



ARDS

Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc.

Media Release

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ARE WE CLOSING THE GAP OR MAKING IT BIGGER?

Major concern about where the Government is heading with Indigenous Australians is the drive behind today's national launch of a paper titled *'Are We Heading in the Right Direction?'*

Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc (ARDS), an Indigenous organisation, poses the question in the paper, now available via the ARDS website, while giving strategies to ensure positive change between dominant and Indigenous cultures.

Paper author, ARDS CEO Richard Trudgen says, "Current government policies, both State and Federal, are not heading in the right direction to 'close the gap' for Indigenous Australians."

"To effectively 'Close the Gap', capacity needs to be built within the people themselves so they have the power and the knowledge to drive their own future and to take full advantage of the services that governments provide," he says.

Indigenous Australians currently face shorter life expectancy, poorer health, higher unemployment, lower education levels and higher rates of imprisonment.

If measures are not taken to address these issues now, Richard predicts there could be dire consequences in the future.

"The people will remain marginalised and traumatised by even higher levels of dependency, disease, sickness and death," he says.

Government intervention has so far failed to address the socio-cultural, economic, legal, linguistic, and historic reality of the people they are now influencing, forcing Indigenous communities to become more fragmented, disempowered and dependent.

Richard believes that government needs to invest in developing human capacity in order to see effective solutions.

"Governments need to stop seeing Indigenous people as 'problems to be solved' but people, citizens of this land, that need access to good information and knowledge in their own language."

ARDS have suggested two strategies that will help bring about change and bridge the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures.

Knowledge empowerment of the whole Indigenous community that will see elders and adults become teachers of contemporary knowledge to compliment their role as teachers of traditional knowledge.

Build the capacity within government to better understand Indigenous people, their struggles and issues to enable all levels of government to step outside current failed approaches and adopt newer, more informed initiatives to bridge the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia.

Richard concludes “There is a ‘culture of silence’ in many Indigenous communities. The way to break this silence is to invest in developing human capacity to build social cohesion rather than implementing punitive measures that further alienate Indigenous citizens. Surely we can do this in 2008!”

ENDS

For interview opportunities please contact:

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To download the full Paper go to:

[www.ards.com.au/print/Are We Heading in the Right Direction.pdf](http://www.ards.com.au/print/Are_We_Heading_in_the_Right_Direction.pdf).