

27 February 2020

Ms Kate Alderton
Director
Aboriginal Policy and Coordination Unit
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Dumas House
2 Havelock Street
WEST PERTH WA 6005

By email: AboriginalPolicy@dpc.wa.gov.au

Dear Ms Alderton

ABORIGINAL EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

Given the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is currently developing an Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy, it is in my view timely that I write to inform you of the work being undertaken by the office of the Ombudsman (**the Office**) in support of empowering Aboriginal people, families and communities.

1. Existing Aboriginal empowerment activities

In undertaking diverse functions that directly impact the lives of Aboriginal people, the Office recognises the criticality of listening to, working with and empowering Aboriginal Western Australians. The Office has developed the Aboriginal Action Plan, a comprehensive whole-of-office plan to address the significant disadvantage faced by Aboriginal people in Western Australia. The plan contributes to an overall goal of developing an organisation that is welcoming and culturally safe for Aboriginal people and meets the unique needs of the Aboriginal community it serves.

Concomitant to the plan, the Office has established an Aboriginal Advisory Team comprising a Senior Aboriginal Advisor reporting to the Office's Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer. The Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer and Senior Aboriginal Advisor attend events and meetings with government and non-government service providers to discuss particular issues affecting the Aboriginal community and raise awareness of the Office's role. The Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer also coordinates cultural awareness information and events throughout the year, including training on *Aboriginal Cultural Awareness* for staff of the Office, and provide information to staff about culturally important dates and events being held in the community.

The Office has also identified a range of other strategies to improve service delivery to Aboriginal people, including:

- Involvement in outreach activities in metropolitan areas to raise community awareness of, and access to, the Office's services, such as the Independent Agency Information Session for Aboriginal service providers and Elders;
- Attending adult prisons and Banksia Hill Detention Centre to meet with prisoners and juvenile detainees, and prisoner representative groups, to understand their

specific needs and be available to take complaints. An Aboriginal consultant and/or the Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer attends these meetings to assist staff to understand the issues involved and to facilitate cross cultural communication;

- Involving the Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer and Aboriginal consultants in relevant own motion investigations and as part of the Ombudsman's Advisory Panel to provide independent advice on issues and trends and contemporary professional practice within the scope of the child death and family and domestic violence fatality review functions;
- Consultation activities specifically targeted to Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities; and
- Involving the Principal Aboriginal Liaison Officer in complaint clinics and complaints involving Aboriginal people.

In my role as inaugural Chair of the Accountability Agencies Leadership Forum I also work in partnership with other accountability agencies to consider ways in which accountability agencies can enhance awareness of, access to and the value of, their services for Aboriginal Western Australians, including opportunities to work collectively to listen to, collaborate with and work for Aboriginal Western Australians. Collaboration between accountability agencies is absolutely essential, in my view, to the achievement of best practice oversight of government agencies and services to Aboriginal people.

The co-location of a number of key accountability agencies at Albert Facey House provides a unique opportunity for enhanced collaboration. Key collaborative initiatives of Albert Facey House tenants have included:

- The creation of an Aboriginal Cultural Competency Hub at Albert Facey House supported by a Statement of Intent signed by the CEO of each accountability agency located in Albert Facey House and the President of the Mental Health Tribunal. The Statement of Intent establishes an Albert Facey House Aboriginal Representatives Committee to commit to a range of projects and a commitment to quarterly CEO-level meetings to oversee a program of cultural learning and events;
- Installation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags in the foyer of Albert Facey House and the offices of the Ombudsman and Auditor General as well as a plaque acknowledging the Whadjuk Noongar people as the traditional custodians of the land upon which Albert Facey House is located; and
- The Regional Awareness and Accessibility Program, led by the office of the Ombudsman, with collaborative participation of accountability agencies in Albert Facey House, enabling accountability agencies to raise awareness of, and access to, their services for regional and Aboriginal Western Australians and providing a valuable opportunity for accountability agencies to strengthen their understanding of the issues affecting people living and working in regional Western Australia and regional and remote Aboriginal communities.

2. Priorities for Aboriginal empowerment in the future

The Office has established the position of Assistant Ombudsman Aboriginal Engagement and Collaboration to be advertised shortly. This is the first time in Australia that such an Assistant Ombudsman position has been created. The Assistant Ombudsman will be a member of the Corporate Executive and work closely with both the Ombudsman and Deputy Ombudsman.

The Office is particularly committed to ensuring this position further develops strong engagement and consultation with, and empowerment of, Aboriginal Western Australians.

If your staff have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Rebecca Poole, Assistant Ombudsman Strategic Policy and Projects on 9220 7571 (Direct) or rebecca.poole@ombudsman.wa.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Chris Field
OMBUDSMAN