



**Office of the Hon Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services
and Indigenous Affairs**

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MC08-007046

Sr Margaret Hinchey
72 Rosebery Avenue
ROSEBERY NSW 1445

Dear Sr Hinchey

Thank you for your email of 29 January 2008 to the Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP about Aboriginal disadvantage. Your email was referred to the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon Jenny Macklin MP. The Minister has asked me to reply to your email on her behalf.

The Australian Government intends to develop a relationship with Indigenous Australians based on mutual respect. To this end the Government is consulting with a broad range of stakeholders on a variety of issues, including identifying what communities need and what works for them. This is an important component in the Government's approach to closing the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Regarding your comments on health services, the Government has committed to providing \$100 million to expand health service delivery in remote NT Indigenous communities over two years from July 2008.

This initiative will expand health services delivery to remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory and deliver long term, sustainable improvements in the Northern Territory primary health care system. It will assist in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health outcomes.

The initiative will provide access to extended levels of care on a regional basis through fly-in/fly-out services and other outreach arrangements.

The initiative also provides for the recruitment of health professionals for remote Indigenous communities, to supplement the recruitment efforts of the Northern Territory Department of Health and Community Services and Aboriginal medical services. A remote area health corps agency will be established for this purpose. The agency will have a particular focus on the recruitment of urban-based health professionals.

You also addressed the development of industry in remote communities, particularly in the form of trades training. You may be interested to know that the Government has begun developing Remote Enterprise Innovation Centres (REIC) and has announced funding of \$10m over four years. REIC will provide mentoring and support to remote small and medium sized enterprises. Whilst located in Alice Springs, the centre's services will be available to small and medium sized enterprises in remote of areas of SA, QLD, WA and NT.

The Government agrees with you, that there is need for improved, sustainable housing in Indigenous communities. The Prime Minister has also proposed a bipartisan Joint Policy Commission to be led by him and the Leader of the Opposition. This announcement was part of the Government's historic apology to Australia's Indigenous people on 13 February 2008. The mandate of the Joint Policy Commission is to develop and implement an effective housing strategy for remote communities over the next five years. The Prime Minister is in discussion with Dr Nelson on the formation, structure and operations of the Joint Commission.

Again, thank you for writing.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rita Markwell', written in a cursive style.

Rita Markwell
Adviser

28 APR 2008