I am pleased to present to you my Final Biannual Report prepared in accordance with section 15 of the Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services Act 2009:

s15 The Coordinator General must prepare and give to the Minister twice each year, or as otherwise required by the Minister, a report on:

a) the development and delivery, during the period since the Coordinator General last gave a report to the Minister under this section, of government services and facilities in each of the specified remote communities ... including through:
   (i) improvements to the coordination of the development and delivery of such services and facilities; and
   (ii) reforms to the development and delivery of such services and facilities; and

b) the progress that has been made during that period towards achieving the Closing the Gap targets in the specified remote communities.

While this report is titled Final Biannual Report and completes the series of reporting that began in 2009, it does not cover a full six month period but concludes reporting in line with the Government decision that my Office ceases operation as of 31 January 2014. Therefore this report is a closing statement from my Office which I trust will provide you with some helpful advice in relation to lessons learned from the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery and will inform your deliberations for the future direction of remote Indigenous policies and service delivery.

I commend the attached Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services Final Biannual Report: January 2014 to you.

Brian Gleeson
Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services

January 2014
## Contents

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Introduction

This is my final biannual report as the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services.

In December 2013, the Australian Government announced the cessation of funding for the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services and that the role and function of the Coordinator General will conclude when my appointment expires on 31 January 2014. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery will remain in place until it expires on 30 June 2014 pending future arrangements. The oversight role I have fulfilled will be performed by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

I am pleased to acknowledge that improving the lives of Indigenous people in remote communities remains a high priority for the Commonwealth Government, and indeed for the State and Northern Territory Governments who are signatories to the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery. In the Commonwealth Government, the transfer of Indigenous policy, programs and service delivery into the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet signals a strengthened ability to coordinate across the entire Australian Public Service.

I welcome the Government’s unambiguous and clear reform agenda for Indigenous Affairs which will focus on:

- Making sure children go to school so they receive a good education;
- Working with leaders, communities, individuals and employers to get adults into work;
- Making sure communities are safer to live in and that the rule of law is applied; and
- Achieving constitutional recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

All levels of governments will continue the work under Remote Service Delivery Agreement, with the current effort and commitment in the 29 designated remote Indigenous communities maintained until the Agreement expires on 30 June 2014 pending decisions being made on future arrangements.

This report presents the most important lessons I have learned over the past four and a half years in this role. In short, the foundation has been laid. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery has achieved measurable improvements to services and infrastructure in all of the 29 Remote Service Delivery communities as well as immeasurable improvements in relationships and human capabilities for both communities and for governments. However, there is still much more to be done. This report highlights the general lessons learned as well as specific lessons for government and communities. I also take the opportunity to share some personal reflections from my experience.

If there is one message I want Governments to hear from this report it is:

**Do not press the reset button!**

In my view we can only achieve sustainable improvements in remote Indigenous communities if we work together and build on the foundations that have been laid by communities and governments. If we continue to start over again the foundations previously laid will be pulled up time and again, never allowing enough time or energy to build the structure required to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. There is considerable strength and capability which has been built in working with remote communities that should not be ignored.
Reflections from the Coordinator General

My role as Coordinator General over the past four and a half years has been a privileged and truly unique position. That is, to independently oversee, monitor, assess, advise in relation to, and drive the implementation of an ambitious, complex and challenging social policy initiative being delivered in 29 remote Indigenous communities across Australia. I have personally undertaken over 100 community visits and a total of 149 community visits have been carried out by my Office. I have facilitated and participated in countless meetings with Ministers, Boards of Management, senior government officials, service providers, Non-Government Organisations as well as many community groups. Many of the most valuable discussions have not been ‘meetings’ in the formal sense, rather they have been opportunistic discussions with knowledgeable and passionate Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who live and work in the 29 Remote Service Delivery communities. I have also published eight reports (prior to this one) and made 58 formal recommendations. It is with this combined experience and unique perspective that I bring to you my final report and these reflections.

I have stated in previous reports that sustainable outcomes in remote Indigenous communities will take a generation. It is widely recognised that it is too simplistic to develop policies which appear to have quick fix solutions but which inevitably have only short term effects. What we should have learned by now in Indigenous Affairs is that achieving quality outcomes for people with entrenched disadvantage takes time and long term investments. This is especially so in remote settings.

So what difference has the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery made?

The successes that have undoubtedly been achieved under the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery are necessarily subjective, usually shared and often challenged. The broad successes of Remote Service Delivery have been:

- Having dedicated Government coordination and engagement staff in remote communities;
- Communities increasingly empowered and confident to set their own agenda;
- Prioritised infrastructure and program investment to the 29 communities;
- Continually improving relationships between levels of governments and between communities and governments which has led to improved joint planning and cooperation at all levels; and
- Focusing combined effort, energy and resources on specific issues and in specific places.

It can be difficult to point to Remote Service Delivery as the sole driver for any particular successes in the Remote Service Delivery communities. One reason being the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery has been hampered by ill-defined operational objectives, outcomes, and outputs and it has lacked a well-defined performance indicator and reporting framework. This has made measuring progress an ongoing challenge for all concerned. While the high level objectives, outcomes and principles in the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery are sound, the lack of early operational clarification (such as for performance monitoring and reporting, local governance and leadership development, cultural awareness training, interpreter services, and before that the baseline mapping) has meant that processes which could have been streamlined were largely developed too late and without sufficient guidance and support. Other processes that could have led to improved community engagement in planning and prioritisation, such as Local Implementation Planning and funding reforms, were often delayed and over engineered.

I strongly believe governments and communities would have also benefited more if greater effort was placed in implementing my 58 formal recommendations. I would have liked to have seen a more timely response and clear evidence to demonstrate sustainable changes in behavior and implementation of my recommendations rather than a defence of current positions as has been the case in some circumstances, such as the first recommendation in my third report which called for “the Australian, State and Territory governments (to) examine the use of more flexible funding approaches which aggregate departmental funding into a master contract with each National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery community.”

\(^1\) Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services Act 2009
I am extremely proud of what this Office has achieved since it came into existence in July 2009. Turning a team of one into one team of professional and committed staff, fully dedicated to turning a set of unclear objectives into real results is a positive lesson in itself. The quality and depth of both current and past staff in this Office have been integral to ensuring the delivery of many achievements for the 29 Remote Service Delivery communities.

I want to take the opportunity to record that over the last four and a half years my Office has led a number of initiatives, several of which are reflected in current Government policy commitments. They include conducting a roundtable of education practitioners on school attendance and education outcomes in August 2011, holding a community safety workshop in July 2011, driving economic development and employment opportunities in all 29 communities, generating guiding principles for Non-Government Organisations working in Indigenous communities, establishing a task force on governance and leadership capacity building of government and communities, and contributing to the research fields of funding reform and the importance of gender in cultural awareness (Refer to Appendix 2 for key examples of progress driven by this Office).

There have been key elements that have made this Office and my independent oversight role effective: having independent legislated powers to drive implementation on long standing commitments and cut through red tape and bureaucracy across all governments is a model that has worked. Having uniquely qualified staff with specialised skills and experience in working with remote communities has been fundamental. And building strong and effective relationships with communities has enabled us to have the hard, honest two way conversations about what’s happening and what needs to happen.

In particular, undertaking regular visits to the 29 communities was crucial to effectively carrying out the role. In my reports I have consistently said that we need to empower the voice of communities and then listen to it. Policies for Indigenous Australians need to be built from the ground up. We must listen to communities about what they need, what they want and how things are working. By meeting with community members, local reference groups and service providers I have built a strong rapport with communities. By seeing firsthand the condition of local infrastructure and environment I have kept up to date with what is happening on the ground and have made a point of feeding this back to other government officials who have not had the same mobility.

I also have a great deal of personal memories and reflections from my time in this role. I will treasure the many strong relationships I have forged with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who I have met. I have valued the ongoing partnerships with the Coordinators General in each of the jurisdictions, all the State and Territory Network staff, the Government Business Managers and Indigenous Engagement Officers, Government staff involved in Remote Service Delivery, other stakeholders, and of course my own fantastic staff. What has been achieved would not have been accomplished without the collective contributions of them all.

As stated in my introduction, the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery remains in place until the end of June 2014 and all levels of governments will maintain their current level of effort and commitment in the 29 communities until the Agreement expires on 30 June 2014 pending future arrangements.

I leave the function knowing that Remote Service Delivery has made a positive difference in all of the 29 communities, that tangible improvements have been made through the partnership, and relationships between governments and communities have been strengthened. What happens beyond June 2014 is clearly a decision for Government; however, I am confident that if the experiences and lessons outlined in this report are heeded by communities and Government then there is a bright future for Indigenous people living in remote Australia.
Key lessons for governments and communities

**Overall lessons learned**

1. Do not press the reset button! Building on the existing capability of the whole-of-government place based approach in remote communities is worthwhile and requires a sustained effort as well as a shared commitment to the desired outcomes.

2. Efforts need to go beyond coordination to systemic reform, particularly of funding processes.

3. The presence of remote coordination staff (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) in communities makes a real difference and will be more effective with a clarified role and enhanced capability development.

4. Joint planning and engagement between communities and all levels of government is required with greater responsibility for communities built into decision-making processes.

5. Effective community empowerment requires investment in strengthening community governance mechanisms.

6. There needs to be agreed performance measures and standards for improved monitoring, evaluation and accountability at the local, jurisdictional and national level.

7. The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery experience provides a practical learning experience where the layers of bureaucracy and decision making need to be streamlined to be effective.

8. The skills of individuals and the collective capacity of both government and community need to be strengthened and supported.

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**Key lessons for government**

- Carefully selected, well trained and supported government staff based locally in or near the community fosters better working relationships with communities and service providers.

- Cultural competence of government is imperative to working effectively anywhere in Indigenous Affairs and specific local knowledge is vital for community engagement.

- The value and sustainability of governments supporting communities in building their future is far greater than governments attempting to do this on behalf of communities.

- The governance of governments must be transparent, of high quality and well administered. Processes for working between and across levels of governments need not be overcomplicated but must ensure accountability.

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**Key lessons for communities**

- Governance and leadership must be strong and sustainable and needs high quality, organised and responsive administrative support.

- Communities who understand how to work with government ways of doing business achieve better outcomes for themselves.

- Invest in planning with key stakeholders in community and in Government.

- If community organisations proactively develop and deliver high quality local cultural awareness programs, it helps others know how your community works and appreciate the value of your local community culture.

- Access to remote communities by service providers and governments needs clear rules and consistent administration support.
Learn from the past to plan for the future

Indigenous people in remote areas continue to suffer the highest levels of disadvantage including poor educational outcomes, community safety issues, employment barriers and low levels of engagement in changing social attitudes or outcomes. In addition, there is a still critical need to improve the human resources capability of both Government and communities, substantial infrastructure gaps and the stubbornly enduring uncoordinated services delivered by government’s and non-government providers. Continued and sustained effort in remote communities remains crucial to ending Indigenous disadvantage in Australia.

While the Remote Service Delivery model is not perfect, the approaches that have been evolving over the past four and a half years of its implementation should be refined and applied to future remote Indigenous policies. The clearest example of this is the production of Local Implementation Plans (LIPs). Initially the process and the first plans were too complex, contained far too many actions which were often too vague to understand, and importantly did not include any performance indicators. However, this has been acknowledged, at least to some extent, by the “LIP Refresh” process which has been undertaken in most RSD communities. Refreshed LIPs contain fewer actions that are of a higher level of priority and have much stronger input through quality engagement from the RSD communities.

The productive relationships that exist and the successes achieved need to be built upon and preserved and the failures need to be acknowledged, learned from and, if possible, not repeated. The Remote Service Delivery communities (in particular but not exclusively) have clearly communicated they do not want to start a completely new approach all over again.

There are a number of key lessons learned that should be considered when planning for future arrangements that will succeed the current National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery

Shared commitment to outcomes and approach by all partners

- Future approaches to remote service delivery should embody the lessons learned from Remote Service Delivery to create the base for an integrated and coordinated approach and avoid the piecemeal approach often taken in the past.
- The principles agreed as part of the current National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery should be considered as a starting point.
- All partners (community, service providers, business and each tier of government) need to commit to future approaches and share a common vision.

Timeframe

- Future strategies must incorporate realistic timelines for reforms - ideally up to ten years.
- Time should especially be invested in developing local governance structures and identifying local priorities.
- Timelines should map out the key milestones.

Capability management

- There is an opportunity to develop a single government presence in communities through expanding the remotely based teams approach. Having Government Engagement Officers (and equivalents) and Indigenous Engagement Officers on the ground has fostered better working relationships with communities.
- Remote staffing needs to be considered more strategically to build on the strengths of what has worked with the current Remote Service Delivery Single Government Interface model.
- Establishing enduring relationships between government and communities requires a particular expertise and a specialised cadre of trained, qualified, mobile and supported staff with remote services capability needs to be developed.
- Establishing clearer responsibilities would avoid the confusion between whether generalists or specialists skills are required for particular roles.
Learn from the past to plan for the future

- Recruitment practices need to be put in place which manage staff turnover. These could include the use of remote staffing pools, which reflect the skills and capabilities unique to remote servicing.
- The Indigenous Engagement Officers model has been a successful model for expanding Indigenous employment opportunities and should be built upon.

Community engagement

- Failure to properly consult Indigenous communities in the early stages of designing new initiatives has repeatedly led to lengthy implementation issues that are costly to fix and stall progress.
- Community engagement at every stage is essential to success. Improved and flexible approaches to community ownership and design need to be central features of new models for remote Indigenous service delivery.
- The use of interpreters must be maximized and communications must be simplified to ensure communities can truly negotiate with Governments.

Strengthen bilateral relationships with the States and Northern Territory

- Feedback from the State and Northern Territory governments confirms the need for an overarching national remote services framework and vision for achieving greater consistencies while providing flexibility to complement jurisdictional and local initiatives.
- Multilateral forums and accountability mechanisms need to reinforce the shared vision and ensure Indigenous disadvantage in remote areas remains a national priority across all levels of government.
- Bilateral agreements are effective when they are clear, binding and hold both parties to account.
- Build on the success of the Coordinators General Network by maintaining regular meetings of the Heads of Indigenous Affairs to strengthen relationships and leverage stronger accountability.

Establish a flexible funding pool to assist in building capacity at the local level

- At present, program funding does not incorporate sufficient flexibility to respond quickly to changing needs. Until that is reformed, a flexible funding pool could provide a suitable mechanism to trial new and innovative approaches and address immediate gaps in social infrastructure.
- The Indigenous Remote Service Delivery Special Account was a flexible funding pool established to address immediate priorities in the Local Implementation Plans that could not be funded from existing sources. Its implementation problems could be avoided in future by adopting clear and simple approvals mechanisms, with devolution of decision making to the local level.

Strengthen implementation, monitoring and accountability arrangements

- The National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery was hampered by ill-defined objectives, unmeasurable outcomes and outputs that were open to interpretation.
- A defined performance framework for assessment and change management would have dramatically improved its ability to achieve clear and measurable results and outcomes.
- Ensuring robust planning and priority setting is undertaken in negotiation with communities to manage expectations and to set realistic targets in implementation.
- A rigorous and authoritative monitoring mechanism allows for problem solving, cutting through blockages and driving delivery outcomes.

Government needs to adapt and learn

- If new models are to incorporate less bureaucracy and red tape, government needs to rethink ways of balancing risks and accountability. Strong leadership and vision are needed to ensure bureaucracy adapts to new ways of doing new business and works in partnership with Indigenous communities.
## Community visits to end December 2013

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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Location</th>
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Key examples of progress driven by the Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services

NATIONAL

Inclusion of local government in Remote Service Delivery:
In the first report from the Coordinator General in 2009 it was recommended that local government be brought into the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery. This recommendation was agreed and local governments have played a vital role in the progress of Remote Service Delivery.

Local Implementation Plans:
At the beginning of the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery, the Office acknowledged there was little in place to guide the development of Local Implementation Plans. The Office developed advice clearly stating the expectations of the Local Implementation Plans. The Office has also actively participated, supported and drove the finalisation of Local Implementation Plans in many of the communities. It is widely acknowledged that the existence of the Office also enhanced the pace at which the plans were developed.

Community Safety Plans:
The Office has been a leading advocate for community safety particularly the need to focus on relationships between the police and the community. The Office has led a national workshop and driven Community Safety Plans ensuring their cohesiveness with wider policy reforms and Local Implementation Plans. This work has been actively driven through Boards of Management to ensure accountability and progress.

Services and Investments in Remote Service Delivery communities:
Through rigorous information gathering the services and investments table that first appeared in the first report from the Office was developed and maps out each community against each building block – services available and investments made. It remains the only comparative assessment of service delivery and investment in Remote Service Delivery communities and is regularly updated and made available on the CGRIS website.

Violence against women:
The Office has actively supported programs addressing violence against women such as the White Ribbon program, and has advocated the Remote Service Delivery communities host events and education forums to support the work of White Ribbon in reducing violence against women. In November 2013 the Office was one of eight organisations nationally to be accredited as a White Ribbon Workplace.

Coordinators General Network:
The Coordinator General established and convenes bimonthly meetings of the State and Northern Territory Coordinators General with support from the Office. The Coordinators General network is a strong, intergovernmental forum for leveraging strategic matters and discussion of key and upcoming issues particularly focussing on resolution and progress.

Education Roundtable 2011:
The Office brought together leading national experts in Indigenous education to examine what is working in the area of school attendance and how this can be enhanced for the future. The resulting discussion paper was developed and presented at Boards of Management meetings to share ideas and information about what is working to improve school attendance in remote Indigenous communities so that these may be better reflected in Local Implementation Plans and carried out into real action.
NGO Roundtable 2012:
The Office brought together leaders from Remote Service Delivery communities, government and NGOs to discuss the role of NGOs in improving service delivery coordination and integration in Remote Service Delivery communities. The Office finalised a set of guiding principles that have been agreed by all stakeholders.

Governance and Leadership Workshop 2013:
A National Governance and Leadership Framework was developed as the result of a recommendation made in the second report from the Office. The Office continued to ensure the Framework’s further development to become a high level policy framework that is acknowledged nationally.

Supporting the Remote Service Delivery Evaluation:
The Office has maintained an active role in supporting the work of the Remote Service Delivery evaluation, particularly enhancing the second stage of the evaluation by recommending the inclusion of community researchers who add value and credibility to the outcome.

The importance of gender and culture in Remote Service Delivery:
Drawing on its four and a half years’ experience overseeing the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery (RSD), the Office of the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services has prepared a paper aimed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of future government activity in remote communities by highlighting the importance of gender and cultural factors in the relative success of programs and policies. Future policy decisions impacting remote communities need to pay attention to the RSD experience and lessons learned, particularly in how policy and service delivery has differentially impacted on women and men, and put into practice an approach to community development which takes into account both culture and gender and their interaction in each community. Gender and cultural analysis should be incorporated into policy and program design, implementation, reporting and evaluation.

JURISDICTIONS

Northern Territory

- Supported the Central Land Council to develop innovative approaches to governance and community development by participating on the Advisory Committee and helping to secure funding for evaluation
- Was instrumental in facilitating improved relationships between the Single Government Interface and the Shire Councils, and in achieving Shire agreement to the Wurrumiyanga and Maningrida Local Implementation Plans
- Advocated across whole of government for timely construction of the four new Child and Family Centres in Remote Service Delivery communities in the Northern Territory – tenders for constructing the Centres have now been released and some have been awarded
- Helped secure additional funding to upgrade the Lajamanu Health Clinic to a category 1 clinic and progressed related lease negotiations with the Central Land Council - the clinic has now been built
- Promoted Local Community Awareness Programs in the Northern Territory, helping to secure participation from senior police officers which in turn has assisted the relationship between communities and the NT Police
- Supported the extension of the Community Engagement Police Officer trial and advocated for the Northern Territory Government to take the lead on community safety planning, which they are now doing
- Helped secure additional funding for the Ntaria Youth Centre and Ntaria Renal Services
- Facilitated the transition of the Gunbalanya community store to community control
- Helped to resolve a rental dispute between the Milingimbi Art and Culture Centre and the East Arnhem Shire Council
Western Australia

- Actively supported, promoted and facilitated improvements in local leadership and governance bodies in Bardi Jawi, Beagle Bay, Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing
- Negotiated a reduced interim licence fee for the Marninwarntikura Women’s Centre to run child care service in Fitzroy Crossing after a highly inflated fee was charged by a licensed NGO while the Women’s Centre undertook their own accreditation
- Mediated discussions between the Halls Creek community and the Western Australian State and Australian governments in order to establish the Halls Creek Healing Strategy, which is a community priority
- Actively promoted and supported the Lililwan ‘Overcoming Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders’ study project in Fitzroy Crossing and its findings and subsequent actions, which are reducing the incidence of the children born with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

South Australia

- Ensured the completion of Early Childhood Centres in the APY Lands were progressed as a priority, following their lengthy delays which stemmed from a period prior to the National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery
- Increased pressure on the South Australian State and Australian governments to transition the under-utilised Amata Substance Misuse Facility into the Amata Family Wellbeing Centre – which is now a highly utilised multi-service hub
- Promoted the early success of a ‘School-to-Work’ Mentor program, securing an additional twelve months funding
- Supported and improved relations between the South Australian State and Australian Governments, which has led to the signing of the APY Lands Regional Partnership Agreement
- Publically advocated for an improved response to and full implementation of the Mullighan Inquiry Recommendations into the incidence of child sexual abuse on the APY Lands, resulting in a much improved and coordinated effort to address these recommendations

New South Wales

- Mediated local governance disputes which have improved the operation and effectiveness of the Community Working Party for Wilcannia
- Facilitated the final establishment of Secretariat functions for the Community Working Parties by negotiating the physical location of the employees
- Advocated for priority infrastructure investments at the request of communities, resulting in high priority projects (buildings, sewage and roads) being expedited
- Advocated for improved communication between the New South Wales State and Australian Governments and the Walgett community in the transition from Community Development Employment Projects to the Remote Jobs and Communities Program

Queensland

- Secured funding for the upgrade of the Coen Airstrip through intensive advocacy
- Ensured the Cape York Accord (Local Implementation Plan) signings by securing strong stakeholder support from all relevant parties
- Gained strong Australian Government participation in Local Community Awareness Programs by attending and promoting the benefits of the Programs
- Facilitated improved local governance and leadership through the reestablishment of the Coen Regional Aboriginal Corporation
- Increased accountability and subsequently improved the timeliness of the construction of the Family Centres in Morning Island and Doomadgee