



Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Ltd.

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**VALS' submission to VCOSS to assist with the VCOSS Stage Budget Submission
VALS' Justice Priorities
28 September 2007**

Engage with Government restructure

The Government commit to engaging the Indigenous Australian community in changes that will result from the restructuring of Government Departments. For instance, Indigenous Australians would benefit from engaging with the Department of Early Childhood Development & Education given that the Department has grown and there is an emphasis on early childhood development. Local and State Government and Non government organizations are involved in providing support to parents and children in this age range. It is vital that this important linking of education with pre-school activities is also used as an opportunity to enhance Indigenous Australian involvement in service development and accessibility issues. The Indigenous Australian community would benefit from engaging with the Department of Planning and Community Development given that the Indigenous Australian population is moving to outer suburbs and capacity building/sustainability are relevant to the Indigenous Australian community. Both of these tasks would benefit from the enhanced capacity building project which was recommended last year (see below).

Capacity Building: Indigenous Organisations and Government

Proposal to fund Junior and Senior Project Officers (VCOSS supported this proposal last year)

The Government fund each of the following five peak and statewide organisations to employ a Senior Project Officer and a Junior Project Officer:

- Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Limited (VACSAL);
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Limited (VAEAI);
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA);
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO);
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited (VALS).

The Project Officers will:

- develop policy, research and program delivery capacity;
- improve workplace planning and training for Indigenous people;

- improve quality and range of partnerships between Indigenous service providers; Government and non-Government organisations;
- forecast the likely impact of Government policy initiatives on Indigenous people;
- provide advice about integrating and prioritising community consultations and service provider feedback;
- develop policy proposals to improve outcomes for Indigenous people;
- liaise with non-Indigenous organisations to improve services;
- gather information from service users and community members about ways to strengthen community;
- disseminate information on good practice to non-Government organisations and all levels of Government;
- provide input into the research and development of national and international best practice for services; and
- identify how programs and services could better reflect United Nations human rights standards, particularly in relation to economic, social and cultural rights.

Annual Indigenous Sector Joint Forum

The Government provide funding for an annual Indigenous Sector Joint Forum to develop:

- An annually updated framework for culturally inclusive policy.
- Quarterly meetings to provide advice about consultation strategies, timing of consultation and possible integration and synergies to help minimise community consultation fatigue.
- Advice to government departments on key policy initiatives in the early stages of development.

State Information and Communications Coordinator

The Government fund a State Information and Communications Coordinator (worker) to assist the Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Statewide and Peak organisations to develop effective communication strategies. The worker will help Indigenous Australian organisations develop an information plan and media strategy. The worker will assist with implementation strategies as well as provide advice to CEO's about communications policy development and strategic public affairs management. The worker will assist Aboriginal organisations to provide effective input to policy development, attract skilled staff and volunteers and inform stakeholders about key issues and services.

Access to legal advice re Heritage protection

The Government provide funding for free legal advice to Indigenous Australians at all stages of the process outlined in the Aboriginal Heritage Act (2006) and regulations.

Articled Clerkship

The Government provide ongoing funding for the position of Articled Clerk, to be filled by an Indigenous Australian, at VALS.

Indigenous Women's Justice Forum

The Government fund the Indigenous Women's Justice Forum on an ongoing basis. The IWJF is an opportunity for Indigenous women working in the justice system and mainstream service providers working towards improved service delivery outcomes for Indigenous women to come together. This project was funded two years ago and was very favourably evaluated by a State Government funded consultant. However the funding was from a non-recurrent program.

RCIADIC

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) Implementation Review Report (2005) proposes the creation of an independent Commissioner for Aboriginal Social Justice (Commissioner). Funding is required. The Commissioner could report on the implementation status of the RCIADIC and Implementation Review Report. Many of the Implementation Review Team recommendations are about monitoring the status of the original 339 recommendations of the RCIADIC (1991).