



Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Recommendation

319. Considerations for review of CDEP Scheme

That in the coming review of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme consideration be given to:

- a. Improved mechanisms for the combining of funds from different programs (such as the Aboriginal Enterprise Incentive Scheme and the Enterprise Program) to supplement the capital and recurrent funding of CDEP in order to facilitate greater Aboriginal community control over infrastructural components of projects;*
- b. The introduction of a mechanism which ensures that CDEP projects are not used as a substitute for the provision of an adequate level of municipal and other social services, unless funds equivalent to those which would have been provided in respect of municipal and social services are provided to supplement the operation of*
- c. The recognition by the Department of Finance of CDEP as a discrete program with considerable offset savings to the government (in respect of administrative savings from non-payment of Unemployment Benefits), and the automatic provision of the 20% on-cost component--not from the ATSIC existing global allocation;*
- d. The improved policing of payments under CDEP to ensure that all participants in CDEP receive an income equivalent to Unemployment Benefit regardless of work actually performed, subject to the participants' performance of their obligations under the scheme;*
- e. Addressing issues of access to income, and meaningful work activities for women participants in CDEP;*
- f. The enhanced involvement of Aboriginal controlled organisations and resource agencies in the provision of administrative expertise and advice in the operation of*
- g. Improvements in the financial control systems for CDEP and provision for the training of CDEP managers in the maintenance of financial controls;*
- h. Initiatives for the development of ATSIC staff training in negotiation and consultation skills, and in cultural sensitivity, in order to improve the effectiveness and minimise the burden of consultation and support provided by ATSIC to communities on CDEP;*
- i. An improved level of training and planning support for projects, and for the development of medium and long-term plans for CDEP projects which reflect the aspirations of participants for access to mainstream employment opportunities, enterprise development or culturally appropriate work;*
- j. Increased co-ordination between ATSIC and DEET in respect of the training requirements of both new and ongoing CDEP projects, and in relation to the enterprise development potential of CDEP projects; and*
- k. The dissemination of information to Aboriginal communities who are on CDEP or who are planning to apply to receive CDEP funds about successful work programs undertaken by other communities under CDEP.¹*

Background²

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) identified several financial and operational improvements to increase the benefits of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) Scheme to Aboriginal communities.

The RCIADIC felt that if these issues were considered in any review of the CDEP, then they could be adequately addressed as part of further development and expansion of the Scheme to provide greater benefits to Aboriginal communities and organisations.

¹ Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Final Report, 1991) vol 4, 423 ('RCIADIC').

² Ibid.

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Intent	Consider ways to support the operation of the CDEP Scheme to ensure greater Aboriginal involvement and meaningful employment outcomes.
Responsibility	The Commonwealth Government.
Key action taken	
2005 Review³	<p>The Victorian Government considered Recommendation 319 a Commonwealth Government responsibility, however the Department of Innovation Industry and Regional Development outlined initiatives aligned with the intent of the CDEP.</p> <p>Department of Innovation Industry and Regional Development</p> <p>The Koori Business Network advised that it provided advice and facilitated opportunities for Aboriginal communities and individuals, in the establishment of community enterprises. Through its Growing Leadership Capacity Program, the Network provided opportunities to look at best practice projects throughout Australia.</p> <p>The Network advised a more strategic approach needed to be applied to stimulate employment opportunities in industry sectors where potential was identified for industry growth and market demand was strong.</p>
2018 Review⁴	<p>Deloitte considered Recommendation 319 the sole responsibility of the Commonwealth Government as the CDEP Scheme fell under their jurisdiction. Deloitte found Recommendation 319 fully implemented by the Commonwealth Government through changes to the CDEP Scheme and successive programs.</p> <p>The Commonwealth addressed several issues through Three Year Operational Plans for the CDEP Scheme, and expanded guidelines in 1995 to improve oversight and reviews. The CDEP was later replaced by the Remote Jobs and Communities Program and then the Community Development Program (CDP). The CDP aimed to resolve earlier concerns by promoting meaningful community activities, enforcing mutual obligations through “no show, no pay,” increasing involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and strengthening financial management and training.</p>
Since then⁵	The Community Development Program (CDP) did not operate in Victoria. The Commonwealth Government committed to change the way it delivers remote employment programs and services by replacing the CDP in two stages:

³ Aboriginal Justice Forum (Vic), Department of Justice (Vic), *Victorian Implementation Review of the Recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Review Report, October 2005) vol 1, 154-5 ('2005 Review').

⁴ Deloitte Access Economics, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Review of the Implementation of the Recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (Report, August 2018) 645 ('2018 Review').

⁵ Commonwealth of Australia, *Closing the Gap: Commonwealth 2023 Annual Report, Commonwealth 2024 Implementation Plan* (Annual Report, February 2024) ('Closing the Gap: Commonwealth 2023 Annual Report, Commonwealth 2024 Implementation Plan'). National Indigenous Australians Agency, 'The Community Development Program (CDP)', *National Indigenous Australians Agency* (Web Page, 26 June 2025) <<https://www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/employment-and-economic-development/community-development-program-cdp>> ('The Community Development Program (CDP)').

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The first stage, announced in February 2024 is the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program. The \$707 million program is creating 3000 new jobs over three years until 2027. It will support people in remote communities to move into meaningful jobs that communities want, with fair pay and conditions.

The second stage of replacing CDP is the design and delivery of the Remote Australia Employment Service (RAES). The Government is investing \$1.9 billion over 5 years to support people who are currently looking for work or may need help to get job-ready, with the skills and resources they need. A competitive grants process will open on 30 June 2025 for interested organisations to apply for funding to deliver these services.

Evidence of impact

Authorising documents	None identified.
Outputs	None identified.
Outcomes	None identified.
Community views	None identified.

Related recommendations

2005 Review⁶	Recommendation 5 That the Department for Victorian Communities work with the Commonwealth Government on the effective delivery of the CDEP across all Aboriginal communities (recommendations 317- 319), noting the concerns raised by the Koori Business Network, and provide a report to the Aboriginal Justice Forum. That the Victorian Government continue to implement and monitor recommendations 317-319 through any monitoring process established as a consequence of this Review.
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Assessment summary⁷

Recommendation 319 was the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government and outside the scope of this project.

⁶ 2005 Review, vol 1, 31-2.

⁷ Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus Working Group (Project Team, In Person, 4 November 2022) ('Working Group Meeting (4 November 2022)'); Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus Working Group (Project Team, Meeting, 13 June 2024) ('Working Group Meeting (13 June 2024)'); Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus (Project Team, In person, 26 June 2024) ('Aboriginal Justice Caucus (26 June 2024)').

Bibliography

Meeting with Aboriginal Justice Caucus (Project Team, In person, 26 June 2024)

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Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (Final Report, 1991)