

**Outstations Policy
Office of Indigenous Policy
Department of Chief Minister**

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This submission to the outstation policy review process concerns the health outcomes related to outstations.

Health is a central concern to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. Unfortunately, large scale data on health outcomes related to outstations is patchy, highlighting this as an area that requires further investigation in our efforts to inform policy with good evidence.

However, what evidence does exist, points to superior health outcomes for adults related to residence in homelands compared to living in a large Aboriginal township [1-4]. Further, mental health outcomes for Aboriginal children in the West Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey were better in remote areas compared to large townships or urban settings [5].

Further work has been undertaken in Arnhem Land exploring what it is about outstations, from Aboriginal peoples' perspectives, that leads to health gains [6]. While publications of this data are in still in process, preliminary findings suggest that residence in homelands promotes a healthier lifestyle in terms of physical activity, better diet and decreased psychological stress [7, 8]. These health gains are associated with fulfilling customary obligations to care for country, a suite of activities of emerging value – for example participation in carbon trading schemes through controlled burning of tropical savannas.

Further work expected to be published in 2009 also indicates that

- caring for country participation is strongly associated with residence in homelands [9]
- caring for country participation is associated with superior health outcomes [10]
- caring for country participation is associated with significant savings in health care expenditure[11]

The research cited above points to broader policy considerations than the immediate supply of infrastructure and services to outstations. Health is a complex outcome shaped by social and political processes and requires a positive environment within which individuals can make positive health choices. The available evidence, and our experience as primary health care providers, suggests that outstations provide an environment more conducive to good health than large centralised communities.

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