Evaluations of Indigenous justice programs under the National indigenous Law and Justice Framework

In August 2009 the Attorney-General announced $2 million to evaluate Indigenous justice programs under the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework.

There is currently very little evidence to guide policy makers when it comes to reducing offending and re-offending in the Indigenous Australian context. Working with States and Territories, the Australian Government has provided funding to evaluate the effectiveness of 26 Indigenous law and justice programs across five subject areas to identify the best approaches to tackling crime and justice issues in Indigenous communities and better inform government funding decisions in the future.

All the evaluations have been designed to run for two years to enable an assessment of the impact of each initiative on participants' behaviour over time, particularly in terms of re-offending. Contracts have now been awarded for all five evaluation projects. Projects A, B, C and D commenced in December 2010 and are scheduled for completion in December 2012. Project E commenced in October 2011 and will be complete in October 2013.

Project A - Aboriginal Sentencing Courts and Conferences

Supplier: Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA)
Contract Value: $363,900 (excluding GST)
Contract Period: 3 December 2010 – 21 December 2012

The aim of this Evaluation Project is to assess the effectiveness of Indigenous specific courts and conferences. The limited amount of research in this area so far has generally been inconclusive. This Evaluation Project provides an opportunity to evaluate and comparatively examine the effectiveness of a number of community courts and conferencing models operating within Australia, including their ability to reduce rates of incarceration and recidivism.

Programs to be evaluated under Project A:

i. Port Adelaide and Murray Bridge Nunga Courts, South Australia (SA)
ii. Port Augusta Aboriginal Sentencing Court (SA)
iii. Port Lincoln Aboriginal Conferencing (SA)
iv. s.9c (Criminal Law Sentencing Act) 1988 Aboriginal Sentencing Conferences (SA)
v. Youth Justice Conferencing, Queensland (Qld), and
vi. Community Courts, Northern Territory (NT)

Project B - Offender Support/Reintegration

Supplier: Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA)
Contract Value: $277,000 (excluding GST)
Contract Period: 3 December 2010 – 21 December 2012

This project is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of a range of offender support and reintegration programs. Recent evidence suggests that programs focusing on the rehabilitation and reintegration of the existing population can potentially have the greatest impact on overall prisoner numbers. This project provides the opportunity to comparatively assess the effectiveness of a range of program models designed to enable Indigenous offenders to successfully reintegrate into the community and to reduce rates of re-offending.

Programs to be evaluated under Project B:

i. Dthina Yuwali, Aboriginal Alcohol & Other Drugs Program, New South Wales (NSW)
ii. Roebourne DECCA Project, Pilbara region (WA)
iii. Aboriginal Reconnect Program, Tasmania (Tas)
iv. Koori Offender Support and Mentoring Program, Victoria (Vic)
v. Aboriginal Cultural Immersion Program (Vic)
vi. Marumali Program (Vic)
vii. Koori Cognitive Skills program (Vic)
viii. Local Justice Worker Program (Vic)

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Project C - Diversion Programs

Supplier: The Australian Institute of Criminology (in consortium with the Australian Institute of Family Studies)
Contract Value: $499,163.50 (including GST)
Contract Period: 3 December 2010 – 21 December 2012
The aim of this project is to examine the impact of programs designed to divert Indigenous people from entering the justice system. This evaluation provides an opportunity to comparatively assess a range of diversionary models currently being implemented across a number of jurisdictions.

Programs to be evaluated under Project C:

i. Aggression Replacement Training (Qld)
ii. Woorabinda Early Intervention (Qld))
iii. Aboriginal Power Cup (SA)
iv. Tiwi Islands Youth Diversion Unit (NT)

Project D - Night and Community Patrols

Supplier: Edith Cowan University (in consortium with University of New England)
Contract Value: $369,600 (including GST)
Contract Period: 3 December 2010 – 21 December 2012

Night Patrols are in place in a number of Indigenous communities across Australia. Some programs focus specifically on youth while others have a broader community focus. The aim of this project is to determine the effectiveness of night patrol initiatives on community safety rates, preferably in comparison with statistically similar communities that do not operate night patrols.

Programs to be evaluated under Project D:

i. Northbridge Policy and Juvenile Aid Group (WA)
ii. Safe Aboriginal Youth Patrols Program (NSW)

Project E – Residential Drug and Alcohol Programs

Supplier: Australian Institute of Criminology
Contract Value: $537,625 (excluding GST)
Contract Period: October 2011 – October 2013

Evidence suggests that high risk alcohol consumption and substance use are directly related to offending in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and have been linked to increased arrest rates, family violence and sexual abuse. Initiatives to address these issues have been the focus of a significant amount of government, police and community work in recent years. However, indications are that few alcohol and substance abuse programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders have been rigorously evaluated. This project will begin to address this gap.

Programs to be evaluated under Project E:

i. Namatjira Haven Drug & Alcohol Healing Centre (NSW);
ii. Warrakoo Station Alcohol Treatment and Rehabilitation Program (Vic);
iii. Njernda Aboriginal Corporation - Baroona Youth Healing Place (Vic);
iv. The Salvation Army Property Trust Towards Independence – Aboriginal Outreach Team (SA);
v. Barkly Region Alcohol and Drug Advisory Group (NT); and
vi. Kalano Community Association Inc - Venndale Rehabilitation and Withdrawal Centre (NT).