

# Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory

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

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Long-term funding commended, but promised new partnership is the key

3 April 2012

The Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT) have welcomed the historic announcements over the past week of a ten year funding commitment by the Australian Government in the Northern Territory (NT) as part of its Stronger Futures funding package.

The funding linked with Stronger Futures will provide greater surety and certainty for our peoples in the NT. For the first time we have a long term funding commitment that potentially matches the intergenerational time scales of Closing the Gap.

The Australian Government now needs to make good its commitment to a new way of working in partnership with Aboriginal people, leaders and communities to address Aboriginal disadvantage.

APO NT believes that in addition to significant resourcing commitment by the Australian Government there are other key factors necessary to close the gap to overcome Indigenous disadvantage:

- community involvement, engagement and working together;
- respect for language and culture;
- recognising underlying social determinants;
- development of social capital;
- commitment to doing projects with, not for, Aboriginal people; and
- understanding that issues are complex and contextual.

We look forward to developing evidence-based projects that will enhance and expand on the welcome announcements from Minister Macklin, especially in other areas of the social determinants of health such as education, employment, housing and cultural services.

#### **Health – On 29 March 2012, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT (AMSANT) CEO John Paterson said:**

“This is the first time in history that Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations in any sector have received a commitment funding extending to ten years.”

“It is difficult to underestimate the profound impact this will potentially have in enabling our services to engage in long-term planning for improved services and programs ... This will also provide significantly improved capacity for planning and retention of our remote workforce that is vital for stability and further development of our services.”

“However... the government needs to match this funding with a reduction in the unnecessary red tape that currently plagues our services and detracts from our service delivery capacity...”

#### **Justice services – On 29 March 2012, North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA) Chairperson Dorothy Fox and Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service (CAALAS) Chairperson Robert Le Rossignol said:**

“Since the Intervention commenced we have seen increases of over 30% in the number of criminal matters and 70% in the number of civil matters undertaken by our services. We are very pleased to have funding to continue to meet the legal demands of our people.”

“But it is important that both the Australian and NT governments recognise that our services remain chronically underfunded.”

We now look forward to ongoing dialogue with the Australian and NT governments on maximising this and future investments in legal services that meet the needs of Aboriginal Territorians.

**Homelands – On 29 March 2012, Mr Kim Hill CEO of the Northern Land Council said:**

“The announcement demonstrates that the Australian Government has not abandoned homelands in favour of larger communities, and this news will be a great relief to many Aboriginal people in the bush”.

“Twenty million a year is not enough money, but it is a good start, and we now call on the NT Government to step up and increase their contribution of \$15 million. APO NT also expects greater transparency and accountability regarding the allocation and outcomes of this funding than has been the case over the past five years. We urge both levels of government to work with APO NT to consider innovative approaches to support these small remote places.”

**Education – Today, Ms Priscilla Collins CEO of NAAJA said:**

APO NT is encouraged by the Australian Government’s pledge yesterday of \$583 million over 10 years to improve access to education in the NT. All available evidence supports the Australian Government’s focus on the importance of the provision of quality teaching and well-resourced schools, and the need for regular school attendance.

“We support the continuation of positive initiatives such as supporting quality teaching, and the School Nutrition Program. The retention of 200 teaching positions and funding for teacher housing is also very important for improving educational outcomes in remote communities.”

“APO NT welcomes the focus on specialist English as a second language (ESL) training for teachers. The investment in professional development for Aboriginal school staff is also strongly supported.”

Ms Collins emphasised the need for positive rather than negative messaging around parental responsibility and school attendance. “The Australian Government needs to work with communities, schools and families through collaboration rather than coercion to develop strong learning communities.”

Interviews/information contact:

Chips Mackinolty (for John Paterson)

0419 844 774

Priscilla Collins (for Ms Fox and Mr Le Rossignol)

(08) 8981 5100

Roanna Edwards (for Kim Hill)

0458 305 355