



Human Services Inquiry
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East
Melbourne Vic 8003

6th February 2017

Dear Sir / Madame

Re – Productivity Commission Issues Paper

The comments following are a general response to the Productivity Commissions Issues Paper.

Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative (RAC) is pleased to make this submission to the Productivity Commission Human Services Inquiry.

RAC is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) offering a range of Health, Community and Aged Care programs and services to the large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of the Greater Shepparton and Goulburn Valley areas of Victoria.

We would like to state from the outset that RAC does not support the idea of increased competition and contestability in Human Services.

Whilst we note the Issues paper refers to Indigenous Australians in remote indigenous communities, we believe the challenges of the service system to meet the needs of all Indigenous Australians and get better outcomes for all, exists across all Indigenous communities.

Earlier this year, RAC conducted our own research and published our first discussion paper. The paper, *Changing the Paradigm to 'Close the Gap'*,¹ utilizes our own health service data to present a health profile of the typical RAC health service user, and offers a new understanding of the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and well being to effect measurable change.

The profile presents a picture of a population that is unwell. However, RAC believes that the community we serve presents with a skewed understanding of what wellness and wellbeing is. In short, being unwell has been normalized. This has occurred through years of living in sub optimal conditions that encompasses physical, mental, cultural, spiritual, educational, and economic wellbeing, and a history of trauma

¹ Sedick K, and Sheehan, G. 2016, Discussion Paper 1, *Changing the Paradigm to 'Close the Gap'*. Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative.

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and disadvantage that has been experienced through multiple generations.

The implications of this normalized state of being unwell are clear. Our indigenous community is engaging with the health system at a later stage and disengaging at an earlier stage than they otherwise would because being unwell is the norm. Our community will never be 'well' if we continue to pursue the ways we are doing things now. The latest, Closing the Gap reports show that we are failing and our targets are not being met.

The state of 'being unwell is the norm' needs to be recognized and taken into consideration when designing planning, and implementing culturally appropriate services across the health system. Episodic health interventions based on a self-assessment of wellness or sickness will not close the gap. Nor will an environment where primacy is placed upon applying for, administering, complying with and reporting to various government funding departments. This takes our focus and resources away from our real goals.

We have become activity based rather than outcome based. Simply, the focus upon fulfilling the requirements of the activity-based funding model disadvantages, rather than assists Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's (ACCHO's) to address the health needs of the people in their communities who engage much later, possibly to a distorted view of what constitutes wellness.

The provision of Human Services in this environment is complex. However, RAC believes that services and a service system that understands the complexities, and are planned and designed to address the multitude of issues that indigenous Australians face must include the following where practicable:

1. An holistic response which takes account of an individuals life journey where their physical, emotional, spiritual and mental well being are seen as integral to improving their outcomes.
2. An integrated response that puts the individual at the centre of all service and program planning and offers choices in medical and dental services, mental health services, family services, justice services, drug and alcohol services, education and educational support services, employment and housing for better outcomes for indigenous Australians.
3. A service system and programs that offers people opportunities to advance their lives through the provision of appropriate support and guidance but which doesn't entrap them in a cycle of welfare and welfare dependence, perhaps for generations. We look for a 'hand up' not a 'hand out.'
4. Robust Governance and operational management that is transparent and accountable to all stakeholders.

5. Business development where Indigenous people are taking responsibility for their own lives and providing opportunities for employment and career options which aims for a future of self determination and self reliance.
6. Indigenous program and service provision that sits beside and works with the general service system in a co-operative and collaborative manner to achieve better outcomes for indigenous Australians.
7. An indigenous program and service workforce that is able to support and guide individuals and families by leveraging relationships and networks and assist people to be better able to navigate the multiple complex systems that exist in the human services sector.

RAC suggests that an environment where free market forces hold sway over the real needs of our Indigenous communities, could result in a patchwork quilt of services, all with differing philosophies and models of care and service provision, where the overriding factor is the dollar bottom line rather than getting better outcomes for the indigenous population and 'closing the gap'.

We assert an ongoing engagement across the life continuum navigating multiple events and issues will help to 'Close the Gap'. We work in a complex multi layered environment. However, the services we offer to our community incorporate a respectful and safe relationship and narrative based engagement that isn't time limited and understands the history that each individual brings with them. This model of care is focused on the best possible outcomes for individuals, families and the community. ACCHO's are best placed to help achieve this

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a response to your Commission Report.

Yours Sincerely

Lee Joachim
Chief Executive Officer
Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative