

Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited

MEDIA RELEASE



Generational Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education = A+
8 June 2011

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service Co-operative Limited (VALS) is urging the Victorian Government to make a generational commitment to education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The Wannik Education Strategy for Aboriginal children has recently been found by the Victorian Auditor-General to have systemic problems with its implementation and makes recommendations for improvement. VALS argues that these recommendations, coupled with the good will of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to work in partnership with Government to further the strategy, should not be overlooked.

VALS considers it pertinent and feels compelled to make public comment on this issue in light of what is known about what leads to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's contact with the criminal justice system. "Many of VALS' clients present with underlying issues that contribute to their offending, one of them being poor educational outcomes. This was identified by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. If prevention is better than a cure then it makes sense that improved education outcomes will result in a reduction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over-representation in the prison system," said VALS CEO, Wayne Muir.

VALS supports the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) in its recent Communiqué calling for the Wannik strategy to receive a generational commitment and to be implemented over a greater period of time.

VALS notes that it is generally accepted by Government that the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy will not close overnight and it will likely take place over generations. "Why is this approach not being taken in relation to education when the Wannik strategy and 'Close the Gap Agreement' are so closely linked?" said Mr. Muir. "A holistic approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage is essential."

VALS believes the good will of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to make a generational commitment to the Wannik strategy is captured in VAEAI's Communiqué in the words of Community Elder, Aunty Melva Johnson: "I believe that Wannik is the way forward. It's been wonderful ... in Echuca, schools have gone in whole-heartedly."

Given the infancy of the Wannik strategy, in operation since 2008, VALS considers it too early to abandon and instead calls for its strengthening. Mr. Muir says VALS will continue to call on the Government to make a generational commitment to the Wannik strategy. "It is only then that we can work towards an A+ in education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children."