

My Life, My Lead

Implementation Plan Advisory Group (IPAG)

Consultation Notes

Alice Springs – 19 April 2017

A range of face to face consultations, coupled with an online submission process, were established to hear from stakeholders and community on how to best address the social determinants and cultural determinants of Indigenous health.

The ninth of 13 consultations was held in Alice Springs on 19 April 2017. Summary outcomes from the forum are below.

The first session focused on what can be done to address the social and cultural determinants of health. The following themes were raised.

Key Observations:

Racism

- Aboriginal employment is one of the keys to overcoming racism in the health sector, including: Aboriginal health practitioners, Aboriginal liaison officers, Clinical translators, Community engagement officers; Upskill local people to fill those critical roles. Training – non Indigenous people need to understand trauma and its impact. Too often think behaviours in workplace are cultural, leading to increase in racism.
- Building cultural capability/awareness among government workers is essential across all sectors
- Maintaining staff in work areas for reasonable amounts of time to enable them to build their cultural knowledge and capability
- Need greater investment in mental health (significant impact of racism on social and emotional wellbeing)
- Media portrayal is a big part of the problem (a lot of people have their attitudes shaped/confirmed through mainstream media); Need to look beyond ‘assumptions’
- Need for interpreters and info in language – break down barriers to communication/understanding
- Need to call out racism by all who witness it (eg education program in media to what is racism); normalisation of racism in Alice, Tennant, etc
- Entire system perpetuates racism on all levels – dominant paradigms need to change. NT Intervention – still impacts all contexts in central Australia and feeds racist attitudes (eg poor policies; forced schooling; bottle shop pricing).
- Fighting racism must be embedded in compulsory school curriculum – still too easy for schools to minimise teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies.
- Lack of respect for different world views. Leadership is key – absent leadership means racism can thrive.
- Need to do something with the Cultural Respect and Security Frameworks!
- Non Indigenous confusion between culture and intergenerational trauma (impact on employment for eg). Too many people think that (eg) workplace behaviours are manifestations of ‘culture’, which leads to increased racism.

- We need effort by governments on increasing ‘mainstream’ appreciation and valuing of Aboriginal society.

Lateral violence

- Recognise cultural knowledge/lore/skills are just as important as literacy/numeracy and vice versa. This two way understanding and respect were seen as core to making inroads into lateral violence.
- Workplace with clear expectations around culture, behaviour expectations, helps decrease lateral violence.
- Communication and respect are important to decrease lateral violence.
- Importance of environment to facilitate family conversation (eg meeting places with safe environments).
- Child protection – Indigenous leadership group should be formed and which is consulted by NT Families before removal of child into care.
- Lateral violence is another manifestation of intergenerational trauma - Need to make sure it’s well understood that lateral violence is a result of things that have happened and are still happening (Government policy and practice, trauma, etc). It is not about ‘culture’.

Connection to family, community, country, language and culture

- Kids are being taken at record levels – what are the questions being asked in assessments? (these are based on material possessions, rather than blood/family). An urgent stocktake is required, both in terms of rationale for taking children and the placement of those children if taken.
- 60,000 vs 200 years – this is not an ‘eternal’ problem and not one driven by culture. We shouldn’t give up hope of being able to make progress.
- Judgement by mainstream Australians about everything to do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – need to increase understanding of how Aboriginal cultures/societies function:
 - Family values/behaviours
 - Community focus
 - More good news stories, rather than just the poor examples.
- Need a system that focuses on early intervention (at risk families and kids) as well as invests in crisis assistance and one where Aboriginal families can feel safe asking for help, without the fear that they will have their children taken. The importance of safe meeting places for families in crisis was also stressed.
- Investment in healing is essential for individuals, families, and communities.

Interaction with Government Systems and Services

- Governments driving community engagement in program development is essential. Dominant themes here included:
 - Trusting Indigenous people to lead, make mistakes, learn and improve.
 - Community identified local solutions.
 - Not listening to Aboriginal NGOs already doing this work – lost opportunity.

- By building partnerships and trust, people feel respected, acknowledged and listened to, and when solutions come from the people you can achieve a real community development approach.
 - Programs led by Government without community consultation have weaker buy in and poorer results.
 - Disingenuous approaches to 'partnerships' are damaging, both in the immediate context and into the future.
 - Consultation in community must be open and transparent – not pushing particular agendas
 - Developing and supporting Aboriginal leadership.
- Government practices across a range of activities came in for active attention. Key themes were:
 - Place based/regional approaches, driven by community need, and with flexible funding packages, will achieve greater ownership and better outcomes (regionalising the Implementation Plan reporting was one example).
 - Disconnect between funding, evaluation, success, failure, funding cycles (funded one round, not the next), government policy and priority cycles. Competitive funding rounds encourage status quo behaviour and actively undermine collaboration and innovation.
 - Government should have a strong sense going in about whether its intervention is going to be positive or negative.
 - The lack of connectedness between services and between governments attracted a lot of comment, as this disconnectedness is felt keenly by the people on the ground. Empowered Communities seen as a positive on the ground.
 - The need for governments to better support interpreters and information sources in language was also a common theme.
 - Governments' failures continue to resonate with local people. Most high profile of these is the NTER, which still impacts in central Australia and still contributes to negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people.
 - Governments can and should be doing better on increasing mainstream appreciation and valuing of Aboriginal society.
 - Genuine evaluations that involve recipients in their development and application.