



AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

PERFORMANCE EXAMINATION

Progress with Implementing the Response to the Gordon Inquiry

Report 11 – November 2005



AUDITOR GENERAL for Western Australia

Serving the Public Interest



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THE SPEAKER
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

THE PRESIDENT
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE EXAMINATION – PROGRESS WITH IMPLEMENTING THE RESPONSE TO THE GORDON INQUIRY

This report has been prepared consequent to an examination conducted under section 80 of the *Financial Administration and Audit Act 1985* for submission to Parliament under the provisions of section 95 of the Act.

Performance Examinations are an integral part of the overall Performance Auditing program and seek to provide Parliament with assessments of the effectiveness and efficiency of public sector programs and activities thereby identifying opportunities for improved performance.

The information provided through this approach will, I am sure, assist Parliament in better evaluating agency performance and enhance Parliamentary decision-making to the benefit of all Western Australians.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D D R Pearson'.

D D R PEARSON
AUDITOR GENERAL
23 November 2005

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Auditor General's Overview

Family violence and child abuse has devastating effects on individual lives and is a very significant issue for the community. While the incidence of abuse is throughout our society, it occurs in Aboriginal communities at a rate that is much higher than that of non-Aboriginal communities.

The State Government's response to the Gordon Inquiry into family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities includes more than 120 initiatives and a whole-of-government approach to organising and delivering services.

While this examination has identified a need for active management of the Government's Action Plan initiatives to achieve timely implementation and to overcome obstacles as they arise, an even bigger challenge lies ahead. Management needs to follow through beyond the initial implementation to ensure that the issues are being addressed on a sustainable basis.

It is important that the impetus for change is not lost and the opportunity forgone.

Executive Summary

The Government response to the Gordon Inquiry in December 2002 was an Action Plan containing more than 120 initiatives to be implemented by 15 public sector agencies. It included \$66.5 million in new funding.

The Action Plan responds particularly to the finding that ‘violence and child abuse are grave social problems that are endemic in many Aboriginal communities’. It also seeks to address child abuse and family violence in the wider community by improving across government coordination of community services.

This performance examination reviewed the effectiveness of monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan. This is considered timely because three years have elapsed since the release of the Action Plan and some initiatives will soon be sufficiently advanced to begin assessing outcomes, such as decreased rates of family violence and child abuse.

Key Findings

There are inadequacies in the central reporting and monitoring of the progress of the Action Plan to facilitate effective oversight by Government.

- An authoritative account of the progress with implementing initiatives has not been prepared by the Action Plan’s Secretariat, with the result that central monitoring and oversight groups do not have available basic information such as the total number of initiatives, the number implemented and estimates on final expenditure and anticipated completion dates.
- Reporting to the public does not acquit all the initiatives and is inconsistent in structure and the type of information reported. Reporting only provides information on a small number of initiatives. As a result, the public has not been informed about the progress of many initiatives nor of the Action Plan overall.
- An evaluation framework for assessing whether the Action Plan is making a difference has not been finalised. The target date for delivery of the framework was the end of 2003. This delay is significant because a clear and shared sense of purpose is important during the planning and implementation phases and because the opportunity may have been lost to collect some important baseline data.

Executive Summary ... continued

- In the absence of an authoritative account and appropriate public reporting, we examined a sample of 10 key initiatives and found that:
 - seven initiatives have been implemented or substantially progressed on time.
 - the three remaining initiatives are progressing but are behind schedule. The reasons include coordination across agencies and with Aboriginal communities taking longer than expected, delays in the construction of facilities and in delivering financial assistance.

Recommendations

- **The Department of Indigenous Affairs (as the agency that became responsible for the Secretariat in April 2005) in conjunction with participating agencies should:**
 - **establish reporting of authoritative accounts of the progress of Action Plan initiatives**
 - **finalise an evaluation framework.**
- **The effectiveness of collaboration between agencies through the current oversight arrangements and on the ground should be revisited with the objective of expediting implementation of initiatives.**

Introduction

The Report of the Gordon Inquiry (tabled in Parliament in August 2002) found that ‘violence and child abuse are grave social problems that are endemic in many Aboriginal communities’. The Gordon Inquiry was prompted by a Coronial Inquest into the death of a 15 year old girl in 1999. The Coroner’s report included allegations of physical and sexual abuse at the community involved.

The Government responded to the Gordon Inquiry in December 2002 with an Action Plan with more than 120 initiatives to ‘improve the capacity of government to protect children from abuse which is an immediate and urgent priority’. The Action Plan also commits the Government to entering into a process of engagement with the wider Aboriginal community to develop the building blocks that will secure a long-term partnership.

Responsibilities and Accountabilities

The Action Plan identified that the State Government Human Services Directors General Group (HSDG) will oversight and monitor the implementation of the Action Plan through a Senior Officers Group (SOG). A Secretariat was formed in 2002 to assist in developing the Action Plan and was retained to support the SOG. The Secretariat’s tasks include:

- implementing a project management and tracking system for the Action Plan initiatives at a cost of \$100 000
- managing the reporting system, monitoring progress and generating progress reports for the SOG
- assisting in developing a process for reporting and evaluating progress against performance measures
- taking minutes of the meetings of SOG
- facilitating and participating in implementing initiatives (this role was discontinued in 2004).

The Secretariat was transferred from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) to the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) in April 2005.

Agencies, in addition to being accountable for implementing Action Plan initiatives through their Minister to Parliament, also report progress through the SOG to the HSDG Group for central monitoring and oversight (Figure 1).

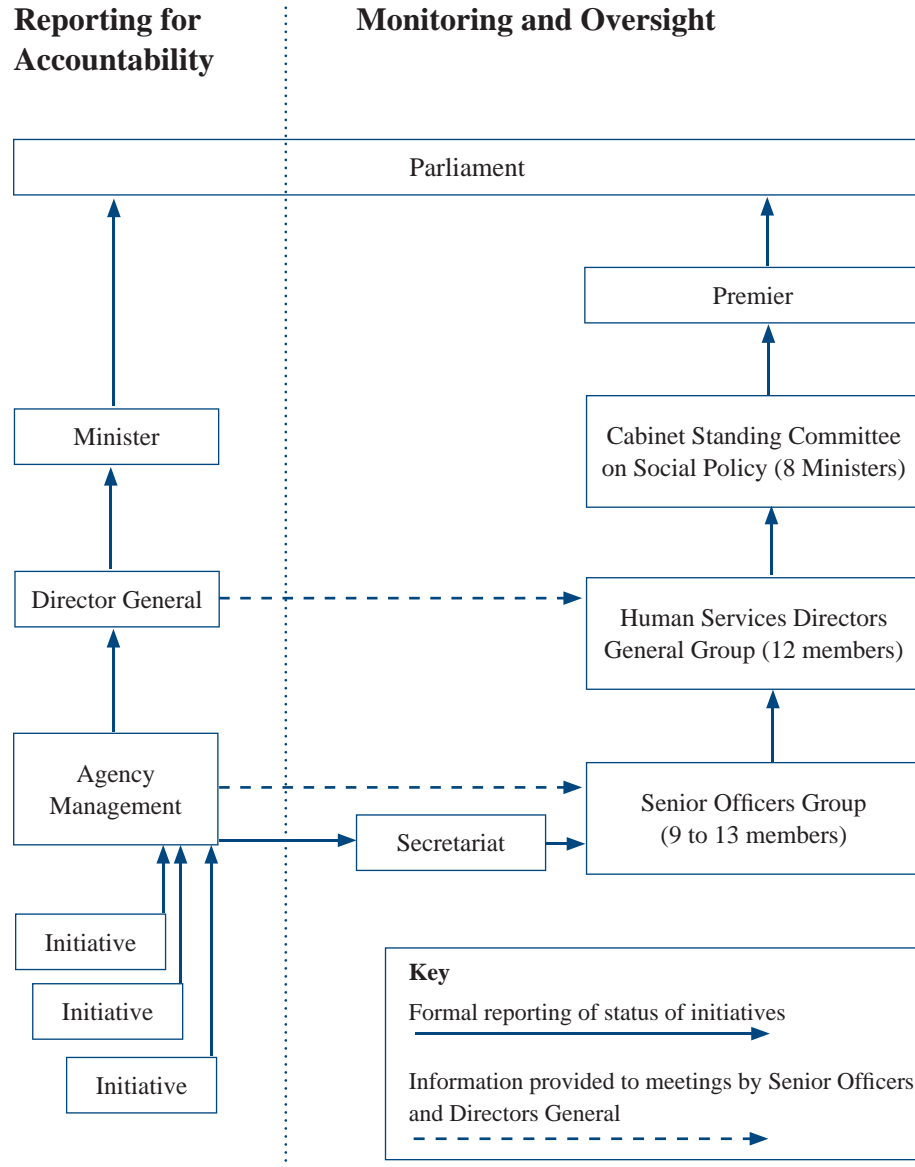


Figure 1: Lines of reporting and oversight arrangements for the implementation of the Action Plan

Reporting for formal accountability purposes is from the agency responsible for each initiative to its Minister and that Minister to Parliament. The Action Plan identified that the Human Services Directors General Group will monitor and oversight the Action Plan through a Senior Officers Group. The two groups are made up of representatives from the agencies with responsibility for implementing the initiatives. A Secretariat provides services to the Senior Officers Group.

Source: OAG

The HSDG Group report to the Cabinet Standing Committee on Social Policy and the Premier reports to Parliament on the progress of the Action Plan.

The Action Plan also identifies that the HSDG Group and SOG will streamline a wide range of existing and new social services, in addition to the Action Plan. This means that the two groups also oversight the Drug, Early Years, Child Protection, Community Safety, Aboriginal Justice Agreement and Family and Domestic Violence strategies.

What We Did

Three years have elapsed since the release of the Action Plan and while it is too early to assess the impact of the initiatives in terms of outcomes such as changes to the rates of family violence and child abuse, it is timely to review the progress made to implement the Action Plan. In particular we looked for an authoritative account of the progress of the implementation of initiatives.

We looked for complete, accurate and relevant agency progress updates on:

- the objectives, deliverables and intended outcomes of each initiative
- progress data set against timelines and budget
- data on forthcoming critical milestones
- a summary of the actions taken to resolve delays and barriers to timely implementation.

We did this by reviewing:

- the effectiveness of the arrangements for reporting and monitoring the progress of implementing the Action Plan and its initiatives
- a sample of six initiatives implemented by the Department for Community Development (DCD) and four initiatives implemented by the Western Australia Police Service (WAPOL).

Reporting, Monitoring and Oversight is Not Supported by Authoritative Information

Findings

- An authoritative account of the progress with implementing initiatives has not been prepared by the Action Plan's Secretariat, with the result that central monitoring and oversight groups do not have available basic information such as the total number of initiatives, the number implemented and estimates on final expenditure and anticipated completion dates.
- Reporting to the public does not acquit all the initiatives and is inconsistent in structure and the type of information reported. Reporting only provides information on a small number of initiatives. As a result, the public has not been informed about the progress of many initiatives nor of the Action Plan overall.
- An evaluation framework for assessing whether the Action Plan is making a difference has not been finalised. The target date for delivery of the framework was the end of 2003. This delay is significant because a clear and shared sense of purpose is important during the planning and implementation phases and because the opportunity may have been lost to collect some important baseline data.

Recommendations

The Department of Indigenous Affairs (as the agency that became responsible for the Secretariat in April 2005) in conjunction with participating agencies should:

- **establish reporting of authoritative accounts of the progress of Action Plan initiatives**
- **finalise an evaluation framework.**

Effective central monitoring and oversight is needed to resolve obstacles to achieving the goals of the Action Plan and to enable authoritative accounts to the Government, Parliament and the community. Inter-linkages between initiatives make it particularly important to coordinate the initiatives as a delay in implementing one can delay progress in implementing others.

An Authoritative Account of Progress Does Not Exist

An authoritative account of the progress of implementing initiatives and the Action Plan overall does not exist. As a result, the monitoring and oversight groups do not have available basic information such as:

- the number of initiatives and how many have been implemented
- how many are behind schedule
- expenditure against budget
- estimates on final expenditure and anticipated final completion
- a summary of the actions taken to resolve delays and barriers to timely implementation.

The oversight groups have had partial information so that they have been able to monitor and review individual initiatives, but progress is not reported for others and for many the information is incomplete.

Progress is Not Reported for Some Initiatives

In 2003, the Secretariat issued guidelines and requested agencies for progress reports on only those initiatives considered by agencies to be of major significance. This means progress data is not reported through the Secretariat managed system for some initiatives. For example,

- DCD is implementing 30 initiatives that address 37 Gordon Inquiry recommendations and findings. However, the central reporting process contains DCD progress data on just eight initiatives in 2003, 17 in 2004 and 18 in 2005.
- Nearly one third (6 of 17) of WAPOL led initiatives are not included on the Gordon Implementation Reporting System (GIRS), the computer database established to aid central reporting.

The Information for Many Initiatives is Incomplete

The reporting guidelines are designed to obtain relevant information suitable for preparing authoritative accounts of the progress of initiatives. However, the Secretariat does not systematically enforce the guidelines and verify that progress reports are complete and up to date. For example of the 10 initiatives sampled:

- the June 2004 GIRS update does not include the four WAPOL initiatives and one of DCDs
- there is narrative for three initiatives in the December 2004 GIRS update to the HSDG Group but no data for the other seven initiatives
- there is no financial information provided in the March 2005 report to the oversight groups.

There is No Updated and Consolidated Action Plan Timetable and Budget

An updated and consolidated Action Plan timetable and budget is not currently available. The Action Plan identified new funding of \$66.5 million over four years for initiatives that had been costed. In the three years since December 2002 additional funds have been budgeted for some initiatives. For example, subsequent State Budgets included an additional \$8.4 million capital works to provide remote multifunctional facilities.

Data collated into reports for the SOG and the public do not consistently identify forthcoming critical milestones and a summary of the actions taken to resolve delays and barriers against timely implementation.

The data is also inadequate for acquitting progress towards responding to the Gordon Inquiry recommendations and findings. In March 2005, the Secretariat commenced preparing a list of Gordon Inquiry findings and recommendations and requested that nominated lead agencies report on the status of each recommendation. However, the status report is not yet completed.

Public Reports Provide Progress Information on a Small Number of Initiatives

The limitations identified in the quality and quantity of information provided for central oversight restricts the information available for public reports. We found that the structure of the public reports is inconsistent and that these reports do not provide clear comprehensive accounts of the progress of the Action Plan and its initiatives.

The 2003 public reports provide general narrative of activity and a table with key information on lead agency, deliverables, timelines, planned and actual expenditure for 12 initiatives. The tabulated information is for each region of the State to assist assessment at a regional level. However, it does not present consolidated information for the State as a whole making it of limited use as a high level overview. The second public report of 2003 was in two stages. A summary was released in December 2003 and the table of initiatives in the regions was released in February 2004. However, the 2005 public report is not structured consistently with the previous reports to facilitate monitoring of progress.

The 2005 public report is in the form of a newsletter focusing on case studies of employee and community experiences. The 2005 public report provides information on 11 initiatives but excludes five initiatives listed in the first 2003 public report and includes four that were not included in the 2003 report.

Public reporting has also included presentations to Aboriginal and other community groups focusing on initiatives relevant to the groups.

An Evaluation Framework has Not Been Finalised

Work is underway but has not produced a finalised evaluation framework including measurable outcomes and indicators. The Action Plan identified that by the end of 2003 outcomes and indicators would be developed to measure the long-term reduction of child abuse and family violence incidents, assess the positive impact of the Plan and the initiatives introduced.

DPC, through the Secretariat, commenced work on developing the evaluation framework in 2003. The delay is significant because a clear and shared sense of purpose is important during the planning and implementation phases and because the opportunity may have been lost to collect some important baseline data. In the

Reporting, Monitoring and Oversight is Not Supported by Authoritative Information ...continued

medium and longer term the evaluation information is needed to guide changes to the Action Plan to ensure that its key outcomes are best achieved. These are identified as:

- timely responses to children identified as abused or significantly at risk of abuse and or neglect
- a reduction in family violence and child abuse in Aboriginal communities
- an increase in the percentage of people in Aboriginal communities who feel safe, including children and youth
- an increase in the percentage of Aboriginal people in communities who are aware of, and can access, family violence and child abuse services.

Initiatives are Being Progressed but Some are Behind Schedule

Findings

In the absence of an authoritative account and appropriate public reporting, we examined a sample of 10 key initiatives and found that:

- seven initiatives have been implemented or substantially progressed on time.
- the three remaining initiatives are progressing but are behind schedule. The reasons include coordination across agencies and with Aboriginal communities taking longer than expected, delays in the construction of facilities and in delivering financial assistance.

Recommendation

The effectiveness of collaboration between agencies through the current oversight arrangements and on the ground should be revisited with the objective of expediting implementation of initiatives.

In the absence of an authoritative account and appropriate public reporting of progress with implementation of the Action Plan, we examined a sample of 10 key initiatives that:

- respond to issues requiring urgent action
- are intended to improve coordination between agencies to deliver services
- received new funding exceeding \$47.7 million (72 per cent of Action Plan new funding)
- are drawn from four major categories of initiatives: employing people to deliver more service, providing facilities to co-locate officers from agencies, reviewing practices, and funding to assist Aboriginal communities.

Initiatives are Being Progressed but Some are Behind Schedule ... continued

Most of the Sampled Initiatives Have Been Implemented on Schedule

Seven initiatives have been implemented or substantially progressed on time and none of the seven have exceeded their budget (Table 1).

Initiatives and Deliverables
<p>Domestic Violence Liaison Officers The appointment of eight specialist Domestic Violence Liaison Officers in regional police districts to coordinate police responses to family violence.</p>
<p>Child Protection Workers Twenty-five additional (Community) Child Protection Workers across the State to increase the DCD capacity to respond to complaints of child abuse and undertake child protection assessments and provide a mobile child protection capacity in the country.</p>
<p>Aboriginal Support Workers Appointing 14 skilled Aboriginal support workers to be co-located within existing child and youth focused services, to provide confidential and practical support advice and assistance to Aboriginal children, in particular children who are fearful of welfare and police, and are not accessing mainstream services.</p>
<p>Strong Families Program Expanded the 'Strong Families' program State-wide to provide a mechanism for an interagency collaborative case management approach to children and families at risk.</p>
<p>Video Evidentiary Unit Established a Video Evidentiary Unit (now called Specialist Child Interviewing Unit) to strengthen joint approaches to child abuse investigations. Specialist officers from the WAPOL, DCD and the Child Protection Unit at Princess Margaret Hospital are co-located to provide a comprehensive service to child abuse victims in the metropolitan area.</p>
<p>Review of the Crisis Care Unit Reviewed the resources, functions and effectiveness of the Crisis Care Unit, particularly with regard to its response times and coordination with other agencies. (The Crisis Care Unit plays a pivotal role in the provision of after-hour and emergency responses across the State.)</p>
<p>Review of Investigatory Practices Reviewed police investigatory practices into sudden deaths.</p>

Table 1: Initiatives implemented

Seven of the 10 initiatives sampled have been implemented or substantially progressed on schedule.

Source: Agency data

Proactive management of these initiatives is still needed to ensure that the initiatives are working on the ground and making a positive contribution. For initiatives that involve employing people (Domestic Violence Liaison Officers, Child Protection Workers, Aboriginal Support Workers and the Strong Families Program), a particular challenge that remains is containing staff turnover at manageable levels to sustain service delivery.

Three of the Sampled Initiatives are Behind Schedule

Three of the sampled initiatives are behind schedule (Table 2).

Description	Target	Progress
<p>Remote Multifunctional Facilities The provision of multi-functional police facilities, staffed by mainstream police officers in eight remote locations which will result in a substantial increase in service to more than 40 remote communities and provide a baseline of safety and security for these communities and service providers located and working in them.</p> <p>The initiative also included establishing a police presence at a multi-jurisdictional facility at Kintore in the Northern Territory.</p>	<p>Three facilities constructed and staffed in 2003-04</p> <p>The remaining five facilities to be completed by 2005-06</p> <p>Establish a police presence at Kintore</p>	<p>One facility constructed and staffed at Balgo in July 2005.</p> <p>Police presence established at Kintore in March 2004.</p>
<p>Indigenous Community Partnership Fund The establishment of the Community Partnership Fund to facilitate Aboriginal communities developing solutions in partnership with government agencies through the provision of flexible funds for initiatives that will address issues raised by the Gordon Inquiry.</p>	<p>\$800 000 by 2004-05</p>	<p>\$397 555 to 30 June 2005¹</p>
<p>Safe Places Safe People Identify, develop and support safe places and persons for vulnerable Aboriginal people and to support the development of community designed safety strategies.</p>	<p>\$601 000 by 2004-05</p>	<p>\$144 756 to 30 June 2005¹</p>

Table 2: Initiatives in progress

These initiatives are behind schedule.

1. Expenditure includes administration costs.

Source: Agency data

Initiatives are Being Progressed but Some are Behind Schedule ... continued

Construction of Remote Multifunctional Facilities is Substantially Behind Schedule

The Action Plan intends the provision of a policing service to remote communities to provide a baseline of safety and security for both community members and service providers. Eight multifunctional facilities are intended to co-locate WAPOL, DCD and officers from other agencies to improve the effectiveness of child protection and violence prevention strategies. The construction of these multifunctional facilities is at an early stage and expenditure is expected to substantially exceed the original Action Plan budget.

The first of eight multifunctional facilities commenced operations in July 2005 at the Balgo Community. The next facility is scheduled to open in December at Warburton with others to follow during the years 2006 and 2007. Implementation has been extended to provide time for delaying factors that include:

- WAPOL, DCD and other agencies to decide what services would be provided and how the officers will work together
- Obtaining agreements with Aboriginal communities for siting facilities and obtaining agreement for the use of Aboriginal land
- Obtaining satisfactory tenders in a tight marketplace, and managing and constructing facilities.

Delays in implementing the remote multifunctional facilities initiative means that child protection workers are not yet co-located with WAPOL officers in remote communities such as Warburton and Warmun.

WAPOL have reported implementing an interim policing strategy, for example at Bidyadanga resident officers are working and living in temporary accommodation provided by the community.

Additional funding is required to meet the tendered prices for the final design. The Action Plan estimated the capital cost of the facilities would be \$10 million. The capital funding available has been increased to \$18.4 million. The Department of Housing and Works estimates the capital cost to be at least \$23.4 million based on the final design and emerging tender prices.

Funding Programs are Substantially Behind Schedule

The Indigenous Community Partnership Fund and Safe Places Safe People initiatives provide money to assist Aboriginal communities to develop a capacity to address child abuse and family violence issues. The initiatives are two years into a four year program but are behind schedule for delivering the financial assistance (Figure 2).

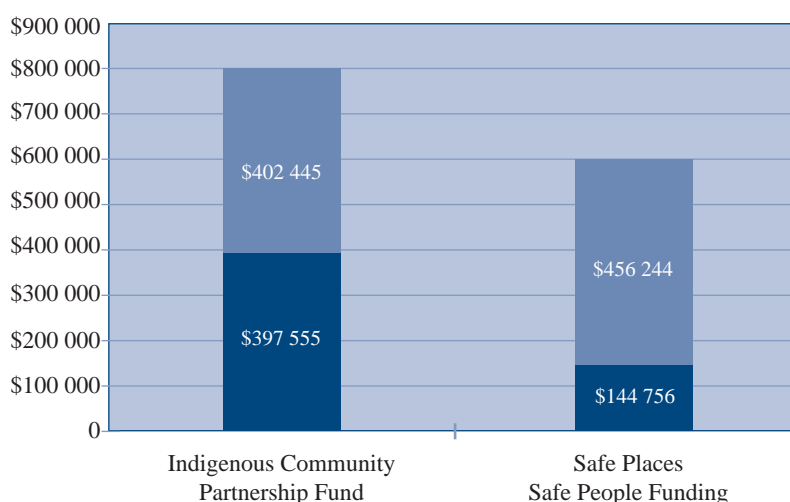


Figure 2: Two funding initiatives are behind schedule for the delivery of financial assistance

The Indigenous Community Partnership Fund and Safe Places Safe People initiatives have used a total of 50 and 24 per cent respectively of the allocated funds for the first two years (2003-04 and 2004-05).

Note: Expenditure includes administration costs.

Source: OAG and DCD data

The Indigenous Community Partnership Fund has been allocated \$1.6 million over four years, commencing in 2003-04. However, only \$397 555 of the \$800 000 allocated for the years 2003-04 and 2004-05 has been used.

The initial program guidelines and approvals processes for the Fund were developed by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and subsequently endorsed by the Human Services Directors General Group in November 2003. Responsibility for administering the Fund was transferred from DPC to the Department for Community Development (DCD) in December 2003.

Initiatives are Being Progressed but Some are Behind Schedule ... continued

The lengthy project development, application and approvals processes led to delays of up to six months in the granting and distribution of funding. Following extensive stakeholder consultation, DCD relaunched the Fund in April 2005 with revised guidelines, promotion and a streamlined approval process.

The Action Plan Safe Places Safe People initiative was developed to allocate \$1 247 000 by 2006-07 to identify, develop and support safe places for vulnerable Aboriginal people and to support the development of community designed safety strategies. Only \$144 756 of the \$601 000 allocated for 2003-04 and 2004-05 has been used.

The Action Plan also included as part of the initiative, the investigation of the feasibility of each safe place, particularly in remote or closed communities, having access to a restricted phone with free provisions for safe persons, children and young people to call emergency numbers such as Police, Crisis Care and the Kids Help Line.

A High Level of Collaboration is Required

A key theme of the Action Plan is to improve the collaboration between agencies to deliver more effective services. Our examination of the 10 initiatives highlighted the importance of collaboration for successful implementation. For instance, the remote facilities initiative encourages the coordination of service delivery.

Collaboration between agencies achieved through the monitoring and oversight arrangements (Figure 1) needs to be closely linked to services at the regional level and to identify systemic issues for consideration by the central oversight bodies.

There are many mechanisms for collaboration and there is a need for clarity of roles and management of overlaps. The difficulty in achieving this clarity is evident with the Action Plan place management initiative where different models have been debated and changes to the approach are continuing.

The implementation of community place managers and the development of privacy legislation are identified in the Action Plan as being urgently needed to 'enable' services provided by the implementation of other initiatives to be more effective. Implementation of both initiatives has been significantly delayed highlighting a need to assess the effectiveness of collaboration between agencies to ensure key initiatives are progressed in a timely manner.