 and above (and younger than age pension age) who have been in long-term receipt of specified payments, including newstart allowance and parenting payment (long-term welfare payment recipients);
- people assessed by a delegate of the Secretary (in practice, a Centrelink social worker) as requiring income management for reasons including vulnerability to financial crisis, domestic violence or economic abuse; and
- people referred for income management by child protection authorities.

The Government selected these categories to target assistance to the most disengaged and disadvantaged individuals in the welfare system. The categories provide an objective basis for targeting the benefits of income management that is independent of race, and as a result, is intended to be non-discriminatory.

The legislation will also allow people to seek exemptions from income management by demonstrating that they are undertaking responsible parenting. Thus parents in the first two targeted categories who ensure their children attend school regularly and consistently will be able to seek an exemption from the scheme. For those without children, participating in regular paid employment or engaging in formal study will allow the welfare recipient to seek an exemption.

The new scheme will provide for financial incentives to encourage welfare recipients outside the targeted categories to volunteer for income management, and there will also be a matched savings incentive to encourage those who fall within the targeted categories to build their financial management skills and capabilities.

The Government has chosen the target groups based on their need for support due to their high risk of social isolation and disengagement, poor financial literacy, and participation in risky behaviours. Youth who are not earning or learning and are relying entirely on income support are more likely to become entrenched in welfare dependency. The long-term unemployed who are on income support are especially disadvantaged in relation to physical and mental health, and levels of literacy and numeracy. It is also more likely that there will be poor outcomes for children growing up in these circumstances, particularly for school attendance and educational attainment.

The categories are designed to reach people the Government considers are most in need of income management and extend no further than necessary. The Government recognises that a significant number of Indigenous people

currently subject to income management in the Northern Territory will be in these categories. But other people who meet the criteria in the Northern Territory will be made subject to income management in the same way.

The current changes represent a further step in reforms to Australia's welfare system, building on the work already undertaken for the Cape York welfare reform trial, the WA child protection trial and the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure.

The operation of the new scheme of income management in the Northern Territory will be carefully evaluated. The first evaluation progress report is expected in 2011/12. This evaluation will also include the other income management trials currently underway in Western Australia and Queensland. The evaluation will inform the future roll out elsewhere in Australia.

Future implementation will also be informed by other criteria including evidence of disadvantage in Australia and consideration of where income management could benefit individuals and families.

Separately, the Government will support the development of a community-based approach to re-establishing social norms, drawing on the learning from the Cape York welfare reform trial, in particular the operation of the Queensland Family Responsibilities Commission. This will require communities to request such an approach – it will not be imposed.

The Government is also committed to continuing to improve income management service delivery arrangements and addressing issues raised during the consultations such as improving ways for people to check their BasicsCard balance. For example, a new free call number allowing people to access their BasicsCard balance, and hotlinked phones in many community stores are two recent innovations to improve service delivery.

ALCOHOL RESTRICTIONS

The *Little Children are Sacred* report found that alcohol abuse was “destroying communities” and was the “gravest and fastest growing threat to the safety of children”. The Inquiry drew on research that alcohol causes the death of an Aboriginal Australian every 38 hours, that a quarter of these deaths occur in the Northern Territory and that Central Australia has the worst rate of alcohol attributable mortality in the country, with 14.6 deaths per 10,000 Aboriginal people between 2000 and 2004.

NTER measure

Under the NTER, alcohol restrictions were introduced which:

- banned drinking, possessing, supplying or transporting liquor in prescribed areas, but allowed for the continued operation of licensed premises and individual permits issued under the Northern Territory *Liquor Act* and for some recreational, tourism and commercial fishing activities; and
- monitored takeaway sales across the whole of the Northern Territory.

What people said

The consultations found that people identified a number of benefits from the restrictions, including that there was less violence and communities were quieter. There was a strong consensus that the alcohol restrictions should continue with women particularly in favour of continuing the restrictions in the prescribed areas. The majority of people who participated in the community consultations were of the view that alcohol and other substance misuse was not welcome and had caused too much personal grief and community disruption for too long.

At the same time some people expressed concerns that alcohol-related problems had continued or even increased since the NTER started, with particular concern about changes in drinking patterns, including extensive use of “drinking paddocks” outside prescribed area boundaries, and increased visits to regional towns to drink. There were also concerns that the NTER location-based prohibitions have led to an increase in ‘grog running’ into communities.

A point raised in the consultations is that blanket restrictions on alcohol in prescribed areas do not encourage responsible drinking behaviours and have cut across previous locally based alcohol controls, some of which were considered to be working quite effectively.

What else we know

Statistics indicate a significant increase in the number of alcohol-related incidents reported to police across the NTER communities from 2,271 in 2006-07 to 3,047 in 2007-08.

The reasons for this could include increased policing (34% of the increase is in communities which formerly did not have a permanent police presence) and the widening of the scope of offences.

The evidence shows that community solutions to restrict alcohol can be more effective than blanket restrictions. The Government recognises that there are examples of excellent and effective local plans for managing alcohol supply and consumption, such as the Groote Eylandt and Bickerton Island Alcohol Management System and the East Arnhem Harmony alcohol restrictions.

What we propose

On the basis of the existing evidence and the views put forward in consultations, the Government believes that alcohol restrictions should continue, but that there should be a change of focus from a universally imposed measure to a measure designed to meet the individual needs of specific communities. These community variations would be based on careful analysis of evidence about each community’s circumstances and would be implemented in consultation with the community.

Moving to local restrictions will be based on evidence about matters including the level of alcohol-related harm in a community and whether a community-based alcohol management plan is in place. Where a proposed alcohol management plan for a community or region requires the variation of some of the existing NTER alcohol restrictions in the legislation for that area, the

Government will consider evidence about the level of alcohol-related harm in that area before approving changes. In addition, the Government will closely monitor trends in alcohol-related harm in communities and, if it is necessary, the Minister will have the capacity to reimpose the existing alcohol restrictions.

The existing alcohol restrictions will remain in place in a particular area until an assessment of alcohol-related harm and other matters and appropriate consultations have taken place.

The Government has decided to amend the power that Northern Territory police have to enter a private residence in a prescribed area as if it were a public place. The Government proposes to amend these powers, unavailable elsewhere in Australia, so that they will only be put in place through a Ministerial declaration in response to a request from a community resident and after community consultation. This means that the powers available to police in the prescribed areas will continue to be as strong as those that apply elsewhere in the Northern Territory. If a declaration is sought, the powers may be stronger.

The Government has also decided to remove the requirements for a licensee to record the sale of take-away liquor over \$100 or more than 5 litres of wine because it has not been effective.

The present arrangements in relation to recreational and tourism activities and commercial fishing will not change.

The Government will work with the Northern Territory Government and Indigenous communities to look at ways to make the alcohol and prohibited materials road signs more acceptable to local people.

The Government considers that the new alcohol restrictions, informed by the consultations, are a special measure for the purposes of the RDA. The measures will reduce the risk of alcohol-related harm involving women and children. The Government considers that the measure addresses the special needs of Indigenous communities, and will play a role in improving health outcomes for Indigenous people in the communities.

The consultations reveal that members of communities recognise these benefits and that there was a strong consensus that the alcohol restrictions should continue. The restrictions will be continued for the sole purpose of reducing alcohol-related harm and ill-health in the communities. The measure restricts the rights of some but the Government believes that the alcohol restrictions are a necessary tool to assist in the protection of members of the communities from alcohol-related harm. Importantly, each community will have a significant say in the form of alcohol restrictions in their community in the future, including in the development of an alcohol management plan tailored for their community.

This measure will cease in August 2012, as originally enacted.

PORNOGRAPHY RESTRICTIONS

The *Little Children are Sacred* report indicated that concerns about children's and the community's exposure to sexually explicit and very violent films, publications and computer games were raised frequently in the course of the Inquiry. The report recommended that strategies to restrict access to such material, generally and by children, be investigated.

NTER measure

The NTER restrictions on pornography were introduced to reduce the risk of children being exposed to sexually explicit and very violent material, as well as the potential risk of child abuse and problem sexualised behaviour. The restrictions prohibited the possession and supply within prescribed areas of sexually explicit or very violent material distributed as publications, films or computer games.

What we heard

The consultations showed that discussion of pornography was a culturally sensitive matter and there were some consultation meetings where this matter was not discussed. Where people did comment, there was a strong view from the consultations that sexually explicit and very violent material is not wanted in communities and that children need to be protected from it. People generally preferred to retain the existing NTER restrictions on prohibited material than to consider other options. On the other hand, there were some who said there was little or none of this material in their communities or that they did not consider it to be a problem.

There was a strongly expressed view that the road signs notifying the restrictions on prohibited material are offensive and cause people to feel shame because they unfairly stigmatise all people living in communities. Many wanted these signs removed, while a minority said the signs should stay because they were needed for enforcement of the restrictions but that more appropriate wording should be used.

What we propose

In the Discussion Paper, the Government's initial proposal for discussion was that the NTER restrictions on prohibited material be lifted but that communities could apply to have restrictions retained. In light of the strength of community views against the availability of sexually explicit and very violent material the Government has instead decided to adopt an approach whereby:

- the current restrictions would remain in place; and
- communities could ask to have the restrictions lifted in their community; and
- decisions on these requests would consider evidence about the prevalence of sexually explicit and very violent material in the community, the well-being of people in the community and the views of those in the community. The advice of the relevant law enforcement authority will also be sought.

A declaration to remove the restrictions on prohibited material under the NTER legislation would mean that these areas would be subject to the same

restrictions on sexually explicit and violent material as apply in other parts of the Northern Territory.

While the Government acknowledges that many people in communities want the road signs removed, it is necessary to retain some form of notification about the restrictions on prohibited material so that people can be fully informed and reduce the risk of inadvertent offences against the law.

The Government nevertheless will work with the Northern Territory Government and individual communities to look at ways to make the road signs more acceptable to local people.

The Government considers that the restrictions on sexually explicit and very violent material are a special measure for the purposes of the RDA. The measure reduces the risk of children being exposed to pornographic material as well as the potential risk of child abuse and problem sexualised behaviour. The consultations reveal that members of the communities recognise these benefits and that there is support for the continuation of the measure. The restrictions will be continued for the sole purpose of protecting children in the communities. The measure restricts the rights of some adults to access some types of otherwise lawful material, but the Government believes that the pornography restrictions are a necessary tool to assist in the protection of children in NTER communities from exposure to inappropriate sexually explicit and very violent material. Importantly, communities will be able to move to have the pornography restrictions lifted in their community. This measure will cease in August 2012, as originally enacted.

FIVE-YEAR LEASES

Five-year leases were introduced to provide security of tenure and allow access to facilitate the administration of the NTER. The five-year leases have been used to underpin:

- the Community Clean Up Program;
- Government Business Manager accommodation;
- installation of safe houses; and
- reformed property and tenancy management arrangements.

NTER measure

The Government currently holds five-year leases over 64 communities to underpin the activities outlined above.

As the underlying title of the land is not affected by the leases, the Indigenous owners still own the land. Further, rights, titles and other interests that existed immediately before the commencement of the five-year lease have been preserved.

All five-year leases expire in August 2012.

What we heard

The main perceived benefits of five-year leases were the prospect of upgrades and renovations to houses, improvements to community

infrastructure and associated creation of employment opportunities for local people.

People also raised issues about rental payments for five-year leases, and expressed frustration at delays in delivery of housing renovations and long-term housing. However, it must be noted that delivery of new housing relies on negotiation of longer-term voluntary leases rather than the presence of a five-year lease.

What else we know

The five-year leases have enabled the community clean ups, the establishment of safe houses, accommodation for Government Business Managers and service providers, better property and tenancy arrangements and refurbishments. The reports provided by Government Business Managers indicate that the leases have also brought a general improvement to the conditions in the communities.

One result of the Australian Government tenure in communities has been the assumption of responsibility to remove asbestos where it has been found to be a risk. The Australian Government has initiated action to remove asbestos in a number of five-year leases, a responsibility which would otherwise and normally fall to the landowners.

What we propose

The Government has decided to retain the five-year leases until they expire in August 2012.

The Government will introduce changes, in line with those proposed in the Discussion Paper, to help clarify the purpose and operation of the five-year leases. This will help address the misunderstanding about the five-year leases expressed during the consultations. These changes include:

- making it clearer that the objectives of the five-year leases are to enable special measures to be taken to improve the delivery of services in Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory and promote economic and social development in those communities;
- defining the permitted use of leases as being directly related to achieving those objectives;
- clarifying that exploration and mining are not permitted uses of the five-year leases;
- requiring the five-year leases to be administered with regard for Aboriginal culture;
- facilitating the Government's commitment to move to voluntary leases by requiring the Government to negotiate the terms and conditions of voluntary leases in good faith where requested; and
- developing clear guidelines to better explain the land use approval process to ensure the transparent allocation of lots.

In this form, the Government considers that the leases are a special measure for the purposes of the RDA. The Government believes that the leases enable the provision of services and other benefits to the communities. The consultations revealed some recognition of benefits from five-year leases and

longer term voluntary leases, but also a significant lack of understanding in this area. As noted the changes seek to address this. The leases will be continued for the sole purpose of the provision of services in the communities, and to promote economic and social development in the communities. The Government believes that the leases are necessary to provide those benefits. The leases have some effect on existing rights, but this effect was limited by the original legislation, and will be further limited by the proposed changes. Importantly, the leases only operate until 2012, and in this period the Government will work to transitioning to voluntary leasing arrangements.

The Government has commenced paying rent for the five-year leases. Following the Northern Territory Valuer-General's first determination of a reasonable amount of rent in relation to five-year leases on Milikapiti and Pirlangimpi in the Tiwi Islands, rental payments were made immediately to the Tiwi Land Council for the benefit of traditional owners. Rental payments will commence in relation to other five-year leased communities as soon as the relevant determinations are made by the Northern Territory Valuer-General.

The Government will continue to work with communities on the negotiation of voluntary, longer term leases. Negotiations are currently underway, especially in relation to the 16 remote communities identified for new investment under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program. Of these, long-term leasing arrangements are already in place at Nguuu, Angurugu, Umbakumba, Milyakburra, Gunbalanya, Maningrida, Wadeye, Galiwinku and the Tennant Creek town camps, and are ready to begin at Ngukurr, Milingimbi and Gapuwiyak. In-principle agreement has also been given or is expected shortly in relation to several other communities.

COMMUNITY STORE LICENSING

The licensing of community stores was introduced to improve the range and quality of food and groceries available in communities to improve the governance and retail management practices of stores and to allow stores to take part in the income management arrangements. The overarching aim is to enhance the contribution made by community stores in the Northern Territory to providing a reasonable ongoing level of access to a range of food, drink and grocery items to meet nutritional and related household needs for certain Indigenous communities.

NTER measure

Under the NTER, community stores are able to be assessed to determine whether they are to be granted a community store licence. Stores are assessed for a licence on the basis that they:

- have a reasonable quality, quantity and range of groceries and consumer items available and promoted at the store, including healthy food and drinks;
- demonstrate the capacity to participate in the requirements of the income management arrangements under the social security law; and
- have sound financial structures, retail and governance practices.

What we heard

The overall view expressed during the consultations was that the range and quality of food and household items available from local stores, especially fresh and healthy food, had improved under the NTER.

Most people agreed that community store licensing should continue, and there was broad support for the strengthened licensing arrangements proposed by the Government in the Discussion Paper.

What else we know

Currently, a total of 88 community stores are licensed. The Final Stores Post Licensing Monitoring Report on community stores that are licensed indicates that customer shopping habits have changed significantly in most stores, with 68% of store operators reporting an increase in the amount of healthy food purchased - including fruit and vegetables, dairy foods and meat. Store operators also noted that increased turnover has enabled them to stock a wider range of goods.

What we propose

The Government proposes to continue the current store licensing provisions, and to extend, improve and clarify the scheme by:

- establishing a legislative link between community store licensing and the eligibility of a store to participate in the income management arrangements under the social security law;
- extending the scope of the licensing scheme to cover shops which are a key source of food, drink and grocery items for an Indigenous community, including takeaway or fast food shops and roadhouses; and
- providing greater clarity and transparency in the focus of the licensing assessment process and the obligations of licence holders.

In the Discussion Paper, the Government's initial proposal for discussion was that the new licensing arrangements would include a power to require a store owner to appoint a new licensed store operator if the store was not being operated satisfactorily. Under the new arrangements, licences will be issued to owners (rather than operators) to recognise the specific responsibilities and risks borne by store owners and store managers in the operation of a community store. The licence will also refer to conditions and obligations that are imposed on managers where the manager is not also the owner of the store. This change also removes the need to provide for the transfer of licences between managers, and reduces the administrative burden when a store changes manager. The transition to the new scheme will be aided by a new power to require that the owner of a store be licensed by a date set out in a notice issued to the owner and manager.

The Government proposes also to allow for decisions made under the community store licensing scheme to be reviewed by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, and to remove the current provisions that permit the Australian Government to compulsorily acquire a community store's assets and liabilities.

The Government considers that the community stores scheme is a special measure for the purposes of the RDA. The Government believes that the measure assists in improving the health of people in remote Indigenous communities. The licensing of stores, and the accompanying monitoring of standards relating to those stores, contributes to the improved provision of healthy food in communities. The consultations reveal that people in the communities recognise the benefits and that most people agreed that community store licensing should continue. The licensing arrangements will be continued for the sole purpose of promoting food security and thereby improving the health of people in those communities. The stores licensing scheme imposes additional requirements on store owners and managers but the Government considers this is necessary to ensure the continuation of improved access to good quality food and household items in communities. Importantly, there will be consultation with the communities in relation to the operation of key elements of the scheme. This measure will cease in August 2012, as originally enacted.

CONTROLS ON USE OF PUBLICLY FUNDED COMPUTERS

In recent years there have been a number of complaints by Indigenous women about their distress at finding pornographic, violent and possibly illegal material on computers provided to community organisations under government grants or other funding.

The measure was introduced to assist in protecting Indigenous people in remote Northern Territory communities from inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit and very violent material on publicly funded computers.

NTER measure

Under the NTER legislation the person in control of each publicly funded computer located in the prescribed areas within the Northern Territory is required to:

- install, and keep in place, a content filter designed to prevent, and record, access to illegal material;
- maintain a policy on acceptable use of computers, covering all users and confirming that all use will be audited;
- keep records that identify each user;
- undertake six monthly audits of material on, or accessed by, the computer; and
- provide to the Australian Crime Commission the outcome of any audit undertaken.

What we heard

The consultations showed that the discussion of pornography was a culturally sensitive matter and there were some consultation meetings where this matter was not discussed. Where people did comment, the majority said that the current controls on the use of publicly funded computers are a good idea and should continue.

Where people had little or no access to computers, this issue was not of concern to them. However people said there should be more computers in communities especially for young people and that when there was more availability and access to computers, there would be a higher risk of seeing unwanted material. Retaining the measure was therefore seen by some people as a safeguard against these risks.

What we propose

The Government proposes to continue this measure without change. Retaining the measure will inconvenience organisations with publicly funded computers in NTER communities, the staff of those organisations and some people who use their computers. However, the consultations showed that people were in favour of retaining these controls and did not want pornography in their communities.

The Government considers that the controls on publicly funded computers are a special measure for the purposes of the RDA. The Government believes that the measure reduces the risk of children, women and others being exposed to sexually explicit and very violent material through publicly funded computers. The consultations reveal that members of the communities recognise these benefits, and that there is support for the continuation of the measure. The restrictions will be continued for the sole purpose of protecting children, women and others in these communities from inadvertent exposure to sexually explicit and very violent material on publicly funded computers. In the Government's view, this measure is a necessary tool to protect children, women and the vulnerable in NTER communities. While an inconvenience, it has minimal impact on the rights of individuals in these communities noting that organisations already have filters installed on their computers. This measure will cease in August 2012, as originally enacted.

LAW ENFORCEMENT POWERS

The *Little Children are Sacred* report referred to the failure and reluctance of people to report concerns that a child may be experiencing violence to an agency that has the authority to intervene to protect the child. Indigenous people told the Northern Territory Inquiry that wrote the *Little Children are Sacred* report that multiple causes of fear prevent reporting, including fear of violence and intimidation.

NTER measure

Under the NTER, the *Australian Crime Commission Act 2002* was amended to insert provisions to enable the Australian Crime Commission (ACC) Board to authorise a special intelligence operation/investigation into 'Indigenous violence or child abuse', which was defined as 'serious violence or child abuse committed by or against, or involving an Indigenous person'.

What we heard

Where people commented on this measure in the consultations they considered the special powers of the ACC to obtain evidence from witnesses to be important in being able to address violence and abuse.

Most people who commented indicated a willingness for the powers to be continued and monitored for effectiveness and that people in communities be given more information about the powers and how they can contact the ACC.

What we propose

The Government proposes to retain the ACC's special law enforcement powers but to make it clear that these powers are in relation to serious violence or child abuse committed against an Indigenous person.

The Government considers this measure is a special measure for the purposes of the RDA. The Government believes that the measure protects the rights of Indigenous people, especially children and women, in these communities by facilitating the reporting and investigation of crimes involving serious violence and abuse, the prosecution of such offences, and therefore the prevention of further serious violence and abuse. The measure will be continued for the sole purpose of protecting Indigenous people, in particular women and children, in the communities. The Government believes that the measure is a necessary tool to assist in the protection of Indigenous people, in particular children and women, from serious violence or abuse. Whilst the measure facilitates reporting and investigation of offences, any prosecution will be for offences applicable generally, and in accordance with the criminal procedure that apply generally.

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AREAS POWERS

The *Little Children are Sacred* report reiterated the findings of other reports that failure of service providers and dysfunctional governance are contributing factors to Indigenous disadvantage.

NTER measure

The NTER legislation included business management areas powers that provide the Australian Government with powers, including the power to vary and terminate funding agreements and for the Commonwealth Minister to make directions relating to the provision of services and assets required for the delivery of community services.

What we heard

The proposal in the Discussion Paper was that the powers be removed because they had not been used since the NTER began.

During the consultations some community members and community leaders, those with a more detailed understanding of this measure, suggested that the powers should be retained in case a community organisation delivering essential community services was performing poorly and the Government needed to step in urgently to help the community.

What we propose

Having considered the views expressed during the consultations, the Government has decided to retain the business management areas powers.

There are other avenues for addressing service-delivery and governance issues but these can involve long timeframes. The scope and need for the use of these powers has been reduced with the establishment of Shire Councils which now provide essential services to remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory.

The Government considers that the powers are a special measure for the purposes of the RDA. The Government believes that the powers will enable the provision of basic services to remote Indigenous communities so as to maintain health, safety and living conditions. The powers will be continued for the sole purpose of providing basic services to Indigenous communities. The Government believes that the powers are necessary to ensure that Indigenous people in NTER communities are able to access basic services. The exercise of the powers may have an effect on those who receive Commonwealth funding, or provide services, but this effect will only be for the purpose of ensuring the continued, adequate provision of the services in communities. This measure will cease in August 2012, as originally enacted.

PART 2.

CLOSING THE GAP IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY

The Government believes that the extreme disadvantage facing Indigenous people in the Northern Territory warrants continuing concentrated intervention and effort.

We are committed to closing the gap in the Northern Territory by working in partnership with Aboriginal people.

Of the top 50 most disadvantaged locations across Australia on the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA), the Northern Territory has 24.

In 2006, Indigenous students in the Northern Territory recorded the lowest level of achievement in the national reading benchmarks for years 3, 5 and 7.

The rate of hospital separations related to alcohol-use among Indigenous people is up to 5 times higher than for non-Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, and the rate of alcohol related deaths is around 10 times higher.

All Australian Governments are agreed that overcoming this scale of disadvantage requires a long-term generational commitment with major effort directed across a range of strategic platforms or 'Building Blocks'. These Building Blocks are:

- 1) Governance and Leadership;
- 2) Early Childhood;
- 3) Schooling;
- 4) Health;
- 5) Economic Participation;
- 6) Healthy Homes; and
- 7) Safe Communities.

The Australian Government has recognised the need to invest in a range of strategies across the COAG Building Blocks aimed at Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory. Australian Government initiatives in the Northern Territory against each of the building blocks are set out below.

1. GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

This Building Block seeks to promote effective governance arrangements in communities and organisations, as well as strong engagement by governments to promote long term sustainability. Indigenous people need to be engaged in the development of reforms that will impact on them. Improved access to capacity building in governance and leadership is needed in order for Indigenous people to play a greater role in exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Over the past few months the Australian Government has conducted over 500 workshops and meetings with several thousands of Indigenous people in 73

Northern Territory communities and town camps on the redesign of NTER. These extensive consultations demonstrate the Government's commitment to work in partnership with Indigenous people on the future direction of the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER).

We know that building strong on-the-ground relationships with communities is critical. Funding directed to this aim includes:

- \$34.6 million over three years (from 2009-10) to facilitate more effective engagement between the government and Indigenous people through providing ongoing funding for **Indigenous Engagement Officers**;
- \$84.1 million over three years has been provided for a boosted presence of government staff in remote regions, and **interpreter services and cultural competency training for Government staff**;
- \$3.3 million over four years has been provided for the **Ombudsman's office** to handle complaints, support complaint handling in Government agencies delivering programs to Indigenous communities, and identify systemic issues;
- \$0.9 million has been provided for the Government to work with the Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service to improve its capacity to deliver services as required.

The **Groote Eylandt Regional Partnership Agreement** is an example of what can be achieved through strong community leadership and meaningful engagement by governments. The Agreement aims to achieve sustainable and measurable improvements across the areas of housing, health services, education, employment and business development, community safety, and local organisations' governance capacities. It includes significant financial contributions from Traditional Owners, and both the Australian and Northern Territory Governments.

Good governance is also about the way that governments deliver services in remote regions. We are committed to overhauling the way governments deliver services and invest in remote areas. Under the Remote Service Delivery Strategy, our benchmark is to progressively deliver in communities or townships the facilities and services one would expect in any Australian town of the same size.

Given the scale of the backlog of need in remote Indigenous communities, 29 priority national locations have been initially identified under the Remote Service Delivery National Partnership.

The Northern Territory has 15 of the 29 priority national locations. Those locations will continue to expand as benchmarks are achieved. Through the Remote Service Delivery arrangements, local governance arrangements involve:

- community partners in setting priorities and implementing initiatives;
- and

- establishing and reporting against baseline data.

Under the National Partnership Agreement for Remote Service Delivery, **leadership and governance training** will be provided to Indigenous people in priority locations in the Northern Territory tailored to meet their specific training needs. The leadership and governance training will assist Indigenous people to develop the skills and capacity to engage effectively with government on the programs and services that affect their lives.

2. EARLY CHILDHOOD

This Building Block seeks to improve access to quality early childhood education and care services, including pre-school, child care and family support services such as parenting programs and supports. Appropriate facilities and physical infrastructure, a sustainable early childhood education and health workforce, learning frameworks and opportunities for parental engagement are also important. Action in the areas of maternal, antenatal and early childhood health is relevant to addressing the child mortality gap and to early childhood development.

Australian Government action in the Northern Territory has focused on increasing access to high quality early childhood health and education services and support for parents. The youthful demographic and high fertility rates in the Northern Territory, coupled with extreme levels of poverty, underline the importance of acting early to give children the best chance in life. The Australian Government is making unprecedented investments into the Northern Territory to support children in their early years.

Increasing access to high quality early childhood health and education services

The **National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education** seeks to improve the supply and integration of early childhood services, including child care and early learning and development through the delivery of universal access to quality early childhood education in the year before full time schooling. The universal access commitment is that by 2013 every child will have access to a preschool program in the 12 months prior to full-time schooling, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year, delivered by a four year university qualified early childhood teacher, in accordance with a national early learning years framework.

In recognition of the importance of early education, the Australian Government is providing \$955 million to states and territories over five years, to achieve Universal Access to early childhood education. Of this, the Northern Territory will be receiving \$15.9 million.

The Australian and Northern Territory Governments have negotiated a Bilateral Agreement, which details the actions and strategies the Northern Territory will put in place to deliver the Universal Access commitment over the next five years.

Key commitments under the Northern Territory Bilateral Agreement are:

- increasing the level of participation while increasing hours of attendance that are available for children from 12 to 15 hours;
- increasing preschool participation for Indigenous children through developing a territory-wide plan for delivery of preschool in small remote communities and town camps; and
- increasing the proportion of four year early childhood education trained teachers.

The Northern Territory Government is undertaking planning discussions and has commenced a range of activities, including mobile preschool delivery initiatives, to ensure that all children, no matter where they live, will have access to a quality early childhood education program.

The **National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development** acknowledges that Indigenous children are the most vulnerable group of children in Australia and disparities with non-Indigenous children in some outcomes have widened in recent years. The Agreement seeks to improve outcomes for Indigenous children through:

- integration of early childhood services through Children and Family Centres;
- increased access to antenatal, pre-pregnancy care and teenage sexual and reproductive health; and
- increased access to and use of Maternal and Child Health Services by Indigenous families.

Under the National Partnership, **Children and Family Centres** will be established in Maningrida, Yuendumu, Ngukurr, Gunbalanya, and Palmerston.

These centres will deliver or link with a range of parenting, child care, health and early learning and development services, making these important services easier for parents and their children to access. The design and service mix of the Centres will be developed in consultation with the local community to ensure services meet local needs.

A school nutrition program has been set up in 69 communities providing breakfast and lunch to school-aged children. These programs are encouraging children to go to school by providing better nutrition:

- around 130 local Aboriginal people are employed either full-time or part-time under the program.

Support for parents

New Directions Mothers and Babies Services are located in Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine, Nhulunbuy and Yuendumu:

- these services deliver new or enhanced services to: increase access to antenatal care; provide standard information about baby care; provide practical advice and assistance with breastfeeding, nutrition and parenting; monitoring of developmental milestones, immunization status and infections; and deliver health checks for Indigenous children before starting school. Additional services in the Northern Territory will be considered for funding this financial year.

\$10 million over three years from 2008-09 of capital funding has been provided for **new accommodation for Indigenous mothers** from remote areas so they can access prenatal obstetric and postnatal services. Two sites in the Northern Territory are currently being considered.

A **home visiting service in Central Australia** funded through the Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program, is being implemented to help mothers gain confidence and improve their parenting skills. It will provide home-visiting services and support mothers to improve pregnancy outcomes; improve child health and development; and encourage mothers to develop goals for themselves and their family.

Fifteen **Indigenous Parenting Support Services** will be established in: Angurugu, Gapuwiyak, Galiwin'ku, Gunbalanya, Lajamanu, Milingimbi, Maningrida, Nguiu, Ntaria, Numbulwar, Ngukkur, Yirrkala, Yuendumu, Umbakumba and Wadeye.

- Parents will have access to a range of services aimed at strengthening parenting skills such as training in nutrition, hygiene, children's health and financial management. They will also benefit from regular home visits from case workers who can support parents with children with behaviour management issues.

Communities for Children is part of the new Family Support Program which provides prevention and early intervention programs to families with children up to 12 years, who are at risk of disadvantage and who remain disconnected from childhood services. This initiative applies to all Australian children in 45 sites around the country, including Alice Springs, East Arnhem, Katherine Region and Palmerston/Tiwi Islands.

Examples of activities being implemented under Communities for Children include: home visiting; early learning and literacy programs, early development of social and communication skills, parenting and family support programs, child nutrition, and community events to celebrate the importance of children, families and the early years.

The **Expansion of Playgroups for Indigenous Families program** will fund Locational Supported Playgroups in Ngukurr, Yuendumu, Numbulwar and Milingimbi. **Mobile Intensive Support Playgroups** have been established in the town camps of Katherine and Tennant Creek, providing extensive support to isolated and disadvantaged families. These playgroups will help develop children's social, emotional, physical and cognitive abilities and provide important opportunities for parents to establish social and support networks to assist them in parenting.

Parents will also get additional support for their children through funding for **crèches in remote communities** in the Northern Territory that previously had little or no access to early childhood programs for children under five years of age. New facilities have been established at Peppimenarti, Yarralin, Robinson River, Areyonga and Lajamanu, and existing crèche facilities have been upgraded at Ntaria (Hermannsburg), Nyirripi, Santa Teresa, Oenpelli (Gunbalanya), Borroloola, Maningrida, Gapuwiyak, Wugularr, Minyerri and Minjilang.

The Government funds a total of 118 **non-mainstream child care services** in the Northern Territory in locations where the market would otherwise fail to deliver child care. These services are mainly located in rural and remote Indigenous communities. The type of non-mainstream services vary based on community need and include Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS), flexible / innovative child care services, outside school hours care, mobile child care services, playgroups and crèches.

The **Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters** is currently operating in Alice Springs and will also be delivered in Katherine in 2010. This home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program empowers parents to be their child's first teacher and foster parent involvement in school and community life.

Research on Children

The Australian Government is committed to building a better understanding of the needs of Indigenous children, through the **Footprints in Time** study and the **Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)**.

The **Footprints in Time** study tracks the long-term development of 1,687 children and will give researchers the capacity to look in depth at the early childhood experiences of Indigenous children and how these experiences influence their future.

- The study measures the health and development of Indigenous children aged between six months and five years – and records the circumstances of their parents and carers. The study began last year and families will be interviewed yearly over at least four years.
- In the Northern Territory the study covers Darwin, Katherine, Galiwin'ku, Alice Springs and Hermannsburg.

The **Australian Early Development Index (AEDI)** is designed to present a population-level picture of how children in a community are developing by the time they reach school age. It measures five domains of early childhood development from information collected via a teacher-completed checklist in the children's first year of formal schooling.

These domains are:

- physical health and wellbeing;
- social competence;
- emotional maturity;
- language and cognitive skills (school based); and
- communication skills and general knowledge.

A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia, the first AEDI national report, will be released in December 2009 along with mapped community results.

Community Profiles will be released in March 2010, which will help inform communities and government in developing and evaluating their efforts to improve outcomes for children.

The AEDI Indigenous Study initiated by the Centre for Developmental Health and the Kulunga Indigenous Research Network, was completed prior to the AEDI national data collection and helped ensure that the AEDI was culturally appropriate for Indigenous Australians.

Additionally, Indigenous Cultural Consultants completed the AEDI Checklist collaboratively with the child's classroom teacher.

3. SCHOOLING

This Building Block seeks to support responsive schooling that requires attention to infrastructure, workforce, curriculum, student literacy and numeracy achievement and opportunities for parental engagement and school/community partnerships. Transition pathways into schooling and into work, post-school education and training are also important. Life-long learning is important and attention is also needed regarding adult literacy and numeracy skills.

The majority of Indigenous students in very remote Australia currently do not meet the national minimum standard in reading, writing and numeracy, and the Government is giving particular attention to improving access to schooling, addressing infrastructure needs and providing funding to improve the quality of teaching.

Specific measures funded in the last Budget as part of Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory are:

- \$23 million for the Quality **Teaching Package** for Professional development framework to up-skill and retain the education workforce in NT schools with a particular emphasis on developing an Indigenous education workforce;
- \$11.2 million in 2009-10 to build up to 22 additional **teacher houses**; and
- \$22.7 million for onsite accelerated **literacy and numeracy support** for teaching staff through the assistance of regionally based specialist teams.

This builds on measures to support the NTER in the 2008 budget and in response to 2007 election commitments:

- \$19.1 million under the Enhancing Education initiatives including funds

to continue professional development of teachers of Indigenous students; and

- \$98.8 million over five years for an additional **200 teachers** in the Northern Territory.

\$17.5 million has been committed under **Building an Education Revolution** for new and refurbished science and language centres for remote Northern Territory communities.

As well, the Government has given particular attention to enabling students from very remote communities to continue their schooling through support for boarding facilities, including \$28.9 million committed over four years in 2008-09 to build three new **boarding facilities** for secondary students in the Northern Territory.

In addition to measures funded under the NTER, students, schools and teachers in the Northern Territory will benefit from investments through the following National Partnerships.

The **National Partnership Agreement on Literacy and Numeracy** seeks to put in place the infrastructure and practices that will deliver sustained improvement in literacy and numeracy outcomes for all students, with many NT schools participating.

The **National Partnership Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality** seeks to drive and reward systemic reforms to improve the quality of teaching and leadership in Australian schools.

- The national partnership incorporates a range of reforms. One indicative Indigenous-specific measure is building professional pathways for Indigenous people and Indigenous Education Workers who wish to progress to teaching through the Indigenous Pathways reform.

The **National Partnership Agreement on Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities** seeks to improve student engagement, educational attainment and wellbeing in participating schools.

- One of the specific focal points in the Northern Territory is on improving support for regional and urban Indigenous students through the Engaging Urban Students (EUS) reform. 16 schools will receive targeted resourcing to support attendance and engagement initiatives to enhance the connection between home, family and school. Many of these schools service the needs of Indigenous students living in town camps.

4. HEALTH

This Building Block seeks to achieve improved health outcomes for Indigenous people. Increasing Indigenous Australians' access to effective, comprehensive primary and preventative health care is essential to improving their health and life expectancy, and reducing excess mortality caused by chronic disease. All health services play an important role in providing Indigenous people with access to effective health care, and being responsive to and accountable for achieving government and community health priorities. Closing the Indigenous health gap requires a concerted effort in the prevention, management and treatment of chronic disease. Indigenous children and their parents need to access programs and services that promote healthy lifestyles.

Health outcomes for Indigenous Australians in the Northern Territory continue to be poorer than for non-Indigenous Australians. The most recent *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report shows that in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory the Indigenous mortality rate was twice the rate for non-Indigenous people, with Indigenous death rates nine times higher than non-Indigenous death rates for diabetes, six times as high for cervical cancer, four times as high for kidney diseases and three times as high for digestive diseases.

To address these, and other issues, significant funds have been committed under the Northern Territory Emergency Response, and through the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes. Areas of focus include improving health outcomes for Indigenous children, increasing access to comprehensive primary health care services, strengthening food security and nutrition through community store licensing and addressing the impact of alcohol misuse.

As well as funding additional health services in the Northern Territory, the Australian and Northern Territory Governments have agreed to the **Pathways to Community Control** framework to help Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory get closer to taking primary health care into their own hands.

The **National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes** will contribute to closing the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians health across urban, rural and remote areas by focusing on five priority areas: tackling smoking, providing a healthy transition to adulthood, making Indigenous health everyone's business, delivery of effective primary health care services and better coordination of the patient journey through the health system.

The Commonwealth is contributing \$805.5 million over four years nationally to the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes. This will tackle chronic disease risk factors, improve chronic disease management in primary care, improve follow up care and increase the capacity of the primary care workforce to deliver effective health care to Indigenous Australians. The Northern Territory Government is providing

\$175.87 million over four years for activities as its contribution to the National Partnership.

To date, funding of \$960,000 for six Indigenous Outreach Workers and two Indigenous health project officers has been approved for the Northern Territory for 2009-10.

The Department is consulting with the Indigenous Health Partnership Forums in each jurisdiction on priority regions for further investment. It is expected that an equitable proportion of funding under the package would be available for the Northern Territory, taking into account the needs of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.

Below are some further measures specific to the Northern Territory.

Healthy children and families

A total of 14,610 **Child Health Checks** were carried out between July 2007 and 30 June 2009. Over 69 percent of children who received a Child Health Check were referred to at least one specialist service.

The 2009-10 budget provided \$131.1 million over three years for **expanded primary health care and health-related services in the NT**, including

- continuation of increased primary health care services;
- regional reform of remote Indigenous primary health care services;
- continuing the Remote Area Health Corps;
- funding follow up services for dental and ear, nose and throat conditions identified through the NTER child health checks;
- continuation of alcohol and other drug services; and
- expanding the Mobile Outreach Services.

In addition, \$21.5 million over five years will be provided to health services in the Northern Territory as part of the **Better Outcomes for Hospitals and Community Health** measure. This will build and improve health clinics (\$10 million over 3 years); provide increased access to renal dialysis (\$5.3 million over 5 years); and expand sexual assault counselling (\$6.2 million over 4 years from 2008-09).

Improving sexual health

\$2.1 million will be provided during 2009-10 to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sexual health workers across the community controlled primary health sector and State-based health services.

- \$1.55 million has been allocated over three years (2008-09, 2009-10, 2010-11) to establish the Tri-State Centre for Sexual Health in Alice Springs to improve sexual health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the cross-border region of Central Australia. The funds represent the collective contribution by the Commonwealth, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

- \$780,000 from 2008-09 to 2010-11 has been provided to Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Inc to employ a senior Aboriginal man to develop and implement an STI/BBV peer education program for young Aboriginal men in remote and urban communities in central Australia. The focus of the program will be on reducing the risk of BBV transmission during ceremonial business and promoting health seeking behaviour including STI/BBV.

Community Stores

An important part of a healthy community is reliable access to a good range and quality of fresh food. A key measure of the NTER has been the licensing of community stores, which has meant that as at 24 June 2009, a total of 85 community stores have been licensed. The community stores licensing process addresses concerns about the management of stores and the quality of food availability by setting standards for food, grocery quality and store governance.

- \$18.3 million over three years from 2009-10 has been provided to continue assessing, licensing and monitoring stores; provide training and improve the capacity and operations of **community stores**; and provide food to communities where a store licence has been revoked.

Addressing alcohol abuse

Abuse of alcohol and other drugs can have devastating health and community safety consequences. An important aspect of the NTER has been to provide additional services to assist individuals and families to address the effects of alcohol.

- \$8 million to **reduce alcohol and substance abuse** and its impact on families, safety and community wellbeing in remote Indigenous communities.
- \$1.5 million through the Alice Springs Transformation Plan to expand and improve the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress' **Targeted Family Support Service** which provides intensive case management for individual families, with a further \$100,000 to employ an additional alcohol counsellor.

5. ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

This Building Block seeks to ensure that individuals and communities have the opportunity to benefit from the mainstream economy. Economic participation needs to extend to disadvantaged job seekers and those outside of the labour market. Welfare needs to promote active engagement, enhanced capability and positive social norms.

The Government has developed both specific employment packages in the Northern Territory, as well as implementing nationwide reforms to the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program, the Indigenous Employment Program (IEP), and mainstream employment

services so Indigenous Australians acquire the skills they need to get and keep a job.

NTER specific employment

Under the 2007 **Northern Territory Jobs Package**, the Australian Government has provided more than \$90 million over three years to generate around 2000 jobs supporting government service delivery.

- As at 30 September 2009, the package has funded 2 122 positions, with 1720 jobs in Australian Government service delivery and 402 in local government service delivery. Those people in these jobs were previously employed through CDEP now have properly paid work with entitlements and superannuation.

The Australian Government has also provided \$28 million to the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts to create 169 new jobs in 28 **Indigenous ranger groups**, working on land and sea management activities in the Northern Territory.

- The investment supports the development of ranger groups in a number of regions across the Northern Territory including (but not confined to) Wadeye, Daly River, Pine Creek, Borroloola, Numbulwar, Waanyi-Garawa Aboriginal Land Trust, Minjilang, Waruwi, Maningrida, Laynhapuy, Galiwinku, Ramingining, Kabulwanamy, Ngukurr, the Tiwi Islands, Lajamanu, Yuendumu, Ti-Tree and Docker River (Kaltukatjara).

More than \$9 million is committed through the Working on Country Northern Territory program delivered by the Department of the Environment, Water and Heritage to create 61 new ranger jobs.

Employment through National Partnership Agreements

The **National Partnership Agreement for Remote Indigenous Housing** includes a requirement that **20 per cent** of local Indigenous employment is to be included as part of procurement requirement for new housing construction. The 20 per cent target is currently being achieved in the first three packages - Tiwi Islands, Groote Eylandt and Tennant Creek.

The **Indigenous Economic Participation National Partnership** seeks to directly create employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians in the private and public sectors. The national partnership will support:

- creation of sustainable jobs in government service delivery;
- strengthening government procurement policies to maximise Indigenous employment;
- incorporating Indigenous workforce strategies into all new major COAG reforms; and

- increasing Indigenous representation across public sector employment in the Northern Territory to at least 10 percent by 2015.

Through the **National Partnership Agreement on Productivity Places Program** the Australian and Northern Territory Governments will invest over \$21 million over three and a half years to deliver 5769 qualification commencements for job seekers and existing workers throughout the Territory in areas of demonstrated skills need. Training through the Program is targeted towards all Territorians, including Indigenous people and training opportunities for job seekers are currently available in locations throughout the Territory including Darwin, Alice Springs, Katherine, Jabiru and Tennant Creek.

6. HEALTHY HOMES

This Building Block seeks to address contributors to unsatisfactory living conditions. These include inadequate water and sewerage systems, waste collection, electricity and housing infrastructure. Children need to live in accommodation with adequate infrastructure conducive to good hygiene and study and free of overcrowding.

Safe, well-built and maintained houses are vital to good health, education, family safety and employment. Throughout the Northern Territory, the Australian Government is contributing significant funds to address this critical aspect of closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

Housing through the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing

The Australian Government is providing \$5.5 billion over ten years to reform Indigenous housing arrangements in remote Australia through the **National Partnership Agreement on Remote Indigenous Housing**, with \$1.7 billion to the Northern Territory. The first stage – to be completed under the Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure program (SIHIP) – will deliver 750 new houses, 230 rebuilds and 2, 500 refurbishments in remote communities and targeted town camps in the Northern Territory by 2013. SIHIP is a \$672 million program of which \$572 million is being provided by the Australian Government and \$100 million by the Northern Territory Government

The package will be delivered by the Northern Territory with Australian Government assistance and will also enable:

- improved tenancy management services to ensure rental houses are well maintained, rent is collected and support services are in place;
- economic development opportunities through increased local training and employment opportunities in construction and housing management;
- an ongoing maintenance and repairs program;

- upgrades to housing related infrastructure in remote communities, including town camps, and
- access to affordable accommodation options in regional centres to support employment, education and training opportunities in regional areas.

The **National Partnership Agreement on Social Housing** seeks to increase the supply of social housing through new construction, and contribute to reduced homelessness and improved outcomes for homeless and Indigenous Australians.

- This agreement will deliver construction of 44 units of accommodation for seniors to improve housing opportunities for Indigenous public housing applicants in Darwin.

The **National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness** seeks to reduce the number of homeless Australians overall by 7%, and the number of homeless Indigenous Australians by one third by 2013.

- In the Northern Territory, total funding under the Partnership is \$54.993 million.
- The National Partnership initially targets the urban centres of Darwin, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs.

The **Nation Building and Jobs Plan – Economic Stimulus – Social Housing Initiative** seeks to increase the supply of social housing through new construction and refurbishment of existing stock that would otherwise be unavailable for occupancy; to provide increased opportunities for persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to gain secure, long term accommodation; and to stimulate the building and construction industry and business that supplies construction materials and help to retain jobs in the industry. In the Northern Territory, a total of 289 dwellings have benefited to date from repair and maintenance funding.

Housing Delivered through the Alice Springs Transformation Plan

Alice Springs Transformation Plan is a strategic joint initiative between the Australian and Northern Territory Governments which will deliver an investment of over \$150 million into the town of Alice Springs and the town camps. It aims to improve the life outcomes for Indigenous residents and visitors in Alice Springs. It comprises three major streams:

- Social support services across the Alice Springs community (\$27 million);
- Transformation of 18 Alice Springs town camps through major infrastructure and housing capital works program as well as tenancy reforms (\$100 million); and
- Reducing homelessness through the provision of transitional and visitor accommodation in Alice Springs (\$24 million).

7. SAFE COMMUNITIES

This Building Block involves improving family and community safety through law and justice responses, victim support, child protection and preventative approaches. Addressing related factors such as alcohol and substance abuse will be critical to improving community safety, along with the improved health benefits

The impact of violence and other crime comes at an enormous cost to families, and in particular women and children. Providing a safe and stable home environment for children is also a critical foundation for making inroads into other areas like education, health and employment. The Government has focused on a number of connected aspects to improve community safety, including increased child protection and support for families, addressing family violence, providing youth diversionary activities, increasing police numbers and facilities, providing legal services and addressing the impact of alcohol and drugs.

Addressing family violence and child abuse

\$31.6m over three years for the **Family Support Package** has been provided under NTER to support Indigenous families and communities suffering from violence or the threat of violence. This program is for:

- 22 safe places in 15 remote communities as well as Alice Springs and Darwin. Of the 22 Safe Places, there are 13 Safe Houses for women and children, which provide an essential refuge for women and children away from family violence; and 9 Cooling-Off Places, to support men to make positive choices;
- a Mobile Child Protection Team, which provides support to areas with high caseloads, and allows for more investigations to take place in remote and regional communities across the Northern Territory; and
- placing Remote Aboriginal Family and Community Workers in 13 remote communities. These workers provide culturally appropriate liaison and linkage points between the child protection system, services and Indigenous families.

\$4.3 million over three years for AFP specialist investigators has been provided to support the **Northern Territory Child Abuse Taskforce**. The Taskforce is a joint initiative between Northern Territory Police, Family and Children's Services and the Australian Federal Police to investigate child abuse and child sexual abuse in the Northern Territory.

\$5.5 million has been provided to continue the work of the Australian Crime Commission's **National Indigenous Intelligence Taskforce** for 12 months (from July 2009). The Taskforce provides Government with intelligence advice to help address the challenges of limited disclosure and reporting on crime in remote communities.

Addressing the impact of alcohol and other drugs

Alcohol is a factor in the majority of criminal activity, and working to reduce the incidence of alcohol-related harm is crucial. This has involved a combination of effective policing strategies combined with availability of treatment services:

- \$12 million over three years from 2007-08 to support alternatives for young people at risk of or engaged in **petrol sniffing**. This has allowed construction and refurbishment of recreation halls and youth worker houses and the employment of permanent youth workers and locally engaged Anangu workers in Finke (Apatula), Imanpa, Mutijulu and Docker River (Kaltukatjara).
- \$7 million for continuation of **alcohol and drug services**, to enhance the remote drug and alcohol workforce and to support 16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to provide substance misuse services. This builds on previous initial funding of \$23.6 million.
- \$7.8 million over three years from 2009-10 for continuation of **alcohol and drug services** to enhance and support the remote alcohol and other drug workforce in six Aboriginal Medical Services and four residential rehabilitation services in the Northern Territory. This builds on previous initial funding of \$10.6 million in 2007-08 and 2008-09.

Providing youth diversionary activities

Building up youth support services is vital, and \$28.4 million over three years will provide young people with a range of safe and healthy activities as an alternative to drinking and substance abuse. The funding builds on initial funding of \$17.3 million for the period 2007-08 to 2009-10 and will improve the recreational infrastructure, fund more youth workers, including Indigenous trainee youth workers and provide **diversionary programs** for young people between 10 and 20.

Sport can provide a very important pathway to improved life outcomes for young people, and the Government has provided \$1.2 million over three years to jointly fund a partnership with the Australian Football League (AFL) to deliver three programs – the AFL Club Fostership Program, the AFL Ambassadors for Life Mentoring Program and the Wadeye/Daly River AFL program. These programs provide a way that sport can promote messages especially to young men about the importance of a good education and the value of a healthy and active lifestyle.

Law and Order

Currently there are 65 additional police in 23 remote communities, including nine Australian Federal Police officers in the child abuse taskforce, and 72 active night patrols. This increased presence has been possible through a range of initiatives, including:

- \$50.2 million over three years to continue operation of ten temporary **police stations** and to construct five new stations at Gapuwiyak, Ramingining, Yarralin, Arlparra and Imanpa;
- \$24.1 million over three years for 60 Northern Territory **Police** to replace Australian Federal Police; and
- As part of the NTER an independent Review of Police Resourcing Levels in Remote Communities has been funded by the Commonwealth Government to inform future policing strategies in the Northern Territory.

\$68.1 million over three years has been provided for **night patrol** services in 81 communities, employing many local Aboriginal men and women.

\$11.2 million from 2005-2012 has been provided for two **Substance Abuse Intelligence Desks** in Alice Springs and Katherine. These Desks:

- target trafficking in the cross-border regions of the Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia and the Top End;
- support the alcohol bans in the Katherine, East Arnhem, Nhulunbuy, Groote Eylandt and the Milingimbi areas; and
- include two Dog Operation Units.

\$5.4 million over three years has been provided for the **Northern Territory Aboriginal Interpreter Service**.

\$17.1 m over three years has been provided to fund the provision of **legal advice and related services** for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.