



Aboriginal Health Council
of South Australia Inc.

'Our health, our choice, our way'

MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

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SA Aboriginal Leader commends the State's Strategic Plan but urges government to involve local communities

Mr John Singer, Chairperson of the state peak body representing Aboriginal community controlled health services, substance misuse services and Aboriginal Health Advisory Committees in South Australia and nationally, the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia Inc., has commended South Australia's Strategic Plan but emphasises the need to involve local Aboriginal communities in the implementation and delivery of its objectives.

"It is vital that governments work with local Aboriginal communities through the Aboriginal Health Service network to ensure that their objectives are successful. If the programs are not designed and delivered in a culturally sensitive and mutually acceptable way, they will not be effective," Mr Singer said.

"If you start forcing programs onto Aboriginal people, it will be seen no differently to assimilation. Our people want an equal opportunity to grow, develop and become economically independent but not at the expense of our culture and community values.

"The Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia Inc. (AHCSA) and its health service members cover the breadth and depth of the state's Aboriginal communities and can assist the government to design and deliver programs that will result in South Australia achieving its plan. But to do so, government need to commit more funds to the health service network which is already depleted of operating cash.

"Whilst the objectives around Aboriginal children are commendable, the government also needs to focus on programs for our youth to help break the cycle of crime. Youth commit such acts when they have nothing else to do. Racism and the lack of employment opportunities for youth is still a major issue and apart from the public sector increasing Aboriginal employment, the private sector should also be encouraged to do so.

"Until racism is no longer supported in media, there will be little impact on the wider community and therefore, little improvement in Aboriginal disadvantage. Racism is perpetuated by stories such as the one receiving so much coverage lately about the Aboriginal gang in Adelaide. There are other non-Aboriginal gangs operating in the area but it is the Aboriginal one that receives the most media attention. Singling us out like this, makes us appear different and perpetuates racism.

"Mr Singer agrees with the Hon. Jay Weatherill, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation, that long term solutions to the issues affecting the Aboriginal community lie within the Aboriginal community. We've had the answers for years said John Singer, it's just that no-one has asked us. "Involving the Aboriginal community and health services in the design and delivery of education, health and other programs is the key," said Mr Singer.

“If the government wants to increase the number of Aboriginal South Australians participating in community leadership, they need to adopt practical solutions such as those exhibited by the boards of the Aboriginal Health Services.

“AHCSA and its member network of health services are funded by government to improve the health and well being of Aboriginal people so why not give us an appropriate level of funding so that we can do the work.

“Any attempt at delivering programs designed by the public sector to the Aboriginal community is doomed to failure. Coordination must start at the design stage. AHCSA and its member services have the expertise, experience and local knowledge,” said Mr Singer.

ENDS.

For further information contact: Mrs Mary Buckskin, Chief Executive Officer, Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia Inc., 08 8132 6700.