GENERATION ONE

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WRITTEN SUBMISSION TO THE DRAFT <u>A PATH FORWARD: DEVELOPING THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S ABORIGINAL EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY DISCUSSION PAPER</u>

ON BEHALF OF GENERATION ONE, AN INITIATVE OF THE MINDEROO FOUNDATION

Generation One is an initiative of Andrew and Nicola Forrest's Minderoo Foundation, committed to creating parity for Indigenous Australians. Although creating parity is an audacious, challenging, and at times overwhelming goal, we strive for it because allowing disparity to continue is not an option.

Generation One works in partnership with Indigenous Australians to co-design practical, scalable solutions. For the last ten years, Generation One has championed evidence-based practices and initiatives in education, employment and other priority areas including research, policy and evaluation.

We advocate for policy reform and we are currently working with government, business and community to support a series of innovative employment programs.

The 2014 Creating Parity Report (Forrest Review) commissioned by the Federal Government provided a series of recommendations to improve parity between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.

https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/forrest-review

We continue to work as a catalytic philanthropy to test innovative approaches in the areas of employment, policy and entrepreneurship.

Generation One applauds the State Government on its commitment to developing an Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy in partnership with the West Australian Indigenous community and other key stakeholders. We have reviewed the discussion paper and offer the following comments for consideration. Our responses have been informed by our work over more than a decade, including long-standing principles of the Forrest Review 2014, commissioned by then-Prime Minister Abbott to create parity with and for Indigenous Australians.

1. ARE THE MAIN IDEAS RIGHT?

    Do you agree with the description of the overall goal, principles, strategic elements and framework? Would you change or add anything?

The Forrest Review identified a number of key drivers required for systemic change, focussing on personal and organisational responsibilities. Some of these included:

- Working with Indigenous Australians to design and deliver services and give them decision-making powers on the basis of trust and robust verification

- Publishing performance in a transparent way

- Agreeing to terminate ineffective programs and consolidate service delivery

- Shifting government investment to preventative solutions

- Agreeing to work with all governments to break the cycle of disparity forever.

We are pleased to note that the draft discussion paper provided acknowledges the majority of these key drivers.

We also recognise the need for Governments to work across jurisdictions to effect positive change. Page 115 of the Forrest Review for example stated that "This is the opportunity to leave partisan politics behind and for all members of the Commonwealth, state and territory parliaments and assemblies to work together to deliver lasting change for first Australians."

It is important to start from an Aboriginal world view, whereby culture and identity is the foundation on which to build the scaffolding of social, economic, and environmental wellbeing and empowerment in partnership with Aboriginal people. The definition of culture must include spirituality, belief and wellbeing. This may look different to people in different communities and must be heard and recognised in the first instance.

We must also recognise how public policy has operated in the past and why and how it needs changing. We have operated in a service system approach tackling "problems" in isolation, such as alcohol and other drugs, suicides, and domestic and family violence. These reactive service systems offer gateways into people's lives but have not encouraged a strengths-based or empowerment approach that focuses on building community resilience using culture as the foundation. In addition, there is a tendency to "add on" cultural competence to existing service delivery, often as an afterthought, rather than allowing the responses to be driven from the ground up.

The initial diagram Empowerment: Foundations and Futures (Page 9) does not build on the solid foundation of culture. Culture is seen as one of many foundations but this in itself provides identity, connection to country and heritage, wellbeing (physical and spiritual/mental) ,safety, language, history which creates the foundation for successful engagement with early childhood development, education, when pathways are established into education, housing and health services. Culture is diverse and unique but allows for a strong basis of identity and wellbeing when confronted with challenges impacting on economic, participation and inclusion which can reduce financial and food security, housing options and community safety. Strengthening pathways and services systems in partnership with the lifecycle of Indigenous people that supports long term and effective decision making.

Principles:

Empowerment and Self Determination:

Empowerment and self-determination can mean different things to the different people and communities all across Western Australia. For this reason, it is critical that when considering empowerment and self-determination we articulate what these terms mean, including how they relate to rights-based community development principles such as the United Nations Human Rights Charter.

For example, for some communities with strong leadership and governance capabilities, empowerment and self-determination may look like communities having full authority and control over their own affairs. For other communities, empowerment may come in the form of putting their aspirations and concerns forward, and then relying on Government to support and drive these solutions in the complex matters relating to themselves or their communities.

Culture and Country:

When we talk of the link between people's wellbeing and culture, it is important to be mindful that individual wellbeing is linked to community wellbeing. For example, we cannot tackle the high rates of Indigenous Youth Suicide if we don't consider with community what makes a healthy and resilient community first. Many conversations with Indigenous Australians indicate that when we talk of individual wellbeing this is inextricably linked to the wellbeing of family and community. There is a collective sense of wellbeing in Indigenous Communities and quite often the Western understanding of sickness which individualises that illness fails to link the two. In the words of a Kimberley elder "When my community is sick, I am sick".

We need to recognise the spiritual connection Indigenous people have to place. Spiritual wellbeing may include a blend of traditional and faith-based spiritual elements. Spiritual healing must be considered as a key aspect of culture, and it must allow for Indigenous community members to articulate what this looks like. For example, a spiritual aspect often overlooked is that of faith in Indigenous communities. Some Elders we work with have told us about the transformative nature of Christianity in regional and remote communities, and some argue that more people have been transformed through the church than any other idea or concept across the Kimberley. Christian faith features strongly in Indigenous identity in many places and is an element to be considered. In the 2016 ABS Census 54% of Indigenous Australians identified as having a Christian faith. In some communities this is as high as 75%. Less than 2% identified adherence to traditional beliefs yet this still remains the key focus in the debate.

Services:

The current regional based service system with outreach services into remote communities has been heavily criticised by many living in remote communities. Accessibility to services must be more than a fortnightly service from a regional centre. It must build resilience and capability from the ground up in community, otherwise it remains crisis-driven and reactive. For example, despite millions of dollars being invested into suicide prevention there has been no impact in reducing suicide in Indigenous communities. This was outlined in the 2019 WA Coroner's Report into the deaths of 13 young people in the Kimberley.

Commitment to a collective impact approach which requires a co-ordinated and ground up approach coupled with place-based strategies (reference Kramer and Kania. Harvard University) so we hear the range of voices, act on those voices and strengthen community resolve is essential.

Service Providers must offer culturally appropriate services not just as an add on but integral to Indigenous health. For example, our health services must recognise that the wholeness of the person and community wellness are critically linked when delivering services. Our specialist approaches to health can mean a community is bombarded with a range of health workers to tackle parts of the individual health problem and creates confusion. For example, on day it could be a visit by a dietician, then a chronic diseases expert, then a diabetes consultant. More focus on preventative and early intervention health work in community would alter the landscape of current crisis response health services.

Evidence:

The 2014 Creating Parity (Forrest Review) report calls on governments to be accountable to the public for the effectiveness of their strategies and the merit of individual programs by meeting robust performance measures. It states, "Critical to sound implementation are accountability milestones where a pre-agreed performance schedule is measured and if found lacking immediately corrected."

The report also calls for a Creating Parity website where service and program quarterly and annual reports are provided to a central repository. Currently, there is no consolidated mapping of funding in Indigenous Affairs whether targeted, mainstream, non-government or philanthropic and without baseline data an evaluation framework will be ineffectual in gaining a clearer picture of policy and programmatic effectiveness. The website suggested in the report would provide "clear evidence of the beneficial impact as government shifts investment from reactive spending to preventative services such as early childhood."

Too often we continue to fund programs that show little evidence of closing the gap.

However, it is important that the need for robust evidence does not stifle innovation and the trialling of new ideas. We welcome the proposed principle that new investments and services should be sustained for a sufficient period of time to produce measurable results. We also propose that in addition, there must be a willingness and commitment to leave old ways behind when a better path forward is identified. This is especially relevant in relation to the funding of pilot programs that often go nowhere and with no opportunities to continue, even if they are proven to be successful, because maintaining the status quo is the default option.

Strategic Elements:

1. Putting Culture at the Centre:

We believe there needs to be mention made in addition to the 'Stolen Generations', to the existence of the 'Lost Generations' of Aboriginal young people and individuals that have little or no connection to Indigenous culture, identity and therefore experience a lack of belonging in contemporary Australian society. How do they re-connect to culture, what does their current culture look like and what are their choices? What is our definition of wellness and does it correlate to the Indigenous notion of wellness?

When we speak of services being culturally competent this means location is important, accessibility (24/7) , holistic delivery (i.e. the notion of two different services delivering AOD and mental health support does not make sense for many community members). Putting culture and spiritual wellbeing at the centre requires having people with cultural authority at the centre of localised service delivery by ensuring a trained local workforce. FIFO services are not ideal, and the rapid turnover of service staff in remote and rural areas can only be addressed If the workforce capacity is built from the ground up locally.

2. Bringing decisions closer to communities through empowered engagement and agreement making.

We wholeheartedly agree with the need for communities to be closer to decision-making and recommend further explanation of what constitutes the regional and local levels.

For example, a common complaint by Indigenous people in remote communities is that many services come from 'regional' centres, and clusters of remote communities often do not have a localised service. This means that services into remote communities are often reactive, travelling out to remote communities after major incidences. Having services permanently located in remote communities (or in a cluster of remote communities) may better serve these communities.

Communities must also be allocated funding to achieve successful 'coordination' and/or 'collaboration' in relation to decisions made about their community. For example, it is often not the core business of initiatives or programs to drive or 'shepherd' collaboration in a community. Although best efforts are often made, such as through networks and interagency meetings, these are not guaranteed to deliver results or drive change. A collective impact approach that sees funding for a backbone organisation to drive collaboration may be a way forward in overcoming such barriers. This has been attempted by the establishment of the Empowered Communities Network and we welcome further work in this area.

Finally, consideration must be given to the notion of local decision-making and its impact on the Commonwealth Government landscape, particularly with the Empowered Communities network and ongoing discussions around a voice to Parliament. Clear links between new and existing decision-making bodies are essential.

3. Enabling Aboriginal -led solutions through improved service commissioning and grant making.

Recent work from the ANAO (2018) and others suggest that there is little oversight and co-ordination of funding in Indigenous Affairs. There is little visibility on where, how much and what area funding in Indigenous affairs is allocated. The recent work by the UWA's centre for Social Impact for the Regional Service Reform Unit noted the lack of co-ordinated approaches in Indigenous grant making and little cross over or communication between Governments or Government Departments. In fact, the report highlighted some State Departments have no way of tracking investment in Indigenous areas.

 https://regionalservicesreform.wa.gov.au/p/mapping-government-funded-services

To consider new ideas we must re-evaluate our relationship with the Commonwealth, improve visibility of current Indigenous funding,
Governance is a critical key to enable aboriginal-led solutions to be implemented effectively. The Empowerment strategy would need to consider the State Relationship with the Commonwealth with bodies such as ORIC to add value for self-determination through improvement the capacity of Indigenous Organisations. There still remains a place for mainstream services to provide services for Aboriginal clients and many people choose to go to State run health services rather than Indigenous run health services. We need to be wary of setting up a dual service system one for Aboriginal people and one exclusively for the rest of Australian community members. Where non-Indigenous services provide front line staff from local communities who have input into service design this can be highly effective.

We also strongly support the proposed idea to revisit the current size, scope and geographic coverage of contracts. The current head contractor model used by the Department of Communities (Housing) mitigates against Indigenous and local businesses participating in the market, whereby excluding them unless they subcontract to the head contractor. This is an example of conflicting policies working against Indigenous empowerment through potential economic and business opportunities. We welcome the current review of this model and look forward to more Indigenous businesses having an opportunity to buy into the work.

4. Investing more in preventative and early-intervention initiatives.

Generation one supports early intervention and preventative approaches The report we partnered with and written by CoLab, Thrive By Five's 'The Cost of Late Intervention' outlined its key finding that Australia spends $15.2 billion every year on crisis services that could have been prevented. We full subscribe to the early intervention priority.

https://colab.telethonkids.org.au/siteassets/media-docs---colab/coli/how-australia-can-invest-in-children-and-return-more----final-bn-not-embargoed.pdf

There needs to be a focus on strengthening communities in a partnered, place-based way rather than the current system of programs which are focused on a specific problem or set of problems.
Place based resilience projects should be considered as a high priority with the opportunity of showcasing new ways of working.

Consideration must be made to strengthen a collaborative approach drawing on the VTEC model which offers clear pathways out of entrenched welfare and direct pathways from school to work, obviating a pathway into welfare. We need to change the social norms, to ensure a life on welfare is not seen as a destination. This requires creative thinking around jobs creation, economic and social enterprise development and promotion and support for Indigenous business.
The Kimberley schools project offers a tangible and evidenced method of pedagogy and community modelling which links schools to communities, engages families in early childhood and offers explicit instruction as the preferred teaching mode. This is already having a positive impact on NAPLAN results. (https://kdc.wa.gov.au/blueprint/kimberley-schools-project/)

5. Boosting economic opportunities across all across of Government activity.

Providing opportunities and ongoing support to Aboriginal people to enter the entrepreneurial space will not only create more pathways for greater economic participation for this group, but is likely to lead to more jobs for other Aboriginal people in a more culturally intelligent and safe environment. Indigenous businesses are 100x times more likely to employ Indigenous people. (CAEPR) .

https://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/ongoing-growth-number-indigenous-australians-business

Removing the land tenure barriers to economic development is the key priority to developing local economies for Aboriginal people living in remote communities. Aligned to this is building the governance capacity of Indigenous Organisations and PBC's prior to the proposed handover of land management responsibilities to local communities. The current bushfire crisis highlights the need for including traditional land management methods as a serious investment to protect our biodiversity and reduce the impact of future fire crises.

A multi-lateral approach to working constructively to progress the Northern Australia agenda and identify emerging industries with proper training and employment pathways for Indigenous job seekers must also be considered. We note there is currently no regional training plan to maximise opportunities for Aboriginal people in Northern Australia.

6. Building cultural understanding and respect:

Generation One supports the key ideas outlined in the report, noting that a comprehensive response to racism must address its direct, indirect, unconscious, casual, structural and systemic forms. Perpetrators of racism must be held to account.

The role of education in schools is also critically important, having lifelong impacts on Indigenous and non-Indigenous children. Particularly, truth telling must be embedded in the school curriculum across the state along with the promotion of positive stories.

2. ARE WE USING THE RIGHT WORDS?

You might broadly agree with the main ideas, but want to see them expressed using different language. We welcome your recommendations. In particular, we are interested in whether the term "Aboriginal people" should be used or whether other terms such as "First Nations" would be more appropriate.

We agree with the terminology Aboriginal, but this must also include Torres Strait Islander.

3. WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE BE THINKING ABOUT?

You may have a view on how the strategy should be implemented in a particular region or subject area, or examples of current good practice. Your ideas are valuable to us.

The framework must involve a multi layered commitment from Commonwealth, State and Local Government from COAG level down and connected to the Closing the Gap Refresh. (Creating Parity Report pp113-115)

We do not need to establish another unwieldy bureaucracy which ties up resources. We need to build on the mechanisms already in place. Consideration needs to be made of how any structural framework can interface with existing Commonwealth and State structures in a planned and co-ordinated way.

REFERENCES:

https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/forrest-review

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