



**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Peoples' Program Strategic Plan
2007-2013**



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“Any person ought to be able to have a decent sleep, with their family, in a safe house they own or rent and wake up in the morning to a hot shower, with household facilities. To feel safe and to have access to a health service where they feel comfortable.

S/he is able to have a good feed, to be able to put on some clothes. To have some food for the kids lunches and transport available to get them to school. Kids should be able to learn in a safe environment where they feel respected as equals.

Be able to go to work in an environment that they enjoy and are valued. Can earn money to support their family.

To be able to have a choice of lifestyle, including choosing your own sport and exercise.”¹

¹ Vision statement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Derby, Western Australia, quoted with permission of the Derby Aboriginal Health Service. This vision was developed as part of the Most Significant Change Project, 2006, supported by Oxfam Australia.



Section A

Context and Background to Oxfam Australia and its Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

1. Context of the strategic plan

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' (ATSIP) Program Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013 outlines what the ATSI Program will do over the next six years to achieve its key objectives, consistent with the values of Oxfam Australia (OAus). It builds on Oxfam Australia's Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013,² fleshing out OAus's work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The ATSI Program works in three thematic areas: Health and Wellbeing, Youth, and Self-determination. Detailed Operational Plans for each thematic area will be developed every two years, in which specific strategies, actions, responsibilities and measures will be outlined. OAus' Reconciliation Action Plan will be reviewed annually and progress reported on the OAus website.

The ATSI Program's Strategic Plan is informed by its team, partners' and consultants' analyses of the current political climate in Australia and the social, cultural and economic conditions being experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It is also informed by the ATSI Program's work and performance over the last five years.³

We will undertake regular reviews of our work and analyse the ways in which shifts in the social, cultural and political climate are impacting on the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and how we can respond effectively to such changes.

2. Background information about Oxfam Australia

OAus is an independent, not-for-profit, secular, community-based international development agency. We are a member of Oxfam International, a global confederation of 13 Oxfams that work together to fight poverty and injustice in more than 100 countries around the world.

OAus exists to contribute to:

- a fairer world;
- overcoming poverty and injustice;
- challenging and changing the structural causes of poverty;
- empowering people to control their lives and achieve their human rights;
- long-term change and sustainability.

OAus' work is characterised by:

- working with and through others in ways that are consultative, inclusive, responsive and collaborative;
- appreciating and respecting diversity;
- ongoing learning.

² Beginning July 2007 and ending June 2013.

³ Please note that the ATSI Program was formerly known as the Indigenous Australian Program (IAP).



3. Oxfam Australia's vision

OAus' vision is of a fair world in which people control their own lives, their basic rights are achieved and the environment is sustained.

OAus' mission is to increase the number of people who have a sustainable livelihood, access to social services, an effective voice in decisions, equal rights and status, and safety from conflict and disaster.

We work through partnerships to enable poor and marginalised people to control their own development, achieve equitable treatment, exercise their basic rights, and ensure the environment is healthy and sustainable.

4. Oxfam Australia's ends

OAus believes that human rights are universal, inalienable and indivisible. In this sense, one right cannot be compromised for the sake of another. OAus' Ends express our key guiding principles, but they are not an exhaustive list of all human rights. These Ends are expressed in five basic rights:

- The right to a livelihood
- The right to basic services
- The right to life and security
- The right to be heard
- The right to gender equality and respect for diversity

These five basic rights reflect our commitment to the realisation of all human rights. They were selected as priorities by Oxfam International in response to analyses of key international Human Rights treaties, conventions and declarations, particularly: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948); International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD, 1965); International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966); and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1966). Directly and indirectly, these documents address the impacts of politics, economics and trade on the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities. As outlined by Oxfam International:

Human rights gained international momentum with the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), which was a direct outcome of the outrage provoked by "barbarous acts" committed during World War II...

Human rights are entitlements and legal claims which human beings have against the State. Human rights do not deal with specific groups, although the underpinning principle of non-discrimination implies a bias towards the protection of the vulnerable. Human rights are usually invoked to avoid or redress wrongdoings.⁴

⁴ Towards Global Equity Strategic Plan 2001 – 2004.



Oxfam Australia's central commitments 2007 – 2013

With partners and allies, we will act in solidarity with people living in poverty, especially women, to achieve their rights and assert their dignity as full citizens.

We will support them to hold governments, corporations and international organisations (including Oxfam) to account for their responsibilities. We will work to change global and national rules that perpetuate poverty, insecurity and inequality.

We will support local, national and international organisations and social movements of active citizens to demand justice, particularly gender justice, and to change ideas and beliefs, policies and practices to achieve improvements in people's lives.

5. Oxfam Australia's external change goals and their relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

- 1. Economic Justice – More women and men will realise their right to secure and sustainable livelihoods.** People living in poverty will only enjoy their basic rights when assets, income, opportunities and power are more equitably distributed. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, this also involves the right to self-determination, land rights and native title, appropriate economic development, and to have livelihoods protected, particularly against the potential impacts of climate change.
- 2. Essential Services – The Millennium Development Goals and targets on essential services will be achieved and people living in poverty, especially women and girls, will realise their rights to accessible and affordable healthcare, education, water and sanitation.** In collaboration with communities, OAus will focus on holding governments to account for the provision of affordable and accessible healthcare, water and sanitation. This is closely linked with a holistic understanding of health and wellbeing, and a belief that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have the right to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical, emotional, social and mental health. This includes health promotion and learning, as well as addressing the environmental and social determinants of health.

Oxfam Australia has expressed its commitment to improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in its Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013:

Closing the Gap in Indigenous health

The health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is comparable to that of poor people in developing countries including Mozambique and Bangladesh. There are solutions but these require political will, financial resources and action. To generate this action, we will campaign to *Close the Gap* in Indigenous health in Australia. Bringing together both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other Australians, the campaign will work with Australian Governments to commit a plan of action to achieve equitable access to primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within 10 years and to Close the Gap in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within 25 years.⁵

⁵ Oxfam Australia Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013, p 11.



3. **Rights in Crisis – All women and men in humanitarian crises will be assured both the protection and the assistance they require, regardless of whom and where they are or how they are afflicted, in a manner consistent with their human rights.** For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, this is linked with the crisis in health and the current political climate of ‘new paternalism’, mainstreaming of services, ‘new arrangements and shared responsibility agreements’, changes to the native title legislation and the Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill 2007 which have all diminished Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ self-determination and echo old and discredited policies of assimilation.
4. **Gender Justice – Many more women will gain power over their lives and live free from violence through changes in attitudes, ideas and beliefs about gender relations; and increased levels of women’s active engagements and critical leadership in institutions, decision-making and change processes.** For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, gender justice requires a focus on issues for both women and men, particularly in addressing the high levels of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

6. Oxfam Australia’s organisational change goals and their relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

1. **To be a cohesive global agency.** The ATSIP Program works with other Oxfams, other international NGOs, the United Nations, and other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations to develop appropriate collaborative programs that can work effectively at local, national and global levels for the rights of all Indigenous peoples.
2. **To enable and support our people effectively.** The ATSIP Program works to provide its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other staff with appropriate mentoring and support to ensure they can achieve their aims. We will work to develop Human Resources & Organisational Development policies that encourage the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both within the ATSIP Program team and across the agency.
3. **To be a highly accountable agency.** The ATSIP Program works to hold itself accountable to the organisations, communities, individuals and groups we work with, as well as our donors and supporters.
4. **To be an innovative, flexible and responsive agency.** The ATSIP Program is guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners, organisations, communities, individuals and groups. We emphasise the importance of listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and responding to their identified priorities and needs. The Oxfam Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group provides an important source of advice and input at a strategic level.
5. **To grow our income.** The ATSIP Program’s work to generate awareness often translates into greater income support and a greater number of supporters.
6. **To grow and mobilise our Australian constituency.** The ATSIP Program works to mobilise all Australians to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to achieve self-determination, social justice, and health and life opportunities equivalent to other Australians.
7. **To live out our values in our daily work.** The ATSIP Program works to implement OAus’ **Reconciliation Action Plan** to ensure that awareness, support and respect for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is enacted in the everyday working life and practices of OAus.



Oxfam Australia has expressed its commitment to work towards reconciliation, particularly in its daily work practices, in its Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013:

Reconciliation Action Plan

We will implement our Reconciliation Action Plan. This is a statement of intent that outlines our commitment to work towards reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other Australians and a better future for us all.

In recognition of the disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Oxfam Australia affirms the significant place and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as First Australians, recognises their culture, history and diversity, and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to achieve their potential on the basis of equity and respect.⁶



Photo: OxfamAus

⁶ Oxfam Australia Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013, p 19.



Section B

Oxfam Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Program Strategic Plan 2007-2013

1. The ATSIP program's vision

Our vision is of a fair world in which all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Indigenous peoples around the world control their own lives, their basic rights achieved, and the environment is sustained.

We affirm the significant place and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as First Australians, recognise their culture, history and diversity, and support all Australians to achieve their potential on a basis of equity and respect.

2. Purpose

The ATSIP Program works in long-term partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, individuals and groups to support them to achieve self-determination and social justice.

We seek to create opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, women, children and young people to exercise their rights to basic social services, a sustainable livelihood, a strong voice, cultural identity, and to live free from violence.

We work from a rights-based approach that focuses on Health and Wellbeing, Youth, and Self-determination, recognising that these areas are highly inter-related. We use advocacy and campaigning work to strengthen the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to support their active citizenship.

We recognise that in order to influence the policies and practices of government and other decision makers there must be multi-layered action at local, regional, state, national and international levels.

We hold that all Australians have responsibility for holding government, stakeholders and the public to account for realising positive change and social justice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.

We believe that closing the gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other Australians is possible within 25 years, and we will work to achieve this, working in collaboration with other agencies.⁷

3. Values

The ATSIP Program values the contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make to Australian culture and society. We value the dynamic nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their energy, creativity, the depth of their history, and the diversity of their culture and lifestyles. We recognise and honour the resilience and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and their maintenance of country and culture since time immemorial. We recognise that they are experiencing the repercussions of two centuries of colonisation. We value the opportunity to learn from

⁷ See Appendices p 23 for further information about the *Close the Gap* campaign.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and particularly recognise that their culture is diverse, dynamic and changing.

4. Positioning

OAus is a non-Indigenous, independent, not-for-profit, secular community-based development agency which has a solid background of working in long-term community development from a human rights-based approach. OAus also has extensive experience working in advocacy and campaigning, marketing and media.

The majority of the ATSIP Program's staff members are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Our work is also guided by the Oxfam Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group. This helps ensure that the ATSIP Program is guided by a strong understanding of culturally appropriate ways of working

The ATSIP Program in no way seeks to represent itself as a voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples or to supplant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices. We are committed to developing the most effective ways to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in their quest for social justice and the realisation of their human rights.

Our role as an international human rights agency positions us to speak out on any violation of human rights. We maintain that human rights abuses can never be defended by claims of cultural tradition. In turn, we will support individuals and groups seeking to speak out against human rights abuses that occur in their communities.

5. Why Oxfam Australia works in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia

OAus recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' cultural heritage and arts have been promoted as a key aspect of Australia's national identity and represents a core part of what is distinctive about Australia. Despite this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the most significantly disadvantaged group in Australia in terms of income, unemployment, chronic illness, disability, life expectancy, imprisonment and education. Abuse within families, community violence and self-destructive behaviours, including substance misuse, are serious nationwide problems.

Dispossession, racism and discrimination have systematically disadvantaged and marginalised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. For over 200 years they have endured the loss of their land and livelihoods (including food and water), culture, identity and spirituality. OAus recognises that the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is akin to that of many other Indigenous peoples around the world who are striving to achieve their basic rights and self-determination.

It is intolerable that, in one of the world's wealthiest countries, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are living in circumstances akin to peoples in developing countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Guyana.⁸

In OAus' Strategic Plan 2002 – 2005, *A Catalyst for Change*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia was confirmed as one of our five priority regions. This commitment has been carried over into the current Oxfam Australia Strategic Plan 2007 – 2013. It states:

The rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People have been progressively eroded over the last ten years. The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People continue to live in

⁸ Oxfam Australia, "Commonwealth Games briefing paper: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health", March 2006, p 3.



poverty across urban, rural and remote locations. Indigenous-controlled organisations and representative institutions have been dismantled or downgraded; land rights regimes have been weakened and Indigenous policy overall is increasingly characterised by a punitive paternalism. *Our challenge is to develop more effective ways to support Indigenous Australians in their quest for justice.*

As an Australian agency, OAus has a particular responsibility to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to exercise their rights to basic social services, sustainable livelihoods, a strong voice and cultural diversity in our own country. Over the life of this plan OAus will focus on contributing to improved health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, supporting youth and reinforcing Indigenous self-determination.⁹

The Governing Board of OAus has also adopted specific position policies on the rights of Indigenous peoples around the world, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.¹⁰

6. Focus on three thematic areas

The ATSIP Program is committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across three thematic areas: Health and Wellbeing, Youth, and Self-determination.

Operational Plans are developed for each of the thematic areas, as well as the Reconciliation Action Plan. These Operational Plans are reviewed and revised annually. As they are essentially workplans, they are not included in this Strategic Plan.

Health and Wellbeing

“As a nation, we have never been as well placed to turn the current health crisis faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People around.”¹¹

“We have all heard them – the figures of death and disability... Every few years, (the) figures are repeated and excite attention. But I suspect that most Australians accept them as being almost inevitable. A certain kind of industrial deafness has developed. The human element is not recognised. The meaning of these figures is not heard – or felt.

“The statistics of infant and perinatal mortality are our babies and children who die in our arms... The statistics of shortened life expectancy are our mothers and fathers, uncles, aunties and elders who live diminished lives and die before their gifts of knowledge and experience are passed on. We die silently under these statistics.”¹²

The ATSIP Program works from a human rights approach that asserts that the right to health is universal and indivisible from other human rights. Human rights provide a framework for addressing the consequences of health inequality and systemic discrimination¹³ experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes recognising underlying causes as well as the connections with other issues, such as inadequate and overcrowded housing, poor sanitation, poverty, unemployment, poor educational attainment, substance abuse, and the social, spiritual and mental health issues arising from alienation, lack of hope and community violence.

⁹ Oxfam Australia Strategic Plan, 2007 – 2013, pp 5 & 8.

¹⁰ See Appendices p 23.

¹¹ Tom Calma, “Indigenous rights watchdog challenges governments to commit to health equality within a generation”, 16 February 2006, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) website, http://www.humanrights.gov.au/media_releases/2006/8_06.htm, accessed 27 December 2006.

¹² Mick Dodson, quoted in *Social Justice Report 2005*, p11.

¹³ Henry BR, Houston S, Mooney GH. Institutional racism in Australian healthcare: a plea for decency. *Med J Aust* 2004; 180: 517-520.



Improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will require specific focus and special measures. Particular attention must be given to the provision of accessible and culturally appropriate primary health care services. It is fundamental to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lead the policy and decision-making in the planning, development, operation and staffing of their health and wellbeing services.

The ATSIP Program's strategies are based on extensive consultation with and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations working in the health sector. Strategies include:

- building on long-term community development, including auspicing the Gulf Regional Health Service in the three community sites of Mornington Island, Normanton and Doomadgee in the Gulf of Carpentaria in NW Queensland. This has been our biggest program over recent years and has made significant progress in supporting community development and innovative health promotion strategies in the participating communities. Over the period of this Strategic Plan, it is envisaged that this program will be transitioned to appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based organisation/s in the region;
- advocacy/campaigning/lobbying for improved health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- *Close the Gap* campaign, in collaboration with other agencies, which aims to commit the State and Federal governments to achieve health equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders within a generation;
- building skills, capacities and resources of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, organisations and individuals
- to work more actively with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health sector to strengthen their planning, monitoring and evaluation, communications and lobbying capacities; and
- information exchange, targeted research, sharing learnings and building networks.

A detailed two-year **Health and Wellbeing Operational Plan** is reviewed and updated annually. The Health and Wellbeing Coordinator can be contacted for further information.

Youth

“It is essential that the leadership skills they (young Indigenous people) develop in their own communities is supported, so that they become even more confident and effective as leaders and importantly that they pass their experience and leadership skills onto the next generation.”¹⁴

“Coming from a small remote Aboriginal community in Cape York, the perception of young people is really distorted, because the whole belief that children should be seen and not heard is still embedded in our culture. And this day and age a lot of our leaders forget that we are the next generation coming through and so they sort of like miss an opportunity to actually get to know us and support us in order to support them to better the community.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Tanya Hosch speaking in *Supporting Aboriginal health*, 'STATEing Women's Health, newsletter of the Women of South Australia, Summer 2004.

¹⁵ Tania Major, *Living Black* interview transcript, screened on ABC Television, 16 May 2005.



“I grew up understanding that we have a right to our sovereignty, our self-determination, access to health, access to education and freedom from racial discrimination. We often claim that we have a whole range of rights that are not recognised by the Australian legal system. For this reason, it makes no sense that we claim all of these rights that are long recognised as inherent in every human being, only to ignore them when that human being is a young girl exposed to great physical, mental and emotional danger.

“There is no reason our cultural values cannot conform to respect basic international human rights laws, and they should and they must... If we are to ensure the continuation of our nations and our cultures, we need to make sure that the rights of our children are protected first and foremost.”¹⁶

The majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are young and they will be the leaders of the future. There is great potential to advance positive change by nurturing and empowering young people to be strong contributors and leaders, which will be for the long-term benefit of all Australians. The challenge is to inspire and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth to use their energies for positive and constructive change and achievement. They need to have their voices heard, and to have the same health wellbeing and life opportunities to realise their dreams and aspirations as other young Australians.

Serious issues are widely experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth, including self-harm (drug and or alcohol misuse and suicide); socially destructive activities (vandalism, theft, violence); sexual health and unsafe sexual practices (with attendant health problems complicated by drug and alcohol misuse and poverty); and clashes with authorities and police. Despite this, there are no mechanisms set up to listen and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth that are not government controlled, and their issues are usually dealt with under a broader mainstream youth agenda.

The ATSIP Program aims to enable positive energy and empower strong young Indigenous Australian voices. We aim to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people with the opportunities and skills that will enable them to be active players within their own communities and throughout all sectors of Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies. Oxfam recognises that Indigenous culture is dynamic and evolving and there is a need for young Indigenous people to be supported in achieving their aspirations as they deem appropriate.

OAus has already got a number of programs that support young people. The focus of the ATSIP Program youth operational plan is to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth participate in relevant programs across OAus and Oxfam International, as well as specific initiatives developed in discussion with them and based on identified needs, requests and dialogue.

There are close links between the ATSIP Program and OAus' International Youth Partnerships (IYP). The ATSIP Program has appointed an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Engagement Program Officer to work across both programs.

¹⁶ Larissa Behrendt, “Rights of Indigenous women and children must come first”, edited extract of her Alice Tay Memorial Lecture, delivered at Australian National University, Canberra, Age, 26 May 2006.



Strategies include:

- Program support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and groups in development, implementation and monitoring of programs
- Networking and information sharing – e.g. exchanges, visits, forums, shared learning opportunities, International Youth Partnerships, mentoring and other opportunities through OAus' Youth Engagement Program
- Capacity building of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, youth networks, alliances, groups and individual young people through –mentoring, training, e.g. workshops in areas such as media, public speaking, campaigning, communications and strategy development;
- Building a larger group of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human rights advocates through training, networking, advocacy and lobbying support
- Conducting research into emerging issues and the changing policy and political environment, particularly as they affect young Indigenous people, scoping / feasibility studies to inform the development of new programs and approaches, sharing research and provoking debate

A detailed two-year **Youth Operational Plan** is reviewed and updated annually. The Youth and Self-determination Coordinator can be contacted for further information.

Self-determination

“An approach that has never been tested cannot be deemed a failure. What we’ve had, at best, in Australia is a kind of self-administration, where Aboriginal communities have been responsible for delivering the basic services Abbott refers to, like garbage collection... The administrative responsibilities in the hands of Indigenous communities have not been self-determined, but imposed...”¹⁷

Over the past few years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs have undergone a fundamental shift. Principles of self-determination and human rights have been derided as a failed experiment when the reality is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have never had the opportunity to exercise this right due to lack of political will and resources from government.

The ATSIP Program emphasises the importance of listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' voices, which is central to self-determination. While each thematic area is based on fundamental principles of self-determination, we have identified the need for a specific program for achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

We aim to increase the accountability of government, corporations and others to their responsibilities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, and to enable and strengthen active citizenship among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their organisations.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was effectively abolished in 2004 and replaced by a government appointed advisory board, the National Indigenous Council (NIC). From July 2004, key conceptual policy planks such as self-determination, self-management, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific programs have been replaced by policies of 'mutual obligation', mainstreaming of services and variants on old and discredited assimilation policies. In the current

¹⁷ Mick Dodson, “Still blaming the victim”, *Age*, 22 June 2006, p 17.



hardline political environment, many of the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are being violated, being traded off for services which are available to other Australians, and are increasingly under attack.

A key human rights issue in the “new arrangements” is the quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ participation. Human rights law requires that when governments make decisions about issues such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander socio-economic development, self-determination, their right to non-discrimination, or their right to different and appropriate treatment as minority cultural groups, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are able to participate in decision-making processes. Effective participation ensures that decisions are not imposed on individuals and communities. The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Bill 2007 is one recent stark example of Indigenous affairs being comprehensively rewritten without consultation with the relevant Aboriginal communities.

Our limited resources, both financial and human, means the ATSIP Program must be targeted and strategic in its investment to address these issues. We are committed to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to realise their right to self-determination, and our contribution will be derived from our strength as an international human rights agency. Strategies include:

- support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and groups in the development, implementation and monitoring of programs that work to strengthen their self-determination;
- capacity building of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, communities, networks, alliances, individuals and groups;
- support for partners so they can engage more effectively in the “new arrangements” in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, and better understand their rights and responsibilities in negotiation processes towards greater self-determination;
- strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ influence in policy development and decision making;
- conducting research into emerging issues and the changing policy and political environment;
- supporting the development of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ representative body as well as effective regional and state bodies, and strengthening the voices of young people and women in such structures;
- supporting emerging leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, especially among young people;
- supporting the growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human rights advocates and networks, and their representation in United Nations and other international forums and processes.

We work across all areas in OAus, but most closely with the Indigenous Advocacy Coordinator in OAus’ Advocacy Unit.

A detailed two-year **Self-determination Operational Plan** is reviewed and updated annually. The Youth and Self-determination Coordinator can be contacted for further information.

7. The ATSIP Program’s direction and growth

For almost 30 years¹⁸ the ATSIP Program has had geographic focus in parts of Western Australia and Queensland, alongside some national programs and smaller initiatives in other parts of Australia. Over

¹⁸ Including the earlier organisations which have joined with or been renamed Oxfam Australia including Community Aid Abroad and Freedom from Hunger.



2007 – 2013 we will develop greater national programs and engagement with urban and regional communities, as approximately two thirds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples live in urban and regional towns.

The ATSIP Program is well positioned to achieve steady growth over the 2007 – 2013 period. Strategies include:

- to grow the ATSIP Program and its work in terms of its resources, initiatives, partnerships and impact;
- to be recognised as a leading non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with significant impact;
- to strengthen our advocacy work and influence in policy development;
- to strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' organisations, networks, individuals and groups;
- to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human rights advocates and networks, as well as increase representation in UN processes including support for implementation of the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
- to implement a geographic shift in the ATSIP Program: growth in urban, regional and national programs and influence;
- build the capacity of OAUs, across units, to more effectively respond to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, especially in the Human Resources and Organisational Development, Marketing, Campaigns and Advocacy Units; and
- contribute to addressing the potential impacts of climate change on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and groups.

8. Who we work with (partners and allies)

The ATSIP Program is a small team with small resources, which means our work must be strategic and targeted with a long-term view. With this in mind, we work to support allies and partners and address issues that may not be taken up by other organisations. We are not a service provider; instead we work to achieve long-term social change, which may involve developing new approaches to service delivery. We also aim to work in diverse areas – in urban, rural and remote communities – and at local, regional, state and national levels.

Generally, the ATSIP Program supports both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners and programs that:

- are aligned to OAUs' and the ATSIP Program's vision and ways of working;
- work from a human rights-based approach;
- are unlikely to receive government funding for a particular project;
- do not duplicate existing arrangements;
- will benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- have the support of the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- generate significant, lasting and positive change;
- empower and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to strengthen their voice and capacity to determine their own affairs.



These are guiding principles only. Decisions about the partners and programs we support are made on a case-by-case basis, as we have limited funds. We may support projects being developed and implemented by partners and others, as well as proactively develop programs and new partnerships. With this in mind, one of our challenges during this Strategic Plan period is to get greater clarity around which projects we take on and who we choose as partners.

As previously outlined, OAus is an international development agency; it is not primarily a funding body. As well as funding, we can provide practical and capacity building assistance such as training and support in communications, advocacy, strategic planning, and other appropriate skills.

9. Our ways of working

The ATSIP Program recognises that relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other Australians are informed by historical, political, environmental, social and economic factors that need to be acknowledged and worked through. With this in mind, we actively seek guidance and direction from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, individuals and groups, including our partners and the Oxfam Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group.

OAus uses a variety of ways of working to bring about significant or lasting change. This is the 'One Program' approach, which integrates long-term community development, humanitarian responses and advocacy. It comes with the awareness that change takes time and is influenced by a range of factors. The ways of working outlined below are usually combined in different ways according to the needs of the project. Our priority is to work in responsive and flexible ways. We aim to be transparent and share our learnings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, individuals and groups.

Rights-Based Approach

OAus takes a human rights-based approach to its work to alleviate poverty, injustice and suffering. We work to support marginalised, poor and disadvantaged communities to achieve the five basic rights, as outlined in the "Ends" section of this Strategic Plan. OAus' work to protect the human rights of all people guides us to speak out on any violation of human rights. OAus will support individuals and groups seeking to speak out against and end human rights abuses that occur in their community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, as with other Indigenous populations around the world, are disproportionately affected by issues of poverty, poor health, poor education and lack of employment. Since colonisation, successive Australian government policies have eroded the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to function effectively and practice self-determination. Australian governments have been slow to recognise and respect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, resulting in serious threats to the right to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, culture and heritage. The ATSIP Program recognises that human rights must underpin our program and advocacy work.

Partnerships

The ATSIP Program works with a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other communities, groups, not-for-profit and corporate organisations, academic institutions, research bodies, and youth organisations throughout Australia and around the world to further the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. As outlined earlier, our relationships may or may not involve funding. We work to establish solid and long-term working relationships that are based on respect and equity. We work to be responsive to partners' needs and to encourage flexible and open practice, in the spirit of two-way learning and accountability. Our relationships are non-exclusive and non-partisan and we do not engage



with factional community politics. Project ‘failure’ or disagreements during a partnership are viewed as an opportunity to learn and develop better ways of working.

OAus is a donor-funded agency and we are accountable to our donors. With this in mind, the ATSIP Program requires partners to comply with national laws and OAus policies and requests, particularly in terms of financial obligations.

Long-Term Community Development

The ATSIP Program respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ decision-making and community control. We work to build local skills and capacities and to help communities create their own solutions to poverty and injustice. As such, we seek to develop long-term and sustainable partnerships and projects that support communities to have their voices heard and be actively involved in decision-making processes. We also work to broker relationships, facilitate the exchange of information, and to be an intermediary that puts community people in contact with decision-makers. We aim to work according to community needs and timelines.

From 2004 our intensive community development work has mostly been in the Gulf of Carpentaria region. The Gulf Regional Health Service operates from a hub in Mt Isa to support community development in Mornington Island, Normanton and Doomadgee to address health and wellbeing issues. Over the life of this Strategic Plan we seek to transition the Gulf Regional Health Service to local or regional community based organisation/s, changing the relationship from direct management of the program to a supportive partnership.

Capacity Building

Capacity building is about supporting people to develop the skills, knowledge and resources that enable them to better manage their own affairs. The ATSIP Program works with field offices and partner organisations to provide capacity building support, based on needs identified by our partners.

Capacity building support may include conducting workshops in areas such as: media and media relations; communications; development of advocacy and lobbying strategies; community development; fundraising and event organisation; monitoring and evaluation; a human rights-based approach to development; and developing international networks.

Advocacy and Campaign Work

OAus’ human rights-based approach necessitates advocacy and campaign work, particularly in the current political climate in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ self-determination and the full realisation of their human rights are being undermined. We strongly believe that enhancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ ability to speak out about their own issues leads to significant and positive outcomes. We work to hold governments, corporations and others, including ourselves, to account to deliver upon responsibilities and commitments. We speak on selected issues from our strengths and knowledge base, and maintain our position as a human rights agency to speak out on human rights violations.

The ATSIP Program has a strong commitment to strengthening the effectiveness of the representational and advocacy roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, individuals and groups. Our current advocacy work focuses on the collaborative *Close the Gap* campaign.



Knowledge Building

Sound research, a strong evidence base and knowledge building are important elements of community development and provide a foundation for effective advocacy work. We identify gaps in research and aim to follow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-identified research protocols and ethics.¹⁹

Our knowledge is developed through direct work with communities and these experiences inform our program development. Knowledge building is not just about collecting statistical data, but having strong working relationships with partners and getting out in the field. We learn from our experiences and use those learnings to inform our planning to develop future programs.

Organisational Cultural Change & Development

OAus recognises the need to continually adjust the ways in which we work, particularly in terms of culturally appropriate practice. We work according to our Organisational Change Goals, which are to be a cohesive, highly accountable, flexible, responsive and reflective agency, and to live out our values in our daily work.

The ATSIP Program will play a lead role in implementing OAus' Reconciliation Action Plan. We will concentrate on promoting cultural awareness throughout the organisation through regular seminars, workshops and trainings about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. This involves encouraging the organisation to: look internally; bring different units together; identify gaps in knowledge within the organisation; encourage open communication; and promote best practice when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, partners, individuals and groups.

We will install appropriate signage and artwork in OAus offices, develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols document for OAus, including Welcome to Country protocols for OAus public events. We will also work with the Human Resources/Organisation Development Unit to review current employee induction and professional development programs to ensure that cultural diversity considerations, both generic and specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, are addressed. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff will be provided with mentoring support. Where possible, we will use Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultants, trainers and researchers when contracting out specific pieces of work.

10. Constraints and risks

As noted in previous sections, OAus is a non-Indigenous organisation, which provides some challenges to working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia. We are seeking to raise our profile and gain credibility and respect within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The ATSIP Program is working as best as it can to develop such relationships to ensure our long-term work generates the best possible outcomes. This takes time, cultural awareness, sensitivity and flexibility.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs are often volatile and sensitive and the current political climate of 'new paternalism' has provided greater challenges to generating positive change. This not only impacts on the everyday lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but also on the professional lives of people working in the area. With this in mind, we support our staff and partners to avoid excessive demands, including the pressures of working in small and remote communities, which can lead to burnout and high staff turnover.

¹⁹ See the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC's) "Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health", and Onemda Koori Health Unit's website www.onemda.unimelb.edu.au.



Section C

Resources

1. Measures

The ATSIP Program is committed to monitoring and evaluating all of our work to ensure the delivery of positive change to the individuals, organisations, communities and groups we work with. We also support the development of best practice in the evaluation work of our partner organisations.

Monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment are integrated into our program work at every level. Each project will have its own monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment plan, and each thematic area will be reviewed on a regular basis. Methodologies include annual reflections, peer evaluations, Most Significant Change projects, project monitoring, external and internal reviews and audits, and in-depth strategic evaluations.

2. Staffing

The ATSIP Program team is growing and recently experienced a significant restructure. This involved the creation of several new positions, including the appointment of a National Manager. OAus has also committed greater amounts of its core funding to the ATSIP Program, there is more interest from OAus' donors to fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs, and OAus has committed to implementing its Reconciliation Action Plan. We are also establishing stronger relationships with other units within OAus, including Human Resources & Organisational Development, Advocacy, Campaigns, Marketing, Media and Communications. These recent developments ensure that the ATSIP Program will continue to grow and strengthen its effectiveness at many levels, including its people resources.

Oxfam Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group

The Oxfam Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group provides guidance and strategic advice, and acts as a sounding board to the ATSIP Program and other relevant units in OAus. This is based on Reference Group members' personal experience and knowledge of current and emerging realities, directions and needs among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The membership of the Oxfam Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group has recently been expanded and diversified.

ATSIP Program Staffing Structure

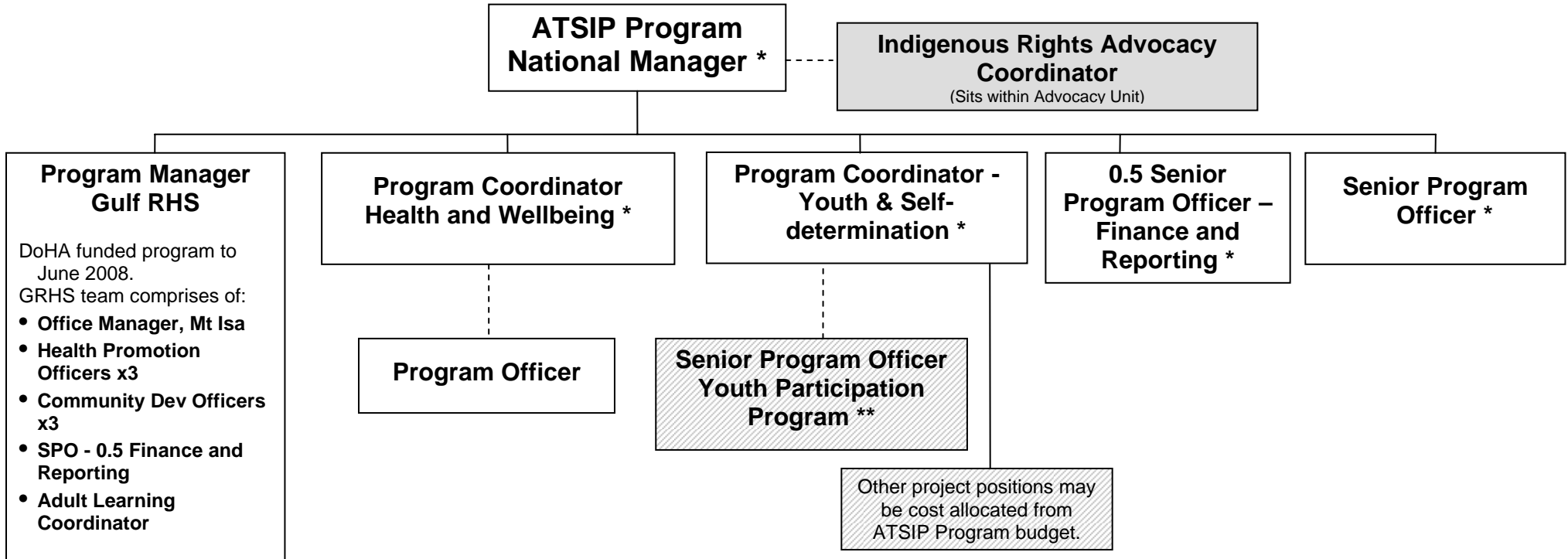
The Staffing Structure of the ATSIP Program is outlined in the diagram on the following page.

3. Budget

The ATSIP Program is well positioned to achieve a steady budget growth over the life of this Strategic Plan. This will involve:

- growing our program work and budget with a greater share of OAus' core funding;
- working with Marketing and Donor Liaison to broaden the donor base and generate greater community support for our programs and projects.
- exploring opportunities to increase institutional (philanthropic and corporate) funding to support our work.

ATSIP Program Structure



Note: Shaded positions are fixed-term and all other positions marked with * are core. Gulf program is funded by DoHA. The Indigenous Rights Advocacy Coordinator's position is part of the Advocacy Unit. ** This position works with the International Youth Partnerships Program.

Structure as revised in October 2007.



Section D

Appendices

Overview of Key Statistics and Facts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia*

Health & Wellbeing*

Youth*

Self-determination*

Oxfam Australia Position Policy: Rights of Indigenous Peoples

[Oxfam Australia :: Policy](#)

Oxfam Australia Position Policy: Rights of Indigenous Peoples in Australia

[Oxfam Australia :: Policy](#)

Oxfam Australia Position Policy: The Right to an Identity: Gender and Diversity

[Oxfam Australia :: Policy](#)

Reconciliation Action Plan

<http://www.oxfam.org.au/world/pacific/australia/docs/RAP-update-OCT-07.pdf>

Close the Gap Solutions to the Indigenous Health Crisis facing Australia

<http://www.oxfam.org.au/media/files/CTG.pdf>

Commonwealth Games briefing paper: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

http://www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/indigenous/docs/health_15032006.pdf

Key References

Tom Calma, *Social Justice Report: Achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality within a generation: a human rights based approach*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, 2005

HREOC, *Bringing them home – Indigenous Social Justice: report of the National Enquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families*, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, Sydney, 1997

Onemda Koori Health Unit website, www.onemda.unimelb.edu.au

Oxfam Australia, *Close the Gap: Solutions to the Indigenous Health Crisis Facing Australia*, April 2007

Darlene Oxenham, 'Aboriginal terms of reference': The concept at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies, CIRC discussion paper series, 27/1999, Gunada Press, Perth

John Taylor. *Population and Diversity: Policy Implications of Emerging Indigenous Demographic Trends*, Discussion Paper No. 283/2006, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, 2006

Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research, National Health and Medical Research Council, 2003

* These documents last updated May 2007, contact ATSIP Program for further information.



Photo: Wayne Quilliam/OxfamAus

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