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DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SECURITY

&

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES & HEALTH

" Take the time to talk and listen. ...":

ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER INFORMATION NEEDS STUDY

FINAL REPORT

AUGUST 1995

- Prepared by -

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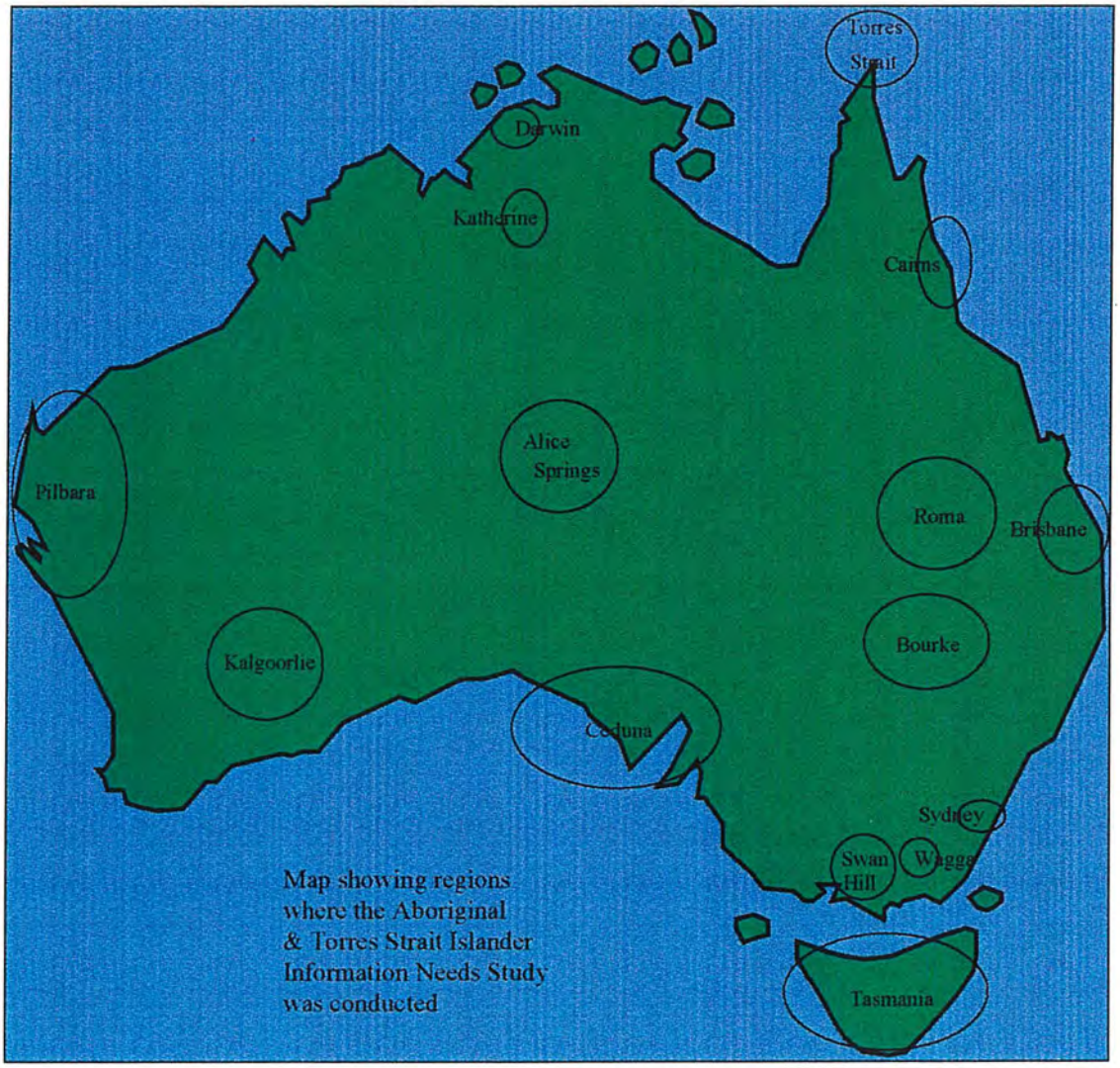
Each department are going to have to put in the groundwork
to get that relationship with the community,
to establish some trust.
Take the time to talk and listen.

When you get out there it has to be bums on the ground.
And when you see those people walking away,
you know it's not working...
There shouldn't be fly in, fly out stuff.
I used to get jarred about that...
They appreciate down to earth people,
not leg in, leg out people.



Map showing regions where the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Information Needs Study was conducted

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In order to assess and improve the effectiveness of government communication and information strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the Department of Social Security (DSS) and the Department of Human Services and Health (DHSH) determined that during 1994-1995 a major national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Information Needs Study would be conducted.

The study had two main components:

(1) face to face interviews with over 900 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in over 70 communities throughout Australia;

(2) 150 case studies in the form of in-depth personal interviews or focus group discussions with 'intermediaries' in key organisations and agencies, who deliver health and welfare services to indigenous people.

The range of service providers represented by intermediaries included: Land Councils; indigenous tertiary institutions or support centres; community health and medical councils, centres and services; youth activities, education and childcare services; indigenous media associations and resource production units; housing co-operatives; community and juvenile justice services; indigenous language centres; legal services; community councils; community resource and advisory services; state and territory government departments; and DSS, DHSH, ATSIC and other Commonwealth departmental indigenous liaison and field staff.

A team of 17 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interviewers was employed to undertake the face to face interviews in communities. The interviewers were generally based in the regions they were asked to work in and were mostly from those areas themselves.

Structured interview schedules were used for the face to face interviews in order to isolate and measure the effect of targeted strategies on the recall, recognition and acceptance of information in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A representative range of information products was used in the interviews as visual aids and prompts. Interviewers also probed for the preferred ways of receiving that information.

Semi-structured interview schedules were used for the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with intermediaries in order to determine the extent to which current information strategies are effective and appropriate and to ascertain preferences for the future.

During the course of the study, many of the issues raised, either directly or indirectly by interviewers, respondents, research staff or others were related to the concepts of representation and agency. That is, how indigenous people are portrayed and therefore perceived, who represents what to whom, on whose behalf and for what purposes all emerged as important and volatile issues.

This study grew out of the concern by DSS and DHSH to find ways to increase the representation of positive images in government information strategies in order to make those strategies more appropriate and effective in conveying information *to* indigenous people. What emerged through the course of the study highlighted the need for indigenous people to be offered the right to choose their own means of expression and to invent and propagate their own diverse assessments of what needs to be done.

The report considers in detail what these issues mean for indigenous people throughout the country. It presents a challenge to DSS, DHSH and other government departments to find ways to ensure that concerns about representation and agency in the relationship with indigenous people are considered seriously and responded to in appropriate and substantial ways.

The outcomes from the research will be used to assist decision-making about differences in product and media usage to be taken into account when preparing information strategies and will support the development of 'best practices' for disseminating social security, human services and health information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Main Findings

The findings of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Information Needs Study reveal that the information needs of indigenous people are integrally bound up with much wider issues. These issues are related to overcoming deeply rooted discrimination and disadvantage, maintaining cultural traditions, achieving social justice and exploring the possibilities of being self-determining within the context of the Australian nation-state.

The most obvious challenge this represents for the Commonwealth Departments of Social Security and Human Services and Health is to find ways to increase the extent to which current information strategies reflect regional and local community needs, values, priorities and aspirations.

These findings reveal a widespread concern that not enough co-operation and collaboration occurs between departments, communities and community organisations.

There is a general perception that government information strategies and products are not sufficiently in tune with what is needed. More often than not this is because 'top down' approaches are used rather than approaches which allow for 'grass roots' involvement and participation in the design, development, production and implementation of information strategies and products.

The relationship between the provision of information about benefits and entitlements, program priorities and service delivery, and the realities they point to, has been shown to be problematic. Many respondents expressed concern about the difference between what a department offers in regard to information about services and what they invariably experience when they try to access those benefits or services. In some cases the mismatch is very stark, as for instance when a person has been encouraged to seek assistance at a departmental office and then encounters a harsh, forbidding information counter and departmental staff who relate to them in hostile or impersonal ways.

Most importantly, the findings of the study indicate the need for government departments to reconceptualise how they relate to indigenous people and their communities, not just in terms of information strategies but in the overall provision of programs and services.

Improving the Relationship Between Government Departments and Indigenous People and their Communities

Respondents provided very clear evidence of the need for the two departments to find ways to significantly improve their relationships with indigenous people. Much of the troubled history in the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians has been mediated by government departments of one kind or another, under the 'protective' gaze and concern of 'welfare paternalism'. Indigenous people therefore tend to have a very deep mistrust of what departments claim to be doing on their behalf, or in support of their 'needs'.

The policy of 'self-determination' was meant to be the antidote to such paternalism, offering the opportunity for indigenous direction and control of the significant processes that impact on their lives. However, to date, examples of successful, self-determining processes are elusive and difficult to find in relation to government initiated or sponsored programs and services.

In this study, respondents repeated what has been said over the years about not being listened to, having lip-service paid to their requests for support, or dealing with imposed solutions, strategies and services which fail to address and meet their real needs and aspirations.

ATSIC, the government department responsible for directly responding to the challenge of supporting indigenous self-determination arguably, and ironically, faces the most bitter criticisms from indigenous people. Respondents stated that it is out of touch with what people really want to see happening, that it is ineffective and under the control of its own bureaucracy and that the money that should be getting to the communities is being used for administration.

If, as some respondents see it, policy development and implementation is the key to making the systems more responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs and demands, then ATSIC will need to take a more proactive role in the future.

Other departments, such as Social Security and Human Services and Health, are also seen to be out of step with the realities and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This is seen as being the result of not listening carefully enough to what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been saying about their needs, interests, priorities and aspirations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander terms of reference were suggested as being an important way of addressing cultural values and preferences and meeting the real needs of indigenous people. This requires a shift away from bureaucratic, paternalistic, social welfare orientations to embrace more holistic, culturally appropriate and accessible modes of discourse and response.

A different approach to consultation is called for which allows for a thorough exploration of the underlying issues related to service provision for indigenous people. In the view of respondents, this is best done by regional offices of departments working collaboratively with communities and community-based organisations and agencies, with the departments playing more of a support role in this relationship.

Concern was expressed about departments continuing to let indigenous people down, take things for granted, not consult enough with the 'grass roots' in communities, operate in rigid, bureaucratic ways and only consider indigenous inputs as an afterthought or as token participation.

Over one third of people in indigenous communities expressed that they had problems in getting information from government agencies. The reasons for these difficulties were found to align closely with those expressed by intermediaries.

Departmental office environments, especially DSS offices, were criticised for being inhospitable, harsh and alienating. This represents a major obstacle to improving the relationship with indigenous clients and community members. So many people regard these office environments as places they would rather not visit. This in turn has a very direct impact on the acceptability, appropriateness and effectiveness of information strategies and products which emanate from the departments, especially if there is seen to be a contradiction between what is said and what people experience.

Respondents also pointed out that there is an element of bitterness and mistrust felt by many indigenous clients and community members that exists regardless of staff or physical location or surroundings.

The previous issue is compounded in situations where departmental staff have an *"I'm better than thou attitude"*. Respondents emphasised that staff need to be conscious of the way their actions affect people. For many, the experience is humiliating and offensive and they can be fearful about being there.

These concerns and issues are experienced by indigenous people in terms of disempowerment. Continuing 'top down' approaches in the broader relationships departments have with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities reinforces this disempowerment, despite the stated government commitments to indigenous self-determination.

Respondents overwhelmingly want to be able to have ownership over decision-making processes that influence and shape their everyday lives. There is still a widespread feeling that *"A lot of departments go in with the idea of what's best for people instead of really listening to what people want to say"*.

This is often reflected back to departments as hurt, anger, frustration, despair and reluctance to seek advice or assistance. And, in turn, this contributes powerfully to the reproduction of further relationships of dependency.

It was noted with some irony that the policy of self-determination has resulted in the pulling back of some support and assistance, especially in remote area communities. For those who raised this issue the concern was to ensure that continuing appropriate forms of support and assistance be provided to indigenous people.

Self-determination does not have to imply leaving people to get on with things without appropriate support and assistance. What it does require, however, is that departmental staff observe the necessary cultural protocols to allow for meaningful participation and decision-making to be in the hands of indigenous people themselves.

Deep frustration was also expressed about the lack of collaboration and strategic planning between different departments, agencies and organisations, and the associated duplication, waste, inefficiency, inappropriate program responses and ineffective service provisions.

These findings reflect, and provide further support to, the concerns and issues raised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Mick Dodson, in his Second Report for 1994 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, **Second Report: 1994**, AGPS, Canberra, 1995).

Developing More Appropriate and Effective Written Forms of Communication

One of the most difficult information problems faced by clients and community members relates to written forms of communication.

Respondents referred to the inability that most indigenous people have in understanding and interpreting the bureaucratic language typically used in written forms of communication. This is particularly the case for DSS advice relating to changes in benefits and payments.

Letters from departments are very often thrown away unread because they are regarded as "junk mail". This is particularly the case in the more remote areas, where people tend to have an uneasy relationship with bureaucracies and government services and where English may not be the first or preferred language spoken.

Where this is the case, intermediaries often play a critical role in translating and interpreting information and providing advocacy and counselling support. This frequently extends to mediating on behalf of the client or community member, who may feel overwhelmed and incapable of dealing with the situation without support. It was felt that ideally, most of this kind of support should be provided by departmental liaison and field staff. The reality is that even in regions where support arrangements are in place, there are insufficient departmental staff to carry out this important work.

When correspondence has to be sent to clients and community members it needs to be written in clear, direct language supported by face to face explanation as much as possible. Bureaucratic jargon, "big words" and convoluted ways of expression should be avoided as a matter of course.

These are matters which require sensitivity if other forms of dependency and imposition are to be avoided. The difference between appropriate advocacy and support and inappropriate procedures can sometimes be very fine. Careful interpretation of regional and local community attitudes and protocols is an essential starting point for considering how best to address this complex issue.

In the wider context, the use of language in reports, and the various kinds of information bulletins, can either empower indigenous people to participate effectively or it can deny them access to, or lock them out of, critical processes related to either their personal situations or indigenous advancement generally. If the language is abstract, complex or impersonal the chances are that the message will not get through. Reports that are "weighty" and "dense" simply have no relevance for the majority of indigenous people.

This raises an issue that is intimately connected with Aboriginal and Islander community government, politics and administration. A number of respondents made reference to the fact that *"information is power"*. By this they meant that often information does not get out into the community, it *"stays in certain circles"*. Consequently *"people in communities are not really aware of what's going on"*. As these practices are entrenched, the challenge for departments will be to increase the opportunity for clients and community members to have greater access to information.

Improving the Effectiveness of Indigenous Liaison and Field Staff

One of the most important and direct ways of increasing client and community access to departmental information is through the employment of liaison and field staff, community agents and remote area visiting teams. As well as providing advice and support to people in order for them to make sense of correspondence, they also assist people to understand departmental policies and programs and gain access to services. Most respondents regarded this form of support as being appropriate and vitally necessary.

One to one attention from an indigenous departmental staff member was often referred to as making the difference by making the client or community member feel comfortable, welcome and supported. This is particularly appreciated in office situations, especially when the office environment appears harsh and alien.

It is also important in indigenous community situations where people frequently express frustration and concern in their efforts to achieve satisfactory relationships and outcomes with government departments, agencies and institutions.

The benefits of having liaison and field staff include:

- the ability to monitor whether a system or program is working effectively;
- provision of direct support to clients and community members, especially in the translation and interpretation of correspondence and completion of forms;
- explanation of departmental policies, programs, services and strategies; and
- negotiation of strategic and operational planning based on accurate and informed community-based assessment, research and development processes.

Concern was expressed by some respondents that the current arrangements are inadequate. This means that clients and community members are either not receiving advice and support of this kind or that the limited staff working in these positions are being stretched beyond their capacity to deal with the range and complexity of demands they are presented with. It was reported that this is resulting in high levels of staff frustration and burnout.

Administrative and bureaucratic work regimes can contribute to the frustration experienced by indigenous staff by requiring them spend considerable amounts of time working behind a desk or in meetings. The expressed preference of those who raised this issue was for indigenous staff to have the ability to provide much more direct support to indigenous clients and community members rather than being *"stuck in here day after day and bogged down with administration"*.

Working more directly with indigenous clients and community members, however, is by no means straightforward, and indigenous staff are not immune from working in inappropriate, whitefella ways. Indigenous staff can become so focussed on what the departmental requirements are that they can lose sight of how they should best relate with, and respond to, their own people. This is further compounded by clients and community members if they regard indigenous staff as government employees rather than people who can mediate between the community and departments.

It was made very clear by respondents that indigenous communities do not want to see a perpetuation of inappropriate processes and practices that are characterised by departmental staff making flying visits. What is called for is a preparedness to work collaboratively, *"in a cultural manner"* in order to find better ways of addressing indigenous community needs.

Improving the Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Information Products

Information products such as pamphlets, brochures, and posters received a range of both supportive and unsupportive responses.

They were regarded as being effective by intermediaries if they reflected local images, graphics and colour preferences, used direct and simple language, and the local indigenous language where appropriate, and conveyed a sense of local control or involvement in the process.

Positive responses from intermediaries included preferences for:

- information that has a clear, direct relevance;
- posters and t-shirts;
- bold, bright, attractive colours, especially red, black and yellow;
- attractive pictures;
- print that is well spaced and bold; and
- local designs and images.

People within communities were found to be most responsive to information products which:

- were colourful;
- incorporated appropriate graphic images and designs;
- were explicitly targeted toward indigenous audiences;
- used simple language;
- were succinct; and
- reinforced positive messages and images.

Intermediaries and community members emphasised the information being conveyed should be directly relevant to indigenous people's lives and should reflect regional and local needs, values and priorities. Information products generated by people living and working away from regional and local contexts were seen as being largely irrelevant and out of step with leading edge developments in indigenous information strategies.

Use of negative images was generally seen as being inappropriate and counterproductive and at worst was cited as causing distress and anxiety. This was especially the case with explicit images associated with death and dying.

To ensure that inappropriate and offensive information strategies are avoided, respondents highlighted the need for regional and local, rather than national, development of information products. This was seen as being essential to ensure that culturally inappropriate designs are not used and displayed. Local relevance, especially reflected in the appropriate use of local art and culture, is the key to conveying information effectively.

Other intermediaries expressed the point of view that information products were a waste of money and generally failed to convey what they were designed for, which tended to make people ignore them or see them as being irrelevant. However, this response tended to be associated with those who were critical of information products being developed 'elsewhere' and not strongly associated with grass roots people and issues.

When information arrives from elsewhere, without adequate explanation and relevance to local priorities, it can lead indigenous people to feel as if they are being bombarded with information, which then often leads to the information being ignored or thrown away. People need to be briefed properly, and need to feel that they are a meaningful part of the process, or it is very likely that information products will fail to produce a positive and satisfactory outcome.

Some respondents were more cynical and suggested that when information products arrive from elsewhere they created the impression that the government department is well resourced, especially if they are glossy and expensively produced. This is not well received, especially by those working in community-based organisations that are struggling to make ends meet while they provide direct support and assistance. Many of these respondents saw this as a misallocation of resources, especially if there is insufficient money to provide what they regard as real 'grass roots' services.

The critical issue for most intermediaries, and one which they kept revisiting, was that information products should be directly relevant to the lives of people in their local contexts.

Torres Strait Islander respondents argued strongly for the right to be able to develop their own distinctive information products and strategies based on their own unique cultural traditions and political aspirations and demands. It is no longer seen as appropriate that they are appended to strategies and products based on Aboriginal imperatives. They see themselves very differently and want that to be properly recognised and supported.

Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Newspapers and Magazines

Newspapers and magazines were not seen by intermediaries as playing a useful role in departmental information strategies. This was confirmed by the findings from the community interviews, where only half of the population surveyed had read a paper or magazine in the last seven days. Even Koori Mail and Land Rights News, which are distinctively indigenous publications, are read by only a small number of people. Two percent indicated reading the Koori Mail, and less than 1% indicated read the Land Rights News during the week prior to interview.

The findings of the study show clearly that indigenous people do not favour written forms of communication, especially if they use language which is abstract, academic or technical in style and they are textually dense.

This strongly suggests that the value of using newspapers and magazines in departmental information strategies in the future is minimal, if the target readership is intended to be indigenous people.

Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Radio and Television

Because indigenous people around the country listen to radio and/or watch television regularly, radio and television were widely supported as being effective media for use in departmental information strategies.

The work of indigenous media organisations was especially appreciated. Many respondents expressed the opinion that programs such as 'Blackout' on ABC television should be used as models for developing indigenous programming in the future. Indeed, "Blackout" was one of the more prominent programs regularly watched by people in indigenous communities.

Radio continues to be regarded as being an effective, and in some cases the best, way of getting information across to communities, especially in some of the more remote areas.

Indigenous people, however, appreciate the visual impact of television and increasingly it is seen as the preferred medium as developments in technology and broadcasting extend its use into remote areas.

Programs that reflect local production and content generally have the most appeal for indigenous people because they can identify readily with both the message and the medium. Indigenous media is therefore having a significant impact in Aboriginal and Islander communities.

One of the very significant things about the indigenous media industry is the opportunity to shape and control what is conveyed, from the initial processes of creating the program through to transmission into communities. At the heart of these developments are indigenous concerns about representation and agency.

Indigenous media is a powerful contemporary way of defining and controlling a range of processes that are intimately concerned with the construction and reconstruction of identity, knowledge and the production and reproduction of social and cultural relationships. Indigenous people who are closely involved with the work of indigenous media organisations are acutely aware of these issues.

Respondents emphasised that indigenous media organisations and their staff are uniquely placed to best determine what should be represented, and how it should be conveyed, to indigenous communities. They are sensitive to the regional and local community protocols and politics and have a keen sense of what will work and be well received and what will not.

It was widely felt that not enough use of indigenous media was made by departments in order to convey information and improve information strategies. As well as having a keen appreciation of what are appropriate and acceptable information strategies and production techniques, indigenous media organisations have growing numbers of skilled and experienced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broadcasters, journalists and production staff who are eager to advance the interests of their own people.

The Broadcasting for Remote Communities Scheme (BRACS) allows for increased broadcasting range and coverage for remote area communities. Although the scheme is still experiencing some difficulties in establishing itself in some regions, respondents considered that it has the potential to provide communities with appropriate media which they can have some influence and control over.

The struggle to achieve indigenous rights and social justice in Australian society is complex and constantly changing. Indigenous media organisations are well placed to monitor these shifts and play a leading role in assisting constructive forms of dialogue and participation.

Improving the Effectiveness of Intermediaries in Supporting Government Information Strategies

Intermediaries play a critical role in supporting information strategies through the provision of advice and advocacy to clients and community members. Very often the support they provide is more direct and culturally appropriate and acceptable than that provided by departmental staff. Evidence from the community interviews supports the prominent role played by intermediaries in the dissemination and support of both health and welfare information.

It was stated by many intermediaries that indigenous people generally feel more comfortable approaching community-based organisations.

The approach of intermediaries was characterised as being flexible, compassionate and down-to-earth, with a strong link to community values and priorities. This is reflected in the face- to-face, word-of-mouth forms of communication in relaxed, non-confronting settings. Clients and community members are also assured of receiving attention and support without hassles, and where 'grass roots' concerns and interests are genuinely considered.

Concern was expressed by some respondents that departments should be providing more adequate and appropriate support of this kind to indigenous clients and community members themselves. Departmental office environments were frequently mentioned as being unwelcoming, harsh and off-putting. Invariably they are located in formal office buildings and purpose built complexes, whereas community-based organisations tend to operate out of modified buildings and houses close to areas that are frequented by indigenous people.

Many respondents thought it was ironic that despite their general lack of resources and inadequate financial support, community-based organisations and the intermediaries who work in them are approached constantly for advice, support and advocacy. Nevertheless they also made it clear that they saw this as a vitally important service they were providing for people who, for whatever reason, did not feel as comfortable approaching a government department.

Given this important ad hoc role of intermediaries, to respond to whatever comes their way, it is essential that they receive as much support from government departments as possible. Many respondents, however, felt that they were largely ignored by the departments and invariably received information about policies, programs and services in unsatisfactory or informal ways.

Consequently there tends to be a high degree of uncertainty, doubt and confusion in the minds of intermediaries about their actual and potential role in supporting government information strategies. There was therefore a call for a more inclusive approach to their role, with the emphasis shifting to a relationship based on partnership and collaboration and much better channels of communication.

It was stated that for particular information strategies and campaigns, briefing and planning meetings and workshops should be held with intermediaries as a matter of course to ensure that at the regional and local community levels, coordinated strategic approaches are considered and implemented properly. Otherwise the processes, especially if they are being directed and managed from a distance, run the serious risk of being regarded as inappropriate and ineffective.

Improving the Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Special Government Information Campaigns

The effectiveness of special government information campaigns, to raise awareness amongst indigenous people on particular topics, was seen by respondents as being inseparable from many of the wider issues.

In general, however, the qualities that made for successful information campaigns, according to respondents, included several important features.

Campaigns should be developed in close partnership with *"people on the ground"*, which involves close consultation and collaboration with indigenous communities and their organisations. For this to be successful, the terms of such relationships have to be established properly. They have to be based on equal partnership, with indigenous people having a clear, determining influence in the development and decision-making processes.

Use of local or well known Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander actors and spokespeople increases the chance of the message getting across. People are more inclined to relate to and identify with them. However, they need to have a credible reputation. Critical reference was made to recent campaigns involving indigenous personalities who were advising people not to smoke or drink, when they were known to do that themselves, or be involved in other kinds of substance abuse. People rightly see this as hypocrisy and it can seriously undermine the value and impact of an otherwise well produced campaign.

The use of appropriate written and spoken language is critical to the success, or otherwise, of information campaigns. This can be a complex matter, requiring skill and experience in determining the best way to convey a particular message. Decisions about this are best made by indigenous people living and working in the different regions, especially in the media organisations and language centres, where there is a keen appreciation of local community issues and preferences.

Showing things happening in environments that people recognise and can relate to plays an important part in making information campaigns appealing and relevant.

The application of cross-cultural, adult education models enhances the potential of a campaign to engage with people and promote positive outcomes. These models emphasise people doing things for themselves, they are concerned with empowerment and use opinion leaders and other credible people with authority to convey information and influence others

Respondents emphasised the point that indigenous people typically have a highly developed visual literacy and orientation and a preference for learning by observation. This predisposes them to relate more naturally to visual images and graphic designs. Certainly, the visual characteristics and impact of any printed information product appear central to the acceptance, perception and ultimately the success of such products. As one respondent put it *"That was a visual thing and worked well because we were all there and saw things. We remember what we see"*. It is important, however, to ensure that culturally inappropriate images and designs are not used.

Information that is being conveyed needs to be relevant, life enhancing and positive. It should be based on real life situations which people have a genuine need to be advised about and be conveyed in culturally appropriate and effective ways.

The use of negative images, slogans and information should be avoided as they can be counterproductive and can also cause distress and anxiety, particularly if the subject relates to death and dying.

Respondents pointed out that indigenous people appreciate humour. Whenever appropriate, campaigns should find ways to employ humour which indigenous people can relate to and identify with

Critical responses relating to information campaigns that were judged to have failed or been unsuccessful in some way also highlighted a number of issues.

Consultation and collaboration between representatives of departments, communities and other participating agencies and organisations has to be conducted in ways which promote effective communication and lead to positive outcomes.

Top down approaches, tokenism and asymmetrical relationships, which use indigenous participation to endorse goals and priorities that are not generated by community representatives, inevitably create friction and often result in antagonism and conflict.

There needs to be a clear idea of who the target group is and where the information is going to be useful. Otherwise an information campaign will be ineffective and may even cause some distress or offence.

This is especially the case on issues which require different approaches for different cultural, age or gender groups. What is effective and appeals to one group may have very different responses and reactions from others. Regional and local community representatives are very sensitive to these differences and their involvement should be considered when determining the directions campaigns should take.

There is a considerable amount of cynicism and scepticism about government departments being more interested in their own time lines and priorities than in properly addressing the concerns and problems faced by indigenous communities.

"I don't think any government department has really got it right", said a respondent. *"We go out and ask people what they want and then go back and try to do it. But it still has to work on government time lines and priorities"*. Indigenous people invariably identify when this is happening and are calling for it to stop.

It can be challenging to find ways to convince people that they are, or might be, at risk. It is a fairly common human trait to deny or not want to face up to the risks involved in an activity that may be associated with pleasure or avoidance behaviour. This can lead to information not being taken seriously and people can develop or maintain an attitude that it won't happen to them. Some respondents felt that issues related to drugs, alcohol and sexuality were in this category, and that no matter how well designed a campaign might be it would not convince enough people to change their preferences, habits or addictions.

Campaigns that do not feature Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were found to be ineffective in conveying the intended message or information, largely because the resultant images were seen as irrelevant. The more a campaign identifies with and features indigenous people in realistic settings, the greater the chance it will be perceived as relevant and be taken notice of.

Care needs to be taken in deciding where to place some types of information products and associated items, such as information on sexual practices and the use of condoms. Inappropriate placement can result in minimal response because people can feel *"shame"* if they think they are being noticed by others. Having pamphlets and condoms readily available on a counter, for instance, may lead a department to feel that it is considering people's needs and addressing a serious social issue.

However, the real test of whether a campaign is being successful requires that people actually take notice of information and follow the prescribed advice.

There is generally a need for more careful, realistic planning of information campaigns. Intermediaries expressed concern that often the information does not get through or make an appreciable difference in terms of influencing significant attitudinal or behavioural change or improving outcomes. This is supported by the findings of the 1994 ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey, which continues to show indigenous people suffering the greatest disadvantages and problems on every social indicator.

Developing More Appropriate and Effective Government Information Strategies

The development of more appropriate and effective government information strategies requires a range of responses, each of which has its own importance and which when taken together represents an integrated, holistic and strategic approach to supporting indigenous people's information needs. The elements of this approach include:

- grass roots involvement in planning, decision-making and implementation;
- developing network relationships between communities, organisations and departments;
- increasing employment opportunities for indigenous staff;
- cross-cultural training and sensitisation for non-indigenous and indigenous staff;
- improving information delivery models and processes;
- using language centres to assist in determining appropriate language(s) to be used;
- increasing the use of information technologies;
- using indigenous media organisations to assist in planning, developing and implementing information strategies; and

- developing more integrated, holistic and strategic approaches to program planning, service delivery and information campaigns.

It needs to be emphasised that there is not a single prescription for considering and responding to the information needs of indigenous people. The proposed approach acknowledges this and allows for regional and local community variation to be taken into account.

Grass Roots Involvement in Planning, Decision-making and Implementation

The most consistent and strongly expressed point made by respondents was that there should be a much more serious effort by departments to listen to and collaborate with indigenous local community and regional organisations and their representatives.

Some respondents felt that departments are more concerned about implementing their own policies and programs, regardless of whether they are culturally appropriate at the different local and regional community levels. As one respondent put it, *"I think departments just go out and explain their current program or grant, without finding out first what the community really wants"*.

Impositional and paternalistic processes that deliver the message that departments know what is best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be avoided as they contribute to feelings of disempowerment, *"It's not about how the government can help us. It's about how we can help ourselves"*.

Greater effort therefore needs to be made to find out what people really need or want, rather than making assumptions based on existing policy and program imperatives. And this needs to be done consistently as an on-going process rather than as a one-off event.

Participatory and collaborative models of community research, development and evaluation offer the greatest potential for work of this kind. However such work is carried out, it must be based on a genuine partnership, with indigenous people taking the leading roles and being involved in decision-making in line with the policy of self-determination.

The role of departments in these processes is seen as shifting from one of telling people what is best for them, what they should do about it and what they are entitled to, to a position of providing greater support in order to allow self-determination to take place. Although this shift does not have to imply radical or dramatic change, it is recognised that it will not be straightforward and will require goodwill and sensitivity from all concerned.

What indigenous people do not want to see happen is tokenism or lip-service being paid to their concerns and aspirations. In the view of many respondents this has overwhelmingly been the case up to the present, *"There needs to be real input, not just pay lip-service to the things Aboriginal people say"*.

A concerted effort is called for to bring departments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their representative organisations together in ways that have not yet been achieved, or perhaps even explored. Indigenous people are desperately seeking results, not *"just shuffling the deck chairs"*.

The determination of regional and local community needs and priorities should involve a range of representatives from communities, community-based organisations and regionally-based service providers. This collaborative relationship also needs to extend into the on-going departmental processes of strategic planning, program development and service delivery and this needs to feed back into the regions and communities in ways that people can understand and relate to.

"There needs to be a structure for community planning, decision-making and information exchange", said one respondent. *"Whatever gets developed should come from what people want to do themselves on their own behalf"*.

Developing Network Relationships Between Communities, Organisations and Departments

In the development of better and more appropriate relationships between communities, organisations and departments, and to ensure that grass roots interests and concerns are properly addressed, departmental staff need to listen more carefully to what they are being told and respond without imposing too many of their own ideas and values.

This requires that departmental staff put in *"groundwork to get that relationship with the community, to establish some trust"*. They need to *"come down off their high horses to see what Aboriginal people need"*. This will involve staff at all levels and in different program and service areas.

State and central office staff will need to consider how they can best support and respond to what will emerge from these processes. For some, this will involve a significant challenge as initiatives and developments have typically been driven from the centre rather than the periphery.

A more coordinated approach to policy and program development is needed that will require a greater commitment to developing networks between communities, their representative and community-based organisations and government departments.

Many intermediaries felt that the existing arrangements maintain a generally unsatisfactory situation characterised by lack of co-ordination and inadequate outcomes.

Despite the large amounts of money that have been spent on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs over the years, some respondents expressed despair and frustration at the continuing *"confusion"*, *"lack of co-ordination"*, *"duplication"* and *"time wasting"*, with *"nothing to show for it"*.

The way forward, therefore, lies in greater co-operation and collaboration between all concerned so that the focus of action is appropriately determined and worked through with minimal distortion and imposition from 'outsiders'. Apart from making greater sense and being more likely to meet people's needs than existing arrangements, greater co-operation and collaboration should result in improved outcomes and efficiencies.

The participation of local people and organisations is seen to be the key to developing appropriate and effective network relationships. They *"understand what people want and need"*. It was emphasised by respondents that Aboriginal society is regionally and locally based, *"You can't have a national approach because of the issues of language and different cultures"*. The diversity of languages, cultures and historical experiences has to be acknowledged and reflected in the regional and local community arrangements that are developed. Departments should, as far as possible, respond to and support community-based initiatives and the production of locally targeted information.

While it was understood that there can be significant obstacles and impediments to an approach of this kind being realisable, it was nevertheless considered essential that such processes be explored in order to find common ground.

The groundwork for addressing these issues has in fact already been done by DHSH. Between August 1993 and January 1994 a Regional Focus Evaluation Team undertook an evaluation of the Department's Regional Focus, which resulted in the report **Working Towards a Regional Focus: Report on the Regional Focus Evaluation in the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health** (AGPS, Canberra, 1994).

The objectives for the Regional Focus, which forms part of the Department's *Regional Focus and Cross Program Links Strategy* (RFCPL), include:

- improving communication between the Department and communities;
- better identification of community needs;
- assisting with the development of appropriate service responses to meet those needs;
- improving access to the range of assistance measures provided by the Department; and
- more coordinated and effective service delivery at the regional level.

The evaluation report provides very strong support for the RFCPL strategy and Regional Focus in particular, arguing that *"for Regional Focus to be successfully introduced, the RFCPL strategy needs to be pursued with increased vigour"*.

Four key principles are identified *"which should drive the adoption of Regional Focus"*:

- regional presence is fundamental;
- that the region should be the primary level for contact for the community and should be complemented by minimising layers within the organisation;
- responsibility and authority should be devolved to the level as close as practicable to the community; and
- programs should remain as the central construct for the organisation.

The report emphasises that *"A regional perspective is attractive because it can balance scale with responsiveness. In particular, activity at the regional level can open up economies of scale, whilst still taking account of local circumstances, needs and diversity"*.

In respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community development the report makes the point that *"At present, a community development approach informs the Department's work with some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and this should continue"*.

This approach, as well as assisting communities and interest groups to develop service proposals to a fundable stage, includes some of the broader principles associated with empowerment, networking and skills transfer.

All of this is clearly in line with what respondents have called for through this Information Needs Study. The findings of the study, however, indicate that both departments need to be more proactive in pursuing the important objectives of Regional Focus.

In the Torres Strait, these issues are perhaps becoming more clearly focussed, following the creation of the Torres Strait Regional Authority. The Authority's **Corporate Plan 1994-95** states that it is *"a transitional arrangement providing a basis for a progressive negotiated movement towards greater regional autonomy in the delivery of programs and services for the Torres Strait"*.

The basis for this greater regional autonomy are the aspirations of Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people in the Torres Strait area for self determination, that is supported by the Commonwealth Government's policy which ensures control by Torres Strait Islanders and Aboriginal people over policies and programs affecting their lives and on the inherent right of indigenous peoples to self determination.

Increasing Employment Opportunities for Indigenous Staff

The range of issues related to the employment of indigenous staff by departments need to be examined carefully. This is not just seen as an equity issue, although there is concern that more indigenous staff are needed in departments, especially in liaison and field positions, and that they should also be employed in a wide range of positions, including senior management. Respondents overwhelmingly wanted to see indigenous issues being handled at all levels and in all areas by indigenous people whenever possible, *"...everything comes from the whiteman. It's got to stop...They need to have a lot of input from Aborigines"*.

Aboriginal liaison officers and field staff are perceived as important sources of information within indigenous communities. From responses obtained at a community level, indigenous departmental staff have been recognised as having contributed to current levels of awareness of government services and assistance. Demand for more indigenous community based workers and departmental staff was voiced by many through the community interviews.

Some concern was expressed by intermediaries, however, that often indigenous staff are placed in very demanding situations without necessarily having adequate induction, training, support or professional development. Another major concern is that indigenous staff frequently get *"bombarded with information"* and *"bogged down with administration"*.

Many indigenous staff respondents put forward the view that they should be able to spend more time on directly working with people in the communities and community-based organisations in order to improve the strategic and operational responsiveness of their work.

There was a call, therefore, for a greater emphasis on recruitment, induction, training and on-going professional development and support for indigenous departmental staff. As much as possible their work should be focussed on improving the collaborative partnership with communities and community-based organisations.

Cross-cultural Training and Sensitisation for Non-indigenous and Indigenous Staff

Cross-cultural training and sensitisation for both non-indigenous and indigenous staff at all levels, including middle and senior management, was proposed by intermediaries in order to address and improve the current information strategies.

Indigenous staff were included by some respondents in the need for such training and sensitisation because they felt it should not be assumed that indigenous staff necessarily understand or appreciate locally sensitive matters, particularly if they are from another part of the country. *"Even the Aboriginal staff need cross-cultural training"*, said one respondent. *"That's the way we've got to go"*.

It is essential that departmental staff gain a greater appreciation of the impacts of historical and contemporary processes, especially related to colonisation and neo-colonialism, in indigenous people's lives.

In particular, the nation's 'Black History' has to be acknowledged and confronted if the mistakes of the past are not to be repeated. This involves developing a better understanding of how neo-colonial relationships are formed, maintained and reproduced, and how departmental staff can potentially or actually participate in such relationships.

Consultation and collaboration with indigenous people and their communities and organisations is perhaps the most direct and obvious way that these relationships are played out.

For indigenous people's real needs and interests to be addressed properly, departmental staff need to be very sensitive about the messages that are conveyed to them. They also need to have well developed skills in translating these messages into appropriate action. As one intermediary said, *"We need to be sensitive to what people are about and what's important to them"*.

Cross-cultural sensitisation and training processes are therefore an essential component of an overall strategy to improve the communication between departmental staff and indigenous communities. As much as possible these sensitisation and training processes should be regionally and locally based and should be directed and conducted by local indigenous people.

Training packages based on blended or selected ideas and issues were seen to be largely inappropriate, although examples were provided of highly effective and successful models, such as the Study Circle Kit developed by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation.

Improving Information Delivery Models and Processes

The importance of direct, face to face communication was emphasised by intermediaries. This needs to be done in culturally appropriate ways which emphasise verbal interaction and encourage family or group participation as much as possible.

In contrast to this, paper-based approaches requiring literacy skills, and structured meeting formats, were seen to be highly inappropriate.

Indigenous people need to be able to feel a sense of belonging and have some ability to direct and control activities and processes that have a strong impact on their lives. It was emphasised by one intermediary that *"A lot of those government structured meetings are a waste of time. People like to see something happen. Not just a lot of talk"*.

Examples of culturally appropriate information models and processes that have more direct appeal to indigenous people included posters, videos, information booklets with easy to read text and attractive pictures and graphics, information expressed in terms of stories and parables, kits that promote music and dancing and include artefacts, and indigenous media.

The importance of having public information days, where families and friends could gather together, share ideas, celebrate and have some fun, was stressed by one community-based organisation, *"People should be able to enjoy themselves when they're finding things out, and it should involve people of all ages...They'll go to a concert or a family day and they'll talk about that for a long time"*.

There was also a strong call for increased resources to be made available at the regional and local levels to enable people to achieve a sense of empowerment in their lives and in the development of effective information strategies. In particular, there needs to be careful thought given to *"how the resources get to the community level, and on the processes that tend to disempower people"*.

The associated need for effective accountability and monitoring procedures was also raised, *"...we have to look at where the money is going and whether it's being effective"*.

An expanded role was suggested for community-based organisations, information centres and advocacy services to provide a more holistic, systematic and better resourced network of support in partnership with government departments. This would build on existing arrangements and bridge the gaps between the different systems and networks so that more focussed advice, assistance and advocacy can be provided to indigenous clients and community members.

Under these arrangements, information strategies would be developed and implemented by people who have a keen appreciation of what works and what doesn't work in their own regions and communities. Language centres and indigenous media organisations would have an important part to play, *"The people with skills in language and media in the regions will be able to develop the best strategies to put the information across"*. They would also be more sensitive of the need for different strategies for different age, gender and cultural groups. In particular, the people with skills in graphic arts, desktop publishing and media production would create images and messages that people would be able to relate to and feel a sense of ownership, *"With national strategies each region should have the opportunity to create their own images"*, said one respondent. *"When it's locally done, people have a real feeling about it. For a national strategy, you can use the ideas but allow for regions and local communities to have an input. That way we'll own it"*.

This would go a long way towards satisfying the concerns that have been raised about representation and agency. Indigenous people want to be able to represent issues in their own distinctive ways based on what they feel is culturally appropriate and effective communication. It was suggested that this sort of approach may even be cheaper than the current arrangements.

The improvement of co-ordination and collaboration between departments, community-based organisations and the communities themselves is generally seen as being critical to the improvement of programs, services and information strategies. Whatever can be done to promote this would receive wide support, as long as the necessary social and cultural protocols were observed and the processes were not seen as being impositional. It is anticipated that the constant linking of efforts and sharing of ideas and resources will result in more effective ways of addressing what are often complex, interrelated problems or difficulties.

Because indigenous people have such *"highly developed visual memories"*, the visual appeal of an information product or media campaign was highlighted, as was the use of local graphics and images, video presentations, picture stories and bold, representative colours with cultural connotations.

The suggestion was also made that departmental indigenous staff photographs should be attractively displayed in poster form, so that people could identify them and be aware of the role they are playing in supporting indigenous clients and communities through their work in a particular departmental program area.

Using Language Centres to Assist in Determining Appropriate Language(s) to be Used

In areas where traditional languages are still spoken, the use of those languages in information strategies was regarded as important. The increased involvement of language centres that are supporting the maintenance of those languages, in terms of translation and interpretation, is also seen to be crucial in the development of more effective information strategies.

These centres are considered to be in tune with local community values and priorities, they *"know how people think locally"* and how things should be *"translated for how locally people see things"*.

However, the language centres are thought to be under resourced for the important work they are carrying out, especially if they are to play an expanded, more proactive role in supporting the development and implementation of information strategies.

More realistic funding support from departments, especially ATSIC, was therefore called for, *"ATSIC has to give the language centres more resources and a better working environment. What they've done is quite incredible. They should be able to work with the government departments"*.

Increasing the Use of Information Technologies

The developments in interactive communication technologies, such as computers and computer networking and two way audio and visual television, were seen as an important development in the way information is conveyed to, used and manipulated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, especially in the more isolated, rural and remote communities.

Their potential to improve information delivery systems and strategies, especially when linked to satellite systems such as the TANAMI Network and BRACS, was emphasised by a number of intermediaries.

For special presentations, one off information campaigns and the transmission of information about programs, services, benefits and entitlements the direct, visual impact and accessibility has strong appeal, *"Communities are getting more and more used to it. What some departments have done with their health campaigns has shown it can work"*.

The recently developed Community Information Network was mentioned as having particular strengths, which would be worth examining for their potential in indigenous community contexts. This system enables clients and community members to access and explore a wide range of information interactively, and could replace or enhance some of the existing forms of contact with departmental staff. However, as the system requires a user to be reasonably proficient in interpreting written language and following computer instructions it also has some limitations and disadvantages.

Using Indigenous Media Organisations to Assist in Planning, Developing and Implementing Information Strategies

Indigenous media organisations received strong support from intermediaries, who considered that they provide appropriate and effective information services to indigenous communities.

Concern was expressed, however, that not enough use was made of the indigenous media industry and their organisations by departments. This often results in tokenistic strategies being developed or the organisations are contacted as an afterthought and are unable to play a significant role in the information planning, production and delivery processes. One respondent said that *"...we never get enough information. You can never give the community enough information"*. Another stated, *"TV broadcasts that summarise issues and broadcast them to local communities. That would be an effective way to communicate...Those people out there are marginalised and information deficient. There's not effective ways at present to disseminate information"*.

Increased use of indigenous media by government departments was also seen as an important way to support local indigenous enterprise, especially through the increased work for local indigenous staff and the payment of service fees.

Developing More Integrated, Holistic and Strategic Approaches to Program Planning, Service Delivery and Information Campaigns.

The proposed approach to developing more appropriate and effective information strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people requires more integrated, holistic and strategic program planning, service delivery and information campaigns than are currently in place.

Such an approach needs to focus more on what indigenous people actually want and need if they are to overcome the disadvantages in their lives, maintain their cultures and participate effectively and productively in the broader social, cultural and economic systems.

According to one respondent, the current arrangements have led to the oppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, *"We've got to change the focus of what's best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people"*. Another respondent emphasised that *"Dignity and pride has to be with the people themselves. They have to be able to do things for themselves. They don't need bandaid, welfare paternalism anymore. It needs coordinated, strategic planning"*.

Time frames for arrangements need to take into account cultural values and priorities, and information strategies need to reflect regional and local cultural sensitivities. Consistent with this, communities should have relative autonomy to determine what messages are conveyed and the manner in which they are delivered, *"If they feel they are being dictated to, there is more chance that they will close their ears. So you have to make sure that they are both advised, informed and approached about any message that might come out. That way you will avoid this"*.

In essence this requires appropriate consultation and respect for cultural protocols. As much as possible, *"...effort and resources should go into developing things with people at the local level, taking into account local needs and priorities"*.

Participatory and collaborative processes should be used to encourage people to work together, network and link the different systems. In this way, broadly-based participation, collaboration and decision-making about program planning, service delivery and information strategies can effectively take place.

One respondent was particularly emphatic about the importance of this, *"Communities have to consider that a strategy is important. It has to work at the local community level. Programs have to be based in the communities to make it work...People have to be fully informed at the local level. They need to know the options. People need to talk about these things"*.

This would result in a much more focussed approach, with community-based organisations and representatives having a more central role in determining appropriate strategic and operational arrangements. These arrangements would also reflect, necessarily, a more integrated and holistic approach to meeting indigenous peoples needs. In turn, this would lead to the reduction or avoidance of duplication of effort and competition for resources. It should also lead to increasing levels of co-operation and collaboration between communities, community-based organisations and government departments.

One respondent, an Aboriginal senior departmental officer, was emphatic about how this approach should be taken up by departments, *"This research"*, he said, should result in *"open participatory reconciliation case mix for all departments to meet. Keating should tell the departments to open up their integration and structuring policies and programs with Aboriginal and Islander people"*.

Another respondent put it this way, *"There's no local protocol set up between different departments that could achieve something together. We target the same group and we need some sort of strategies that tie us together. It needs to be done at the Ministers' level and worked out at the local level"*.

The DEET Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Program (AESIP) was mentioned by another Aboriginal senior departmental officer as being a successful, effective model that could offer important clues to other departments.

He considered it was *"an excellent way of getting Aboriginal people involved"*. In order to do this *"They pulled back funding for an overall strategic plan. It required strategic and operational planning. And these had to be ratified. Agencies were forced to take into account what people wanted. And Aboriginal involvement was central to the decision being made right through"*. As many other respondents also pointed out, he argued that *"We've got to tie things down more so that resources and strategies are streamlined and made more responsive and accountable to the people they're intended to serve. I think AESIP is a very good example of how to tie down the departments and ensure the consultation processes are appropriate"*.

The effort to improve the provision of services and related information strategies has to involve departmental staff moving out of their office environments and into more dynamic relationships based on partnership and collaboration with other providers and with the communities themselves and their community-based organisations.

Within these arrangements, indigenous people themselves must be given the opportunity to determine their own goals and priorities, with appropriate resources and support to achieve them. In this way, the development of appropriate and effective information strategies will be a natural consequence of developing more integrated, holistic and strategic approaches to program planning and service delivery.

If this is not done with real commitment and purpose the feeling of respondents is that nothing will change and indigenous people will continue to struggle with the effects of marginalisation and disempowerment. Many respondents, therefore, expressed the hope that the findings of this Information Needs Study would be a catalyst for a major reorientation and restructuring of departmental strategies, programs and services.

Consolidated Recommendations

Recommendation 1: DSS and DHSH need to find ways to significantly improve their relationships with indigenous people.

This requires that the departments listen more carefully to what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are saying about their needs, interests, priorities and aspirations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terms of Reference should be developed in response to this challenge, in order to address indigenous cultural values and preferences.

There should be a consequent shift away from bureaucratic, paternalistic, social welfare orientations, towards more holistic, culturally appropriate and accessible ways of providing support.

The key principles for achieving this reorientation involve partnership, collaboration, negotiation, and responsiveness within an overall context and framework of indigenous self-determination.

Recommendation 2: Written forms of communication should be expressed in clear, direct language, supported by face to face explanation as much as possible. Inappropriate language should be avoided as a matter of course.

Because the difference between appropriate advocacy and support and inappropriate procedures can be fine, careful interpretation of regional and local community attitudes and protocols is essential in order to find the best ways to address this complex issue.

The styles of language and forms of presentation used in reports and bulletins that are to be disseminated to indigenous people should also reflect these considerations.

The broader challenge for the departments is to increase the opportunity for all indigenous clients and community members to have greater access to information.

Recommendation 3: The employment of indigenous liaison and field staff is one of the most important and direct ways of increasing indigenous client and community access to departmental information. This form of support is both highly appropriate and vitally necessary and should be extended.

Current levels of staffing are generally inadequate and should be increased, particularly for the more isolated rural and remote areas.

Issues relating to indigenous staff work regimes, frustration and burnout should be examined as a matter of priority and more culturally appropriate ways of enabling them to address indigenous community needs should be developed.

Recommendation 4: Information products should make substantial use of local images, graphics and colour preferences, use direct and simple language, and the local indigenous language where appropriate, and convey a sense of local control or involvement in the process.

The information being conveyed should be directly relevant to indigenous people's lives and should reflect regional and local needs, values and priorities.

Use of negative images, particularly relating to the theme of death and dying, should be avoided.

Distribution of information products should be accompanied by appropriate briefing processes.

Torres Strait Islanders should be able to develop their own distinctive information products and strategies because of their unique cultural traditions and political demands and aspirations.

Recommendation 5: As indigenous people generally do not favour written forms of communication the value of using newspapers and magazines in departmental information strategies is minimal.

Newspapers and magazines should therefore not be considered as necessary components of future departmental information strategies.

Recommendation 6: Radio and television are widely supported as being effective media for use in departmental information strategies. Increased use of radio and television should therefore be considered.

Programming and information segments should reflect local production and content as much as possible. The indigenous media industry are uniquely placed to do this as they are sensitive to what should be represented, and how it should be conveyed, to indigenous communities. Increased use should be made of their services.

BRACS has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of information strategies and should be supported, particularly in areas where it is currently experiencing difficulties in establishing itself.

Recommendation 7: Intermediaries play a critical role in supporting information strategies through the provision of advice and advocacy to clients and community members. In order to support and enhance this role there should be a more inclusive approach taken by the departments, with the emphasis shifting to a relationship based on partnership and collaboration.

Channels of communication between the departments and intermediaries need to be improved and made more systematic. Briefing and planning meetings and workshops should be held with intermediaries as a matter of course to ensure that at the regional and local community levels, coordinated strategic approaches are considered and implemented properly.

Recommendation 8: Special government information campaigns, that aim to raise awareness amongst indigenous people on particular topics, should be developed in close collaboration with other partners at the regional and local community levels.

Indigenous people should have a clear, determining influence in the development and decision-making processes.

Information campaigns should appropriately reflect the following qualities, which are associated with successful, positive strategies:

- **consulting with people on the ground and working with communities and their organisations ;**
- **using local actors and spokespeople that people can relate to and identify with;**
- **using appropriate spoken and written language ;**
- **showing things happening in environments that people recognise;**
- **applying cross-cultural adult education models which emphasise people doing things for themselves;**

- **emphasising visual images and graphic designs;**
- **making sure that the information is relevant, life enhancing and positive; and**
- **having a sense of humour, which people can identify with.**

Recommendation 9: Information strategies should be based on an integrated, holistic and strategic approach to supporting indigenous people's information needs.

The elements of this approach include:

- **grass roots involvement in planning, decision-making and implementation**
- **developing network relationships between communities, organisations and departments**
- **increasing employment opportunities for indigenous staff**
- **cross-cultural training and sensitisation for non-indigenous and indigenous staff**
- **improving information delivery models and processes**
- **using language centres to assist in determining appropriate language(s) to be used**
- **increasing the use of information technologies**
- **using indigenous media organisations to assist in planning, developing and implementing information strategies**
- **developing more integrated, holistic and strategic approaches to program planning, service delivery and information campaigns**

Recommendation 10: There should be a much more serious effort by the departments to listen to and collaborate with indigenous local community and regional organisations and their representatives.

Impositional and paternalistic processes that deliver the message that departments know what is best for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be avoided.

Greater effort needs to be made to find out what indigenous people really need or want. This should be done consistently as an on-going process, using participatory and collaborative models of community research, development and evaluation.

Recommendation 11: A more coordinated approach to policy and program development is needed that will require a greater commitment to developing networks between communities, their representative and community-based organisations and the departments.

The participation of local community people and organisations is essential in the development of appropriate and effective network relationships.

The diversity of languages, cultures and historical experiences has to be acknowledged and reflected in the regional and local community arrangements that are developed.

The departments should therefore respond to and support community-based initiatives and the production of locally targeted information.

The DHSH report Working Towards a Regional Focus provides a detailed model and process for responding to this challenge and should be implemented.

The Torres Strait Regional Authority Corporate Plan 1994-95 provides the basis for greater regional autonomy in the delivery of programs and services for the Torres Strait and should be supported.

Recommendation 12: The range of issues related to the employment of indigenous staff need to be examined carefully.

More indigenous staff are needed in the departments, especially in liaison and field positions, but also in a wide range of other positions including senior management.

Whenever possible, indigenous staff should have a major involvement in the consideration of indigenous issues. This should be the case at all levels and in all areas.

More time should be spent by indigenous staff on directly working with people in the communities and community-based organisations in order to improve the strategic and operational responsiveness of their work.

There should therefore be a greater emphasis on recruitment, induction, training and on-going professional development and support for indigenous departmental staff.

Recommendation 13: Cross-cultural training and sensitisation is necessary for both non-indigenous and indigenous staff at all levels, including middle and senior management.

It is essential that staff be made aware of how neo-colonial relationships are formed, maintained and reproduced and how departmental staff can potentially or actually participate in such relationships.

Staff need to be assisted to develop sensitivity about what is conveyed to them by indigenous people and the necessary skills to translate that into appropriate action.

Sensitisation and training processes should be regionally and locally based and should be directed and conducted by local indigenous people as much as possible.

Recommendation 14: Information delivery models and processes should make use of direct, face to face communication as much as possible.

These models and processes should make appropriate use of:

- **posters;**
- **videos;**
- **information booklets with easy to read text and attractive pictures and graphics;**
- **information expressed in terms of stories and parables;**
- **kits that promote music and dancing and include artefacts; and**
- **indigenous media.**

Public information days, where indigenous people can gather together, share ideas, celebrate and have fun, should be used for major presentations.

Paper-based approaches requiring literacy skills, and structured meeting formats should be avoided.

Increased resources need to be made available at the regional and local levels to support the development of effective information delivery models and processes.

Indigenous people in the different regional and local community contexts must be able to represent issues in their own distinctive ways based on what they regard as culturally appropriate and effective communication.

Wherever appropriate, departmental indigenous staff photographs should be displayed in poster form so that they can be readily identified by indigenous clients and community members with the roles, relationships and responsibilities they have.

Recommendation 15: The increased use of language centres that are supporting the maintenance of traditional languages is crucial in the development of more effective information strategies.

More realistic funding for language centres should be examined if they are to play an expanded, more proactive role.

Recommendation 16: Interactive communication technologies that allow for user control and manipulation, such as computers, computer networking and two way audio and visual television using satellite linkups, have the potential to improve information delivery systems and strategies. Use should be made of these technologies whenever appropriate, especially in the more isolated rural and remote areas.

The Community Information Network has particular strengths which should be examined for potential use in indigenous community contexts.

Recommendation 17: Because indigenous media organisations provide such appropriate and effective information services to indigenous communities, increased use should be made of them in the planning, development and implementation of government information strategies.

Recommendation 18: A more integrated, holistic and strategic approach to program planning, service delivery and information campaigns for indigenous people is required. This approach needs to focus on what indigenous people actually want and need if they are to overcome the disadvantages in their lives, maintain their cultures and participate effectively and productively in the broader social, cultural and economic systems.

Time frames for arrangements need to take into account cultural values and priorities, and information strategies need to reflect regional and local cultural sensitivities.

Indigenous people must be given the opportunity to determine their own goals and priorities, with appropriate resources and support to achieve them. Indigenous communities should have relative autonomy to determine what messages are conveyed and the manner in which they are delivered. This will require appropriate consultation and respect for cultural protocols.

Community-based organisations and representatives should play a more central role in determining appropriate strategic and operational arrangements.

This approach will require departmental staff to move out of their office environments into more dynamic relationships based on partnership and collaboration with other providers and with the communities themselves and their community-based organisations.

1. INTRODUCTION

In order to assess and improve the effectiveness of government communication and information strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the Department of Social Security (DSS) and the Department of Human Services and Health (DHSH) determined that during 1994-1995 a major national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Information Needs Study would be conducted.

The major objectives of the study were to:

- measure and compare the impact of different media on recall, recognition and acceptance of health and welfare information among indigenous peoples;

- measure and compare the impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'identifiers' on recall, recognition and acceptance of health and welfare information among indigenous peoples; and

- research the best use of intermediaries to target specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups.

The study had two main components:

(1) face to face interviews with over 900 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in over 70 communities throughout Australia

(2) 150 case studies in the form of in-depth personal interviews or focus group discussions with 'intermediaries' in key organisations and agencies, who deliver health and welfare services to indigenous people.

The outcomes from the research will be used to assist decision-making about differences in product and media usage to be taken into account when preparing information strategies and will support the development of 'best practices' for disseminating social security, human services and health information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This report provides the findings of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Information Needs Study.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The three objectives of the study were to:

- measure and compare the impact of different media on recall, recognition and acceptance of health and welfare information among indigenous peoples by:
    - identifying the flow of information within communities for different demographic groups (for example, opinion leaders for males/females, young/old);
    - measuring and comparing existing and preferred sources of health and welfare information;
    - measuring and comparing the effectiveness of specific product categories, in particular -
        - print products (for example, brochures, posters and information kits),
        - electronic products (for example, videos, audio-tapes, radio and television),
        - promotional items (for example, calendars and fridge magnets);

- measuring and comparing television, radio, newspaper and magazine usage and preferences; and

- measuring and comparing usage and preferences for specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media (including those that use indigenous languages)

- measure and compare the impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'identifiers on recall, recognition and acceptance of health and welfare information among indigenous peoples by (the term 'identifiers' refers to imagery, colours, music or formats recognisably Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in nature):

  - measuring the impact of information products with and without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'identifiers' on indigenous peoples;

  - comparing and evaluating a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'identifiers' targeted at indigenous peoples.

- research the best use of intermediaries to target specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups by (the term 'intermediaries' refers to state government, community and other service providers):

  - compiling a list of intermediaries (nominated by the sample) that disseminate health and welfare information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;

  - classifying the intermediaries according to service and clientele categories (for example, families or youth);

- identifying the information needs of such intermediaries, in terms of-
  - their existing and preferred sources of health and welfare information, and their access to and use of relevant information products;
  - measuring the impact of information products with and without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'identifiers' on intermediaries;
  - comparing and evaluating a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'identifiers' targeted at intermediaries.

Through the course of the pilot studies the objectives for the intermediary component of the study were modified to respond to the issues relating to representation and agency which emerged. This resulted in the intermediary findings gaining greater prominence within the overall study and in the broadening of the conceptual issues relating to their role as both receivers and providers of information in indigenous community contexts (the amended objectives are reflected in the interview schedule; see Appendix 2). This made the intermediary component more qualitative, which consequently allowed for a deeper and more extensive analysis of the issues relating to indigenous information needs.

4. MAIN FINDINGS: COMMUNITY INTERVIEWS

The findings of the community based interviews have been grouped according to the following criteria:

- Knowledge of Health and Welfare Services;
- Sources of Information - Unaided Recall;
- Sources of Information - Aided and Unaided Recall of Information Products;
- Community-based Preferences for Health and Welfare Information;
- Presentation of Information Using Printed Information Products;
- Media Usage;
- Difficulties in Obtaining Health and Welfare Information.

It is important, before examining the information needs and preferences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to establish a profile of existing knowledge and sources of awareness of government health and welfare services and assistance.

4.1 Knowledge of Health and Welfare Services

It should be noted that, in pilot testing the survey, respondents' notions of "government" were found to be vague with little differentiation between, say, the roles and names of federal and state health departments. Hence many of the questions simply referred to "the government".

4.1.1 Awareness of DSS and DHSH

There is almost universal awareness of DSS amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Ninety nine percent replied that, before the interview, they had heard of the Department. It is not known whether any Government department, DSS or another, could expect this level of awareness from the Australian community at large, but it would seem unlikely. At a basic level, therefore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander awareness of DSS as an entity could be said to be very high.

Based on the results of the pilot testing, it was considered inappropriate to try to collect information on respondents' awareness of DHSH because of the difficulty many people have in making the distinction between state/territory and federal departments and programs. It was therefore not attempted. Instead there was a focus on provision of support for different client groups.

4.1.2 Awareness of Help from DSS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were generally aware of a number of types of help available from DSS. Most (81%) were aware of unemployment payments (Jobsearch and Newstart allowances), and a clear majority (65%) were aware of Family payments by one name or another. Terms commonly used in reference to family payments include previous versions of the payments, such as family allowance and child endowment.

From other research with the broader community, this phenomenon is widespread and not specific to indigenous peoples. Continual changes in nomenclature have been found, through other research conducted into Family Payments on behalf of DSS, to cause confusion over the recognition and understanding of the assistance which is available from DSS.

Just over half (51%) indicated they were aware of DSS help for the aged, while 48% were aware of sickness allowances/disability payments. Just over a quarter (29%) indicated that they were aware of DSS help in the field of rent assistance. Eighteen percent reported that they were aware of DSS help to get training or education. Other areas of DSS help were mentioned by very few respondents.

Not surprisingly, the awareness of help and assistance available from DSS was focussed mainly upon financial assistance.

Awareness of the range of different types of help available from DSS varied significantly from region to region.

Awareness of some of the main forms of DSS help varied according to the age of the respondents in line with expectations, for instance awareness of family payments was highest amongst those aged 30-39 (76%) and lowest amongst those aged 14-19 (55%) and those aged 50 and over (48%). Nevertheless, even amongst those responsible for children, awareness of family payments was not found to exceed 80%.

Similarly, awareness of help for the aged increased with the age group of the respondents, although even amongst those aged 50 and over awareness was no higher than 64%.

Awareness of the Home Child Care Allowance was found to be very low (less than 0.5% overall) and even amongst those responsible for the care of children aged under 5 years awareness of this type of help was recorded at less than 1.5%.

While those responsible for the care of someone with a disability were slightly more likely to report being aware of sickness/disability payments (52% cf. 48% overall) this difference was not found to be statistically significant.

Table 1: Awareness of help from DSS and DHSH

Type of help	Percent aware (917) %
Unemployment payments (Jobsearch/Newstart allowance)	81
Family payments, Child endowment	65
Age	51
Sickness allowance/disability payments	48
Rent assistance	29
Help to get training, education	18
Sole parent/Jet program	5
Travel concessions	4
Homeless allowance	3
Pension	1
Home Childcare Allowance/help with child care	*
Health Care Card	*
Other types of help	11
Can't say	2
Total heard of DSS	99

Note: An * represents percentages below 0.5%. Percentages may sum to more than 100% as respondents could be aware of more than one type of help.

4.1.3 Awareness of Government Help for Families

Awareness of the types of help for families provided by "the government" ranged from 43% amongst Torres Strait Islander people to 100% of those interviewed in Darwin, with 80% overall indicating that they had heard about types of help for families provided by the government.

Importantly, twelve percent of those responsible for children had not heard about government help for families.

When asked more specifically what types of help for families they had heard of, the most commonly mentioned were Family Payments (including Family Allowances/Supplements) (53%). The following table shows the percentage of respondents who mentioned various types of help for families.

Table 2: Awareness of government help for families

Type of help:	Percent heard of: (917) %
Family Payment/Allowance/Supplement	53
Childcare/Childcare Assistance	18
Sole Parent	6
Rent Assistance	5
Abstudy/Austudy/education/training	3
Home Childcare Allowance	2
Supporting Parent's Pension	2
Pension	1
Medicare/health	1
Unemployment benefits/allowance/dole	1
De facto pension	*
Other	21
Can't say	6
Total heard of help for families	80
Total not heard of help for families	20

Note: An * represents percentages below 0.5%. Percentages may sum to more than 100% as respondents could be aware of more than one type of help.

Awareness of Family Payments was certainly higher among those who care for children than those who do not (62% cf. 48%), but still indicates a significant minority of those who care for children may not be aware of a most relevant source of Government help.

At the same time, it is important to consider the extent to which perceptions of the term "help for families" differ between respondents. By way of example, the study results indicate that only 63% of those who, at a later stage of the interview reported being recipients of Family Payments, indicated that Family Payments was one of the types of government help for families they had heard of.

4.1.4 Awareness of Government Help for Young People

Seventy five percent indicated that they had heard about types of help for young people provided by the government. The level of awareness varied considerably by region. Awareness was lowest in Torres Strait (38%) and highest in Sydney (92%).

As might be expected, respondents aged 50 and over were generally less aware of help for young people (57% cf. 75% overall), while respondents aged 14-19 years were the most likely to be aware of such help (84%).

As a general group the main types of help for young people mentioned were the various types of unemployment benefits and jobseeker allowances, in particular Jobsearch (21%) and New Start (9%), plus others less precisely specified (11%). The Homeless Youth Allowance, although not always specified by that name, was also very commonly mentioned (31%). Other main types of help that respondents were aware of included Abstudy (15%), training and education/TAFE/apprenticeships (15%).

Levels of awareness of various types of help revealed some interesting relationships with respondents' employment status.

Those not in paid employment were more likely than others to be aware of Jobsearch, though at 25% this level of awareness may be considered somewhat low. Just 12% of those not in paid employment indicated that they were aware of training and education/TAFE/apprenticeships a types of government help for young people, while this category was mentioned by 22% of those currently in full-time employment.

Table 3: Awareness of government help for young people

Type of help	Percent (917) %
Unemployment benefits:	
- Jobsearch	21
- New Start	9
- unspecified	11
Homeless youth allowance	31
Abstudy	15
Training & education/TAFE/apprenticeship	15
Rent assistance	8
Austudy	5
Skill share	3
CDEP	3
CES	1
Help for homeless kids (unspecified)	1
Travel concessions	1
Others	11
Can't say	2
Total heard of help for young people	75
Total not heard of help for young people	25

Note: An * represents percentages below 0.5%. Percentages may sum to more than 100% as respondents could be aware of more than one type of help.

4.1.5 Awareness of Government Help for Old People

A majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people stated that they were aware of help the government provides for old people (86%). Awareness amongst those aged under 20 was only 77%, but increased to between 85% and 91% amongst older age groups.

Interestingly, awareness of government help for old people was lower amongst those who care for an aged relative (80%) than amongst other respondents. Furthermore, even amongst those who later in the study indicated that they received the Age Pension themselves, stated awareness of government help for the aged was only marginally above the level of awareness for the overall sample.

When asked what types of help for old people they had heard of a majority (55%) mentioned the Age Pension. A further 16% mentioned an unspecified "Pension". Among other types of help mentioned were Home Care/Home Visiting Service (8%), Meals on Wheels (6%) and Travel Concessions (5%).

Table 4: Awareness of help for old people

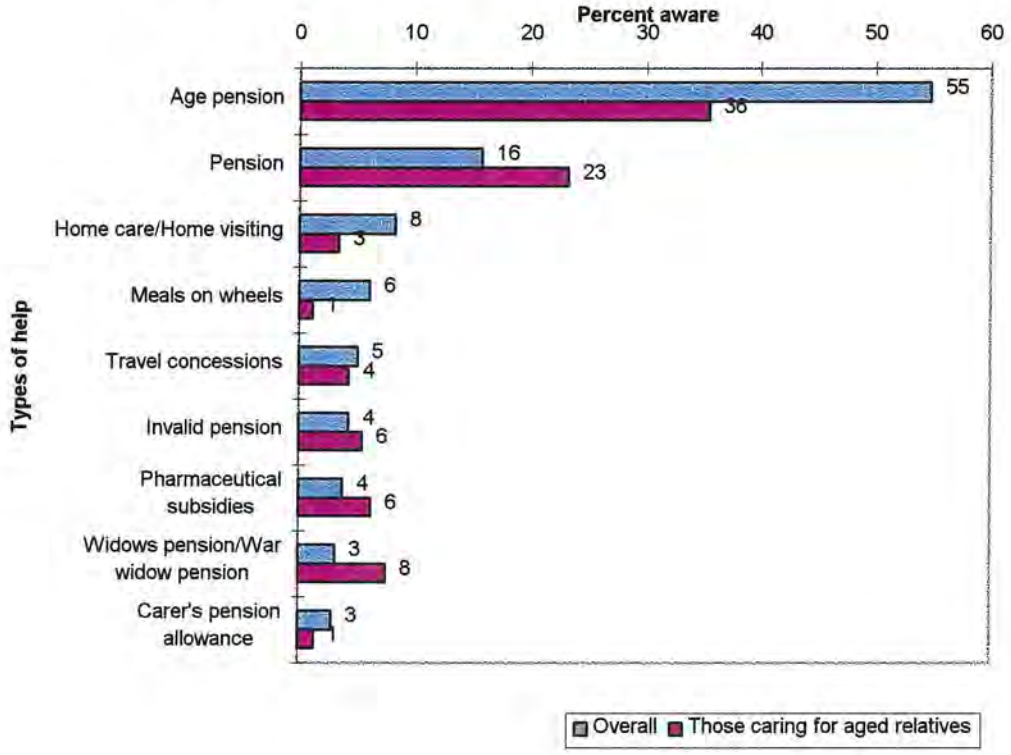
Types of help	Percent (917) %
Age pension	55
Pension (not specified)	16
Home Care/Home visiting service	8
Meals on Wheels	6
Travel concessions	5
Invalid pension	4
Pharmaceutical subsidies/concessions	4
Widows pension/War widow pension	3
Carer's pension/allowance	3
HACC	3
Old people's homes/hostels	2
Home modification scheme	1
Rent assistance	1
Disability payments	1
Others	21
Can't say	2
Total heard of help for old people	86
Total not heard of help for old people	14

Note: An * represents percentages below 0.5%. Percentages may sum to more than 100% as respondents could be aware of more than one type of help.

Again, those who cared for an aged relative and those who reported being on an aged pension did not appear to be any more aware of the help government provides old people. If anything, these people were slightly less aware of the types of help available than respondents overall. In particular, just 36% of those who care for an aged relative indicated that they were aware of the Age Pension (cf. 56% overall).

This pattern repeated itself in regard to most services, such as Home Care, Meals on Wheels and Travel Concessions, although those caring for aged relatives were slightly more aware of pharmaceutical subsidies than respondents overall (6% cf. 4%). Figure 1 demonstrates this pattern for the most commonly reported types of help for old people.

Figure 1: Awareness of help for old people: Those who care for aged relatives compared with the overall population



4.1.6 Awareness of Government Help for People with Health Problems

Awareness of types of government help for people with health problems was relatively low at 69% overall. Younger respondents in particular were more likely to indicate they had not heard of help for people with health problems (59% of those aged 14 to 19 years).

Fewer than one third of Torres Strait Island people had heard of government help for people with health problems, and another 25% couldn't say.

The type of government help most commonly mentioned for people with health problems was the Sickness Benefit, mentioned by 40% of respondents. Although not necessarily mentioned by its current correct name, the Disability Support Pension was effectively identified by those who mentioned the Invalid Pension (5%) and those who mentioned the Disability Allowance/Pension (6%). Six percent of respondents also referred to the Health Card. Other types of help were each mentioned by fewer than 5% of respondents.

Table 5: Awareness of help for people with health problems

Type of help	Percent (917) %
Sickness benefit	40
Disability Support Pension	12
Health Card	6
Carer's Allowance/pension	4
Medical subsidies/cheap medication	4
Medicare	2
Help for drinking/help for people who drink	2
Homecare	2
Respite care	1
Help for drug problems	1
Travel concessions	*
Others	16
Can't say	4
Total heard of help for health problems	69
Total not heard of help for health problems	31

Note: An * represents percentages below 0.5%. Percentages may sum to more than 100% as respondents could be aware of more than one type of help.

Awareness of the Sickness Benefit appears to range widely from region to region, with as few as 8% of Darwin respondents mentioning it as one of the forms of help for people with health problems that they were aware of, up to as many as 70% in Victorian areas surveyed. Conversely, the "Health Card" was mentioned by 50% of Darwin respondents and no Victorian respondents. Although it is understood that the terms are not interchangeable, nevertheless it is possible that the apparent overlap in eligibility for the two types of benefits may lead to a blurring of the terms in some areas.

A slight, but clear relationship was observed between respondents' employment status and their awareness of types of help for people with health problems. Those in full time employment were significantly more aware (78%) than those not in paid employment (64%), and in a few specific areas this relationship was also clearly observed. For instance, while 8% of those in full time employment were aware of medical subsidies and cheap medication only 2% of those not in paid employment indicated that they were aware of this.

In line with some of the other findings of the study, those who reported later being recipients of the sickness benefit/allowance were no more likely (in fact marginally less likely) to mention the sickness benefit as a form of government help for people with health problems (36% cf. 40% overall).

4.1.7 Awareness of Help for People with Disabilities

Sixty six percent of respondents indicated they had heard about government help for people with disabilities. Once again, those aged 14-19 were the least aware age group (42%).

Those in full time employment were slightly more likely to be aware of this type of help (75% cf. 62% of those not in paid employment). Those responsible for the care of someone with a disability were significantly more likely to be aware of this type of government help than respondents overall (80% cf. 66%), although conversely it should be recognised that 20% of those who care for someone with a disability answered "no", they had not heard about any types of help for people with disabilities provided by the government.

The type of help most commonly identified was the Disability Support Pension, described as such by 27%. It was described as the Disability Allowance/Payments/Benefit by a further 10%, and as the Invalid Pension by another 10%.

Other forms of help identified included the Carer Pension (5%), the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service (5%) and Homecare (5%). Other forms of help were each mentioned by 2% of respondents or fewer.

While those caring for someone with a disability were more aware of the types of help than respondents overall (as already noted), nevertheless only 58% indicated that they were aware of the Disability Support Pension (however described).

Table 6: Awareness of help for people with disabilities

Types of help:	Percent (917) %
Disability Support Pension	44
Carer's Pension/Allowance	5
Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service/Rehabilitation	5
Homecare	5
Pension	2
Meals on Wheels	2
Pharmaceutical benefits/medical subsidies	2
Free glasses/optometrist	1
Hearing aids/hearing problems	1
Sickness benefit/pension	1
Others	16
Can't say	4
Total heard of help for people with disabilities	66
Total not heard of help for people with disabilities	34

Note: An * represents percentages below 0.5%. Percentages may sum to more than 100% as respondents could be aware of more than one type of help.

4.2 Sources of Information - Unaided Recall

A key issue addressed by the study was how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people become aware of health and welfare assistance provided by the government. Respondents were firstly asked to recall, without prompting (ie. unaided recall), how they became aware of government assistance. Respondents were then prompted to recall specific types of information products or media they may have seen which contributed to their awareness of government assistance. This section of the report deals with the sources of information people recalled on an unaided basis. Analysis of the specific information products and media recalled on an aided basis is provided in the next section.

On average, people generally mentioned two different ways by which they had found out about government help.

Personal interaction, whether with a friend or family member, or with a DSS officer, accounted for the great majority of all responses. Non-interactive methods and media were mentioned by relatively few people, the highest mentioned being "saw a booklet/pamphlet/brochure" (13%). Posters were mentioned by 10% of respondents, TV by 7% , and newspapers and radio each by just 3% of respondents.

The following table provides a summary, and shows that the method most commonly mentioned was a visit or telephone call to a DSS office (36%).

Conversely, those with low levels of awareness were significantly more likely to nominate radio and videos. Eleven percent of those with low awareness nominated radio as the preferred medium for health information and 16% nominated it as the preferred medium for welfare information. This compares to 8% and 11% respectively for those with higher levels of awareness. Twelve percent of those with low levels of awareness nominated videos as the preferred medium for health information and 11% for welfare information, compared to 10% and 7% respectively for those with high levels of awareness.

4.5 Presentation of Information Using Printed Information Products

DSS, DHSH, and a number of other State and Commonwealth government agencies produce an array of print based information products for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community. As one of the main objectives of the study was to examine the impact of different media upon the acceptance of health and welfare information, the reaction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to printed information products was examined at two levels.

The first level of examination was at a purely perceptual level. It can be argued that the success of a printed information product will be directly linked to whether the product captures the attention of its intended audience. If a particular printed product does not have perceptual appeal for an audience, then the likelihood that members of that audience would either be alerted to the product, or make the effort to process the information presented by that product is diminished.

The second level of examination was at a cognitive level. While the "attention grabbing" ability of a printed information product is critical in determining whether an audience will attend to it, the ease of comprehension and cognitive processing of the information presented will determine whether the product is ultimately successful.

The community interviews component of the study examined a range of printed information products at a perceptual and cognitive level. The range of products included posters, brochures and more detailed information booklets. Respondents were asked to examine a number of like products and identify those which they liked the most and liked the least in terms of visual appeal, and then identify those which looked the easiest and most difficult to understand.

Given the nature of the research exercise, the detail in which the perceptual and cognitive reaction to printed information products could be examined is limited. Alternative research strategies may enable more detailed examination of particular information products in a perceptual and cognitive sense. However, such strategies would require considerably more invasive techniques which may well not be acceptable to indigenous people, and would not be appropriate for a sample survey research strategy where a wide range of products were to be considered.

Despite the methodological constraints of a sample survey in assessing these issues, the information which has been yielded by study provides some clear indications of factors which are important in the design and presentation of health and welfare information in a printed medium.

4.5.1 Brochures

Brochures were defined for the purpose of the Information Needs Study as printed information products which were small in size, presenting a cover or front panel with one third the size of an A4 sheet.

A total of 12 brochures were presented to respondents. A copy of the brochures used in the study are included in Appendix 3. Descriptions of each brochure are provided below.

1. **Career opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates with the Department of Human Services and Health.** This brochure is predominantly white in colour, with black text on the cover and a reproduction of a painting by an indigenous artist.

2. **The Pensions Earnings Credit Scheme.** This is a brochure designed by the Department of Social Security, and was not targeted specifically for indigenous audiences. The colour of the brochure is predominantly mauve with large black text on the front panel. The title caption on the brochure is "Earn up to $1,000 without losing a cent of your pension".

3. **Kids Especially Good Child Care! - Supplementary Services.** A Department of Human Services and Health brochure targeted to a general audience. Predominantly yellow in colour with a large black caption "Kids", followed by a smaller sub-caption of "Especially Good Child Care" in red. A red, blue and green abstract image of a child is also presented on the front panel.

4. **You could be right.** A predominantly white brochure with blue and red text on the cover. . Again, this is a brochure designed by the Department of Social Security, and was not targeted specifically for indigenous audiences The title caption of "You could be right" is followed by a red tick in a blue box and the following sub captions in red: "Claim rejected? Payment Cancelled?, Money to repay? Come and talk to us", with another sub-caption in blue "You can ask us to look at the decision again."

5. **Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.** A brochure produced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit of the Department of Social Security in Queensland, specifically for indigenous audiences. Predominantly black in colour, with the title caption in red and a sub-caption of "A guide to Social Security Pensions, Allowances, Benefits and Services in yellow text. The front panel includes an abstract red and yellow column that sits behind the captions. Unlike most other brochures, this brochure contains 10 pages on information within the front and back panels

6. **More Money to Study - Austudy/Abstudy Supplementary Loans 1994.** Produced by the Department of Employment Education and Training for tertiary students receiving either Austudy or Abstudy. The front panel presents a busy array of abstract images in earthy colours which is broken by bands of black text with the caption "More money to study". The sub-captions "Austudy/Abstudy Loans 1994" is presented in light coloured text on a dark coloured block. This brochure also contains a number of pages of information (16 in total) within the front and back panels.

7. **Helping Parents Raise Children - Family Payment.** Produced by the Department of Social Security specifically for indigenous audiences. Predominantly yellow in colour with a black and white photograph of several indigenous adults and children. The title caption of "Helping Parents Raise Children" was placed below the photograph in large red text. The sub-caption "Family Payment" was presented in small white text in a small red coloured block at the top of the front panel

8. **Making Choices - Community Aged Care.** A lightly coloured brochure produced by the Department of Human Services and Health specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. An indigenous design of a turtle is presented in earth colours in the centre of the front panel. The title caption of "Making Choices" is in earth tones above the turtle design. Immediately below the title caption in small green print is the sub-caption "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People". Below the turtle design, also in green text is the caption "Community Aged Care".

9. **Newstart Allowance**
10. **Job Search Allowance**
11. **When you finish your studies**
12. **Family Payment**

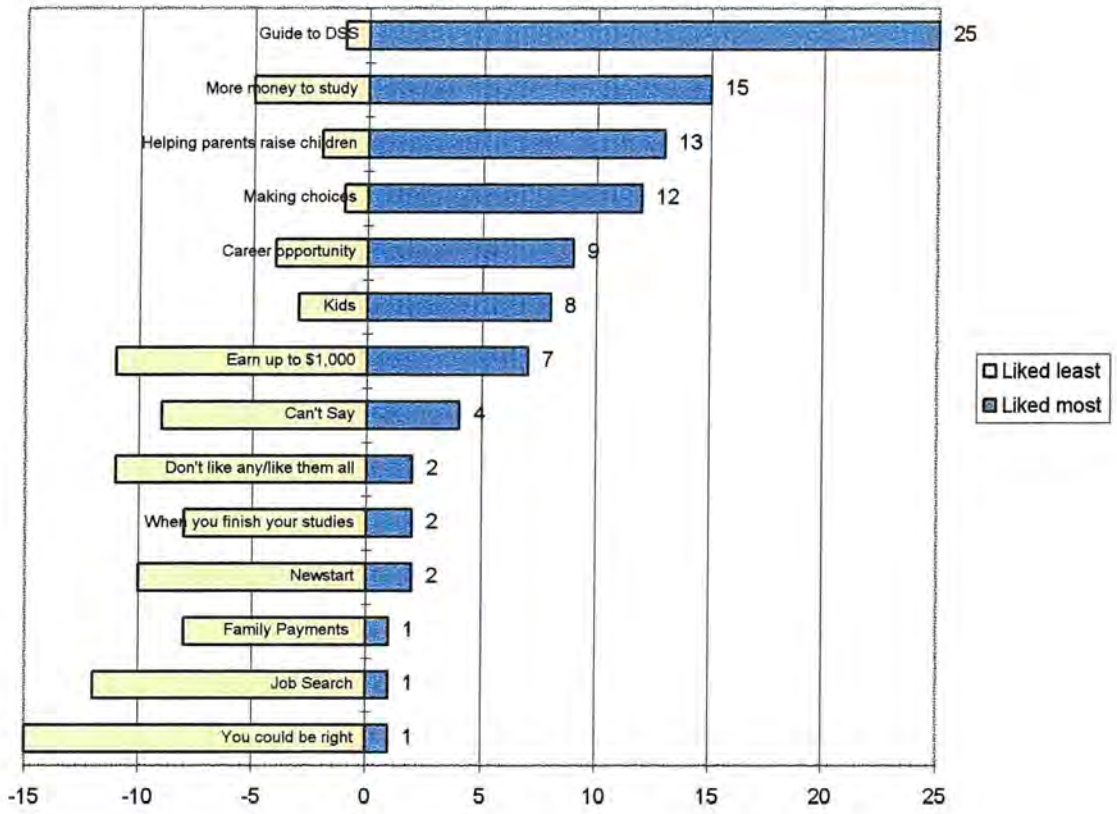
Brochures 9, 10, 11 and 12 are standard Department of Social Security designs, comprising black text and title caption on a white background. The only colour on the brochure is a small red or green rectangle containing a black number at the top left of the front panel.

4.5.1.1 Perceptual Appeal of Brochures

Brochures with a variety of designs, subject matter, colour, and target audiences were chosen in order to identify which types of attributes of a brochure enhanced its perceptual appeal, as well as its ease of interpretation and understanding.

It was found the brochure with the greatest perceptual appeal was brochure number 5, the Information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people produced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit of the Department of Social Security (the "Guide"). The responses given as to which brochure was liked the most and the least are shown in the following chart.

Figure 15: Brochure liked the most/least



It can be seen from the above figure that the "Guide to Social Security Pensions, Allowances, Benefits and Services" was, overall, more likely to be identified as the brochure with the greatest perceptual appeal. It was also one of the least likely to be identified as being the brochure least liked, along with the "Making Choices" brochure for Community Aged Care. Although the "Making Choices" brochure was equally unlikely to be named as the brochure least liked, it only obtained moderate support for the brochure most liked. This suggests that the brochure was inoffensive, but lacked in attributes which generate great perceptual appeal. The "Guide" seemingly achieved both a high level of perceptual appeal and a low level of dislike.

The reasons for brochures being selected as the most liked focussed on four main factors:

- the colour;
- the topic;
- the picture/graphic; and
- the wording on the brochure.

All of the types of reasons given for a brochure being selected as the most liked are shown in the following table.

Table 41: Reasons for liking brochures

Reasons for liking brochures	Percent of those who liked a brochure (945) %
I like the colour	42
Topic of the brochure	37
Picture of the brochure	36
Wording of the brochure	32
Aboriginal art/colours	6
Eye catching	3
Relevant to me	2
Understandable	1
Gets my attention	1
Clear - not cluttered	1
For Aboriginal people	*
Other	13

Note: * represents less than 0.5%. Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

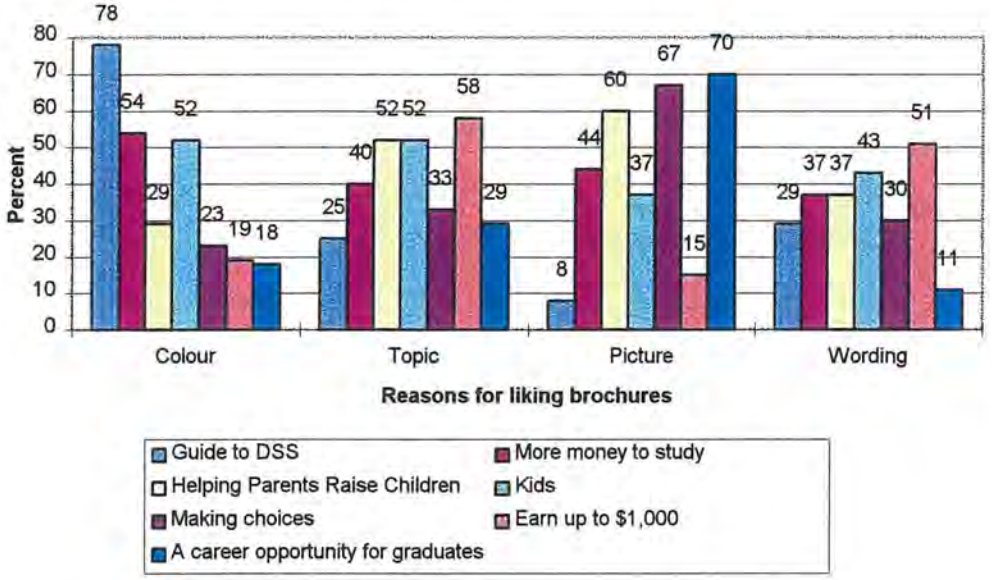
The colour of the brochure is central to a brochure's perceptual appeal. In just under half of the cases where respondents were asked to identify why they liked a particular brochure the most, colour was identified as a reason. The use of the Aboriginal colours: red, black and yellow, seemed to be frequently identified in relation to the "Guide", which was clearly the brochure with the greatest perceptual appeal.

The topic of the brochure is also important to the perceptual appeal of the brochure. This is not a surprising finding. The appeal of a document would be greatly diminished if the presentation of the topic did not appear to be relevant to the target audience. It is therefore understandable that when a brochure was identified as being liked, the topic of the brochure was also likely to be identified as a reason.

The picture or graphic on the brochure was a very important factor in the selection of several of the brochures. It appears the use of an appropriate picture or graphic enhances the perceptual appeal of brochures. As will be seen, not all brochures with a graphic or picture were frequently selected as having perceptual appeal.

The brochures most often identified as being liked tended to be identified for slightly different reasons. The following figure displays the reasons given for liking the seven most popular brochures.

Figure 16: Reasons for liking the three most popular brochures



The colour of the "Guide", the brochure most frequently identified as being the most liked brochure, was the most significant reason for its perceptual appeal. Colour seems to have been a more important reason for people liking this particular brochure when compared to the other frequently identified brochures.

Unlike the "Guide" the "More Money to Study" brochure was liked for a variety of reasons. High proportions of the 15% who selected this brochure did so because of the colour, topic, picture and wording. It is interesting to note this particular brochure did not use Aboriginal colours, but was still well liked because of its colour.

The "Helping Parents Raise Children" brochure was well liked for both the topic of the brochure and the picture on it. The picture and the topic of the brochure relate to notions of children and family. It appears from this and responses to images on other information products that the positive portrayal of children and families is well received by indigenous people. The use of such positive imagery seems to raise the importance of the information portrayed and thus attracts people to the information product.

The "Kids" brochure was liked for the appeal of the abstract graphic image of a child. While this brochure also is related to children and family issues, the topic is not seen as being an important reason for people who like this brochure. This may be due in part to the fact that indigenous people were not the target audience for this brochure, whereas the "Helping Parents Raise Children" brochure is obviously targeted at indigenous parents through the photograph used on the cover.

The brochures which were most likely to be selected on the basis of the graphics used were the "Making Choices" and "Career Opportunity" brochures. A clear majority of the 12% who selected the "Making Choices" brochure and the 9% who selected the "Career Opportunity" brochures, did so because they liked the indigenous paintings on the cover. The colour, topic and wording of the brochure were seen as less important issues for those who found these brochures appealing.

Of the 7% of people who liked the "Earn up to $1,000" brochure, the majority focussed on the topic and the wording of the brochure. The title caption certainly seemed to be a strong factor in attracting the attention and approval of some respondents. Despite the use of photographic images of people working on the cover, these images were only identified by a small proportion of those who liked this particular brochure.

The factors which resulted in people disliking particular brochures were similar to the factors identified as reasons for people liking particular brochures. The reasons given for disliking brochures are shown in the table below.

Table 42: Reasons for disliking brochures

Reasons for disliking brochures	Percent of those who disliked a brochure (801) %
Not enough colour	27
No picture on the brochure	23
Topic is not interesting	20
Don't like the wording	16
Aboriginal art/colours	14
Don't like the colour	8
Boring	7
Don't like the pictures on the brochure	6
Plain	5
Not eye catching	2
Looks complicated	2
Other	10

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

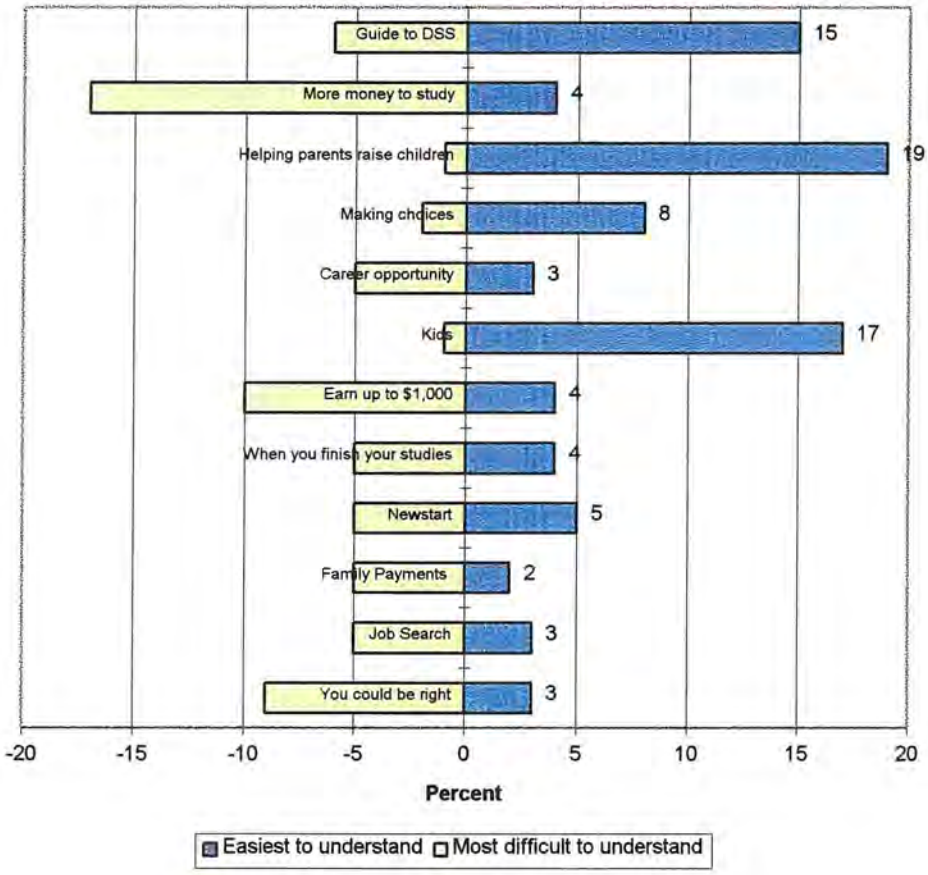
The four brochures identified as being disliked by more than 10% of the population were very similar in terms of the reasons given for their dislike. Three lacked any vibrant colour, while the fourth, the "Earn up to $1,000" brochure had a predominantly purple background which was also a common reason for dislike. The topic and wording were also issues for all four of the brochures, particularly the "You could be right" brochure.

It is also worth noting that a significant number of people (14%) stated that their reason for disliking the brochures was because of the Aboriginal art and colours.

4.5.1.2 Understanding of Brochures

The brochures which were considered to have the greatest perceptual appeal were not always the brochures considered easiest to understand. The perceived understanding of each brochure is shown in the figure below.

Figure 17: Ease and difficulty of understanding by brochure



Three brochures stand out as being perceived as easy to understand. These are the "Helping Parents Raise Children", "Kids" and the "Guide" brochures. Interestingly, one of the brochures identified as being liked the most, was considered to be one of the most difficult to understand. The "More Money to Study" brochure was the second most popular brochure in terms of perceptual appeal, but was the most frequently identified as difficult to understand.

There were few significant differences between sub-groups within the indigenous population in terms of the brochures identified as easy or difficult to understand.

Females were significantly more likely to indicate the "Kids" brochure was easy to understand when compared to males (18% cf. 16%). Younger respondents (aged 14 to 19 years) were also significantly more likely to indicate this brochure was easy to understand relative to older respondents (27% for those aged 14 to 19 years cf. 12% for those aged 40 years or more). People aged 40 years or more were, however, more likely to indicate the "Making Choices" brochure was easy to understand (11% cf. 4% for those aged under 30 years).

It is worth noting those in full-time paid employment were most likely to nominate the "Guide" as the easiest brochure to understand (20%), while those not in paid employment were more likely to nominate other brochures such as "Helping Parents Raise Children" (20%) and the "Kids" brochure (17%).

The main reasons given by people when indicating why a brochure was easy to understand focused on three main issues.

- The first issue related to the amount of information provided in the brochure. This was most commonly expressed as "(the brochure)... tells me all I need to know" about the given topic.

- The second issue related to the complexity of the language used in the brochure. Having simple, understandable wording was a key reason identified when articulating why a brochure was easy to understand.

- The third issue related to the actual amount of text. Brochures with less textual information were more likely to be identified as easy to understand.

Based on the combination of these types of responses, it appears the ideal brochure would be one that minimises the amount of text based information, and used simple language where text was required. The amount of information being conveyed would also be minimised by keeping the information to the point, and by not trying to cover too much information in the one brochure.

The following table displays the reasons given for brochures being easy to understand.

Table 43: Reasons why brochures are easy to understand

Why brochure is easy to understand	Percent who identified a brochure as easy to understand (885) %
Tells me all I need to know	35
Words easy to understand	34
Not too much wording	24
Stands out/looks interesting	3
Looks easy	3
Large print	3
Topic is relevant	3
Use of pictures	2
Written for indigenous people	2
Strait to the point	2
Clear	2
Not too much reading	1
Other	9

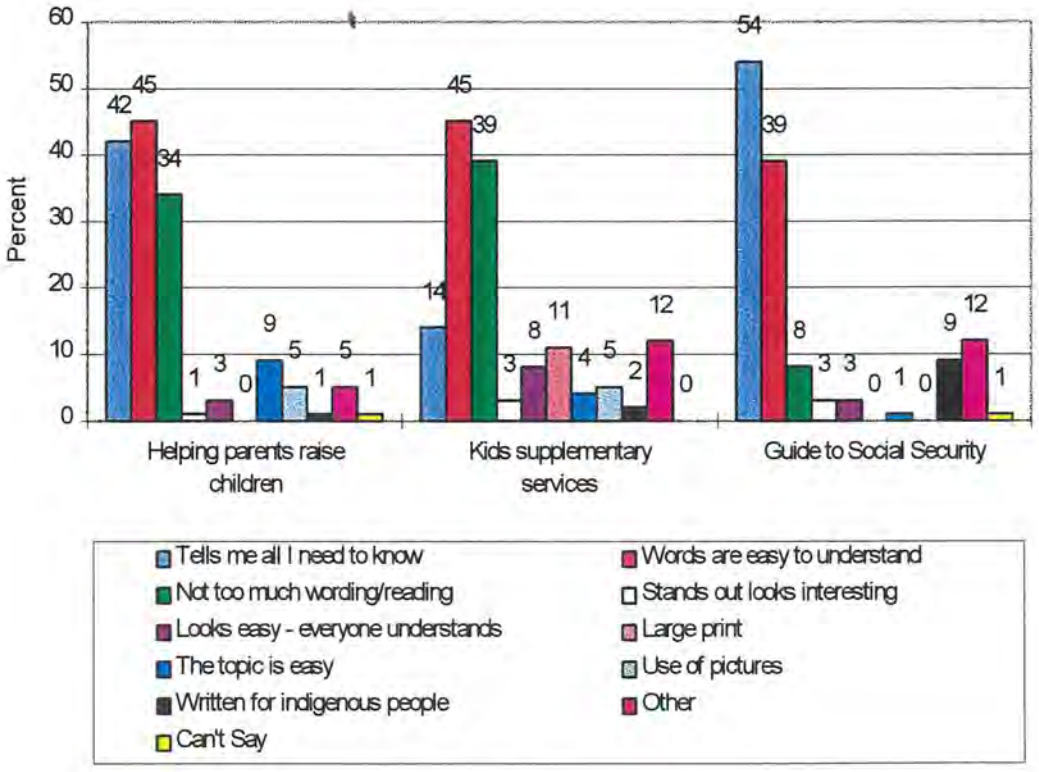
Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

Analysis of the reasons given shows that the brochure most commonly identified as easy to understand was significantly more likely to be identified because the brochure:

- told people all they needed to know,
- the amount of wording used was minimised,
- and the wording which was used was simple.

The following figure shows the reasons given for the three brochures that were most frequently identified as easy to understand.

Figure 18: Reasons for being easy to understand for the three most commonly identified brochures



It is evident from the above figure the reasons given for the three brochures most commonly nominated as easiest to understand, varied considerably.

Of the 19% of people who identified the "Helping Parents Raise Children" brochure as the easiest to understand, over one third indicated all three of the main factors as reasons why that brochure is easy to understand. The "Kids - Supplementary Services" brochure, which was identified by 17% of people as the easiest to understand, was significantly less likely to be identified because it was considered to have the right amount of information (ie. "tells me all I need to know"). It did, however, receive strong support because it was considered not to have too much wording and what wording it did have was simple.

Surprisingly, the "Guide" was nominated by only 15% of people as the easiest to understand when nearly 25% indicated it was the brochure they liked the most.

The reasons given, by those who found it easy to understand, tended to focus upon the brochure providing a comprehensive amount of information, and the use of wording which was easy to understand. It was significantly less likely than other brochures to be nominated because it had an appropriate amount of wording. This is perhaps a reflection of the larger size of this brochure relative to others.

The following table displays the types reasons given by respondents who identified a brochure which was difficult to understand.

Table 44: Reasons why brochures are difficult to understand

Why brochure is difficult to understand	Percent who identified a brochure as difficult to understand (707) %
Complicated wording	21
Too much detail	19
Poor layout/design	16
Not enough detail	8
Hard to understand/don't understand topic/message	7
Too much reading/writing	3
Looks too big/long	2
Boring/uninteresting	2
Too crowded	2
Print too small	1
Can't read	1
Other	12
Can't say	5

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% as not all respondents identified a brochure that was easy to understand.

It is apparent, from the reasons given as to why a particular brochure is difficult to understand, that the use of text based information is the most likely cause for confusion or a lack of understanding. Small amounts of simple text is probably the most appropriate when designing brochures that will be understood by a wide audience. If the level of detail is too great, or the type of wording used is too complicated, some people will have difficulty in accessing the information.

The "More Money to Study" brochure was commonly perceived as difficult to understand because it provided too much detail. Fifty-six percent of those who felt it was the most difficult to understand indicated the high level of detail as the reason. A further 28% indicated the use of complicated wording was also a reason for the difficulty in understanding the brochure.

The "Earn up to $1,000" brochure was also perceived as difficult to understand for similar reasons. However, only 20% of people who found this brochure difficult to understand indicated the level of detail as a reason, with a further 17% indicating the complexity of the wording used as a reason. Another 17% were unable to point to any particular aspect of the brochure, and responded that is was that they didn't understand the topic or the message of the brochure.

Interestingly, the level of detail of the "You Could be Right" brochure was not a frequently mentioned reason by the 9% of people who found this brochure difficult to understand. In fact, a significantly higher proportion of these people indicated the problem lay in a lack of detail and a poor layout/design of the brochure.

4.5.2 Booklets

Booklets were defined for the purpose of the Information Needs Study as printed information products which comprised of a number pages and had a cover with a surface area larger than an A4 sheet of paper.

A total of 6 booklets were presented to respondents. Copies of the booklets used in the study are included in Appendix 3, however descriptions of each booklet are provided below.

1. **Information Kit on Departmental Programs and Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.** This booklet was comprised of a large plastic folder which included a great deal of information on programs and services offered by the Department of Human Services and Health. The cover included predominantly Earthy colours and displayed an Aboriginal painting.

2. **HIV/AIDS Health Promotion.** This is booklet was a large spiral bound booklet. It was designed specifically for Torres Strait Island communities. The booklet used a cartoon based approach to convey the information, and was very bright and colourful.

3. **Aged Pension News.** A standard Department Social Security booklet, published in the form of a newspaper. The booklet was printed completely in black and white.

4. **Top-up Money for Kids.** A Street-wise comic style publication. Uses cartoon based stories to relay information about Family Payments from the Department of Social Security. The cover is printed in bright colours, with the interior pages printed in black and white.

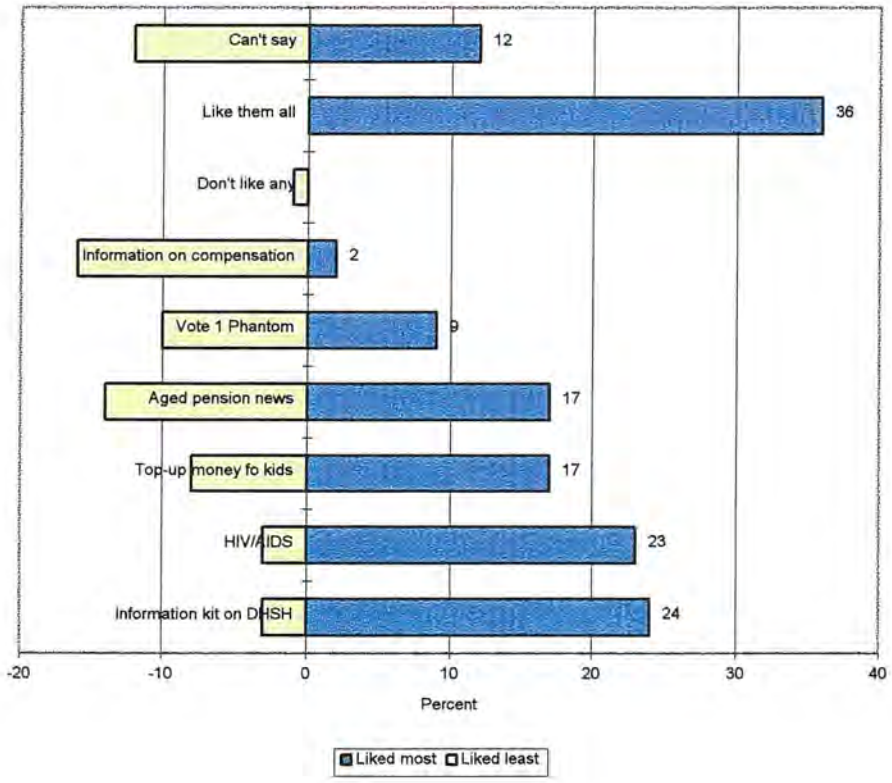
5. **Vote 1 Phantom.** A similar comic book style to the Street-wise publication. Produced by the Australian Electoral Commission to encourage people to vote in the ATSIC regional council elections. A predominantly purple cover with black and white interior pages.

6. **Information on Compensation and How it Affects Social Security Payments.** A large document presented in a plastic folder. Includes information presented in a number of foreign languages, and English about compensation and its effect on DSS payments. Mainly white cover with a small red and black abstract image.

4.5.2.1 Perceptual Appeal of Booklets

As with the brochures, a range of booklets with a variety of designs, subject matter, colour, and target audiences were chosen. The most popular booklet in terms of perceptual appeal was the Information kit on DHSH programs and services. The following figure displays the proportion of people who indicated the booklet they liked the most.

Figure 19: Booklet liked the most/least



It can be seen from the above figure that the HIV/AIDS promotion booklet closely follows the Information Kit on DHSH Services and Programs in terms of perceptual appeal. Surprisingly, the Aged Pension News was liked by a high proportion of respondents despite its monotone colour, and relatively few people liked the "Vote 1 Phantom" comic style booklet.

There was considerable regional variation in the booklets liked most and least. The Information Kit on DHSH services and programs was most popular in the Bourke (42%), Wagga (37%), Victoria (33%), Pilbara/Broome/Geraldton (34%), and Pt Augusta/Ceduna regions (38%). As might have been expected the Torres Strait Islander HIV/AIDS health promotion booklet received most support in the Torres Strait (34%). However, it was also well liked in Tasmania (59%). The "Top-up money for kids" booklet was significantly more likely to be chosen as the booklet most liked in the Sydney (38%), Victoria (21%), Roma (32%) and Alice Springs regions (45%).

There was also significant variation in the types of booklets liked between sub-groups within the population. Females were significantly more likely to rate the HIV/AIDS promotion booklet as most liked when compared to males (28% cf. 18%), while males were more likely to prefer the "Vote 1 Phantom" booklet to females (12% cf. 6%).

Younger respondents (aged 14-19 years) were also significantly more likely to prefer the "Top-up Money for Kids" booklet when compared to older respondents (24% cf. 17% overall).

There were no significant differences between people with responsibilities for aged care, child care or care for a person with a disability and the rest of the population.

The reasons for booklets being selected as liked followed a similar pattern to those given in regard to brochures. That is the reasons tended to focus on four main factors:

- the colour;
- the topic;
- the picture/graphic; and
- the wording on the brochure.

The order of importance of these factors was, however, slightly different to that of brochures. All of the types of reasons given for a booklet being selected as the most liked are shown in the following table.

Table 45: Reasons for liking booklets

Reasons for liking booklets	Percent of those who liked a booklet (951) %
Picture on the booklet	53
Like the colour of the booklet	45
Topic of the booklet	32
Wording on the booklet	31
Like the Phantom/cartoons	6
Eye catching	4
Big/clear/simple	4
Tells you everything	2
For Aboriginal people	2
Other	12

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

The picture on the booklet seems to be central to the perceptual appeal of the booklet. Over half of the reasons given for liking a booklet related to the picture presented on the cover.

Those booklets which were liked most for the pictures used on the cover were the HIV/AIDS promotion booklet (66%), the "Vote 1 Phantom" booklet (64%) and the "Top-up money for kids" booklet (56%). The colour of the booklet was also significantly more likely to be identified in relation to those who liked the "Top-up money for kids" and HIV/AIDS promotion booklets (76% and 71% respectively).

The topic of the booklet was again found to be important to the perceptual appeal of the booklet. The topic was found to be frequently identified by those who liked the HIV/AIDS promotion booklet and the Information Kit on DHSH services and programs booklet.

The factors which resulted in people disliking particular booklets are shown in the table below.

Table 46: Reasons for disliking booklets

Reasons for disliking brooklets	Percent of those who disliked a booklet (840) %
Not enough colour	28
Topic is not interesting	22
No picture on the booklet	19
Don't like the colour	12
Don't like the wording	10
Boring	7
Don't like the pictures on the brooklet	7
Plain	6
Not eye catching	4
Looks complicated/don't understand it	4
Too big	3
Not enough information	3
Don't like comics	3
Full of government jargon	2
Not relevant	2
Other	13
Can't Say	3

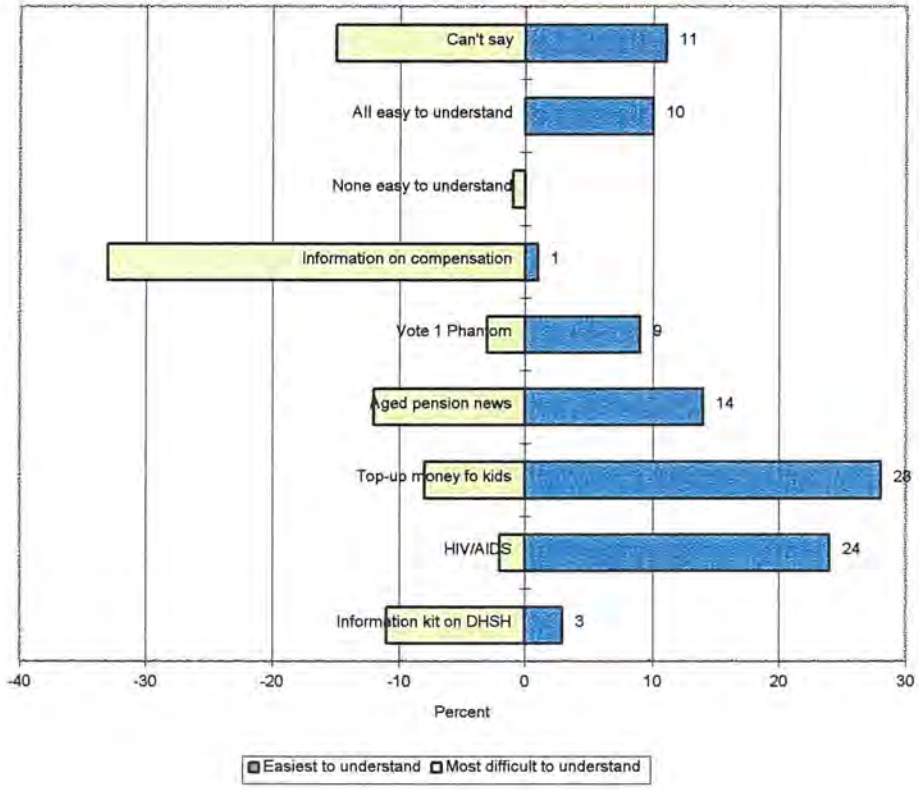
Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

It is evident from the above table that the same types of factors which lead to people dislike brochures also apply to booklets. A lack of colour was mentioned by people who disliked booklets such as the Age Pension News. The topic not being interesting was a criticism most likely to be leveled at the information on compensation and the both of the comic book style booklets.

4.5.2.2 Understanding of Booklets

As with brochures, the booklets which were considered to have the greatest perceptual appeal were not always the same as those considered easiest to understand. The perceived understanding of each booklet is shown in the figure below.

Table 47: Ease and difficulty of understanding by booklet



Two booklets stand out as being perceived as easy to understand. These are the HIV/AIDS health promotion booklet and the "Top-up money for kids" booklet. Despite the fact the Information on DHSH programs was well liked in terms of perceptual appeal, very few people considered it to be the easiest booklet to understand, and a substantial proportion considered it to be the most difficult to understand. The most frequently identified booklet as difficult to understand was the "Information on Compensation" booklet.

The following table displays the reasons given for booklets being easy to understand.

Table 48: Reasons why booklets are easy to understand

Why booklet is easy to understand	Percent who identified a booklet as easy to understand (887) %
Tells me all I need to know	42
Not too much wording	22
Easy to read	7
Like comics	7
Pictures tell the story	5
Easy to understand	4
Big letters/print	4
Written for indigenous people	3
Gives a clear picture on the topic	2
The design	1
Other	15

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

Analysis of the reasons given shows that the booklet most commonly identified as easy to understand was significantly more likely to be identified because:

- the booklet told people all they needed to know, and
- the amount of wording used was minimised.

Smaller proportions of people also made mention of the use of pictures to tell a story and the comic book format as reasons for booklets being chosen as easy to understand.

The following table displays the reasons given for booklets being difficult to understand.

Table 49: Reasons why booklets are difficult to understand

Why booklet is difficult to understand	Percent who identified a booklet as difficult to understand (753) %
Complicated wording	35
Too much detail	21
Poor layout/design	11
Not enough detail	7
Too in-depth/too much to read	5
Looks too complex	4
Too big/off putting	4
Irrelevant to me	3
Doesn't say what its about	1
Other	11
Can't say	3

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

The features of booklets which were hard to understand were very similar to those given for brochures. Having an appropriate level of detail presented in clear and simple language will avoid many of the problems people encounter with print based information products.

The use of visual images such as appropriate pictures and photographs are important in giving information products like brochures and booklets perceptual appeal and making them stand out from other products as important and appropriate for indigenous people. The use of pictures and photographs are also useful in conveying meaning to the intended audience. In some cases they may be used to replace or supplement textual information.

While visual images may be used purely as identifiers that a particular product is aimed at an indigenous audience, the use of such images could be made more effective if they relate to the meaning of the information provided, as in a comic or "story-board" style booklet.

4.5.3 Posters

Posters were included in the gamut of print information products to be considered as part of the community interview phase of the study. While posters are generally designed to be used in a different manner to booklets and brochures, many of the issues which relate to the effectiveness of booklets and brochures relate to the effectiveness of posters. The main difference between them is the more visual nature of posters, and generally the simpler the information aims. That is, posters do not usually attempt to provide all the information a person will require on a given topic, but do attempt to capture the attention of a target audience and raise awareness of an issue or reinforce a message in fairly broad and simple terms.

A number of posters with different styles, sizes and designs were used in the study. Some were specifically designed for an indigenous audience while others were designed for broader target groups. Reproductions of the posters are included in Appendix 3. However, brief descriptions of the posters are given below.

1. **JET at a Glance**. This poster is designed to provide a brief summary of the Jobs, Employment and Training (JET) program for sole parents. The poster was considerably smaller than other posters used, approximately the size of an A4 sheet of paper. It had a white background with limited use of red, yellow and blue for some text and an abstract of image human figures.

2. **SNAP/JET**. This poster provided information about a contact officer for the Support Network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parent Program (SNAP) and JET program. While the majority of the poster was text based, a black, red and yellow border with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander designs identified the poster as being intended for an indigenous audience. It was slightly larger than the JET at a glance poster, approximately the size of an A3 sheet of paper.

3. **Child Care Cash Rebate.** This is a brightly coloured poster with an abstract "stick figure" depiction of two people. The main message is to register with Medicare for the Commonwealth Childcare Cash Rebate.

4. **The JET Program.** This is a black and white printed poster with an image of a mother and child embraced in a hug. The photograph takes up the bulk of the poster with only a small amount of text indicating what the JET program is about.

5. **Achieve Your Goal.** This poster displays a colour photograph of a prominent Aboriginal footballer. The photograph is surrounded by a border with indigenous designs and the text "Achieve your goal with the CRS". The message of the poster is to see a CRS officer if help is required with any rehabilitation problems.

6. **Empty Kids Fill up on Petrol.** This poster predominantly black in colour with fluorescent pictures of people sniffing petrol, and a skeleton filling up a coffin with petrol from a bowser. The text "Empty Kids Fill up on Petrol" is presented in large fluorescent lettering below these images.

7. **Aim for One Workforce.** This is another large colourful poster with photographic images of indigenous people engaged in work activity. The main message is to encourage people to participate in work activity and training.

8. **Can We Help Look After Your Children?** This is a large colourful poster which incorporates both Aboriginal paintings of people and children as well as colour photographs. The main caption is "Can we Help?", followed by "look after your children". The main message of the poster is advertising children's services provided by the Department of Human Services and Health.

9. **MACS Kids Stuff.** This is a similar design to the "Can We Help Look After Your Children?" poster, using both indigenous art designs and photographs of children. This poster is also advertising child care services provided by DHSH, with the main caption reading: "MACS Kids Stuff", followed by "A Great Place for Your Kids".

10. **Enrol to Vote.** This is an Australian Electoral Commission poster designed for the Torres Strait. It depicts a cartoon style drawing of a man and woman sitting on a beach painting a boat. The poster uses a great amount of colour, and has the main caption "Enrol to Vote" in large red lettering at the top of the poster. This is followed by the caption "Its your right" at the bottom of the poster in black lettering.

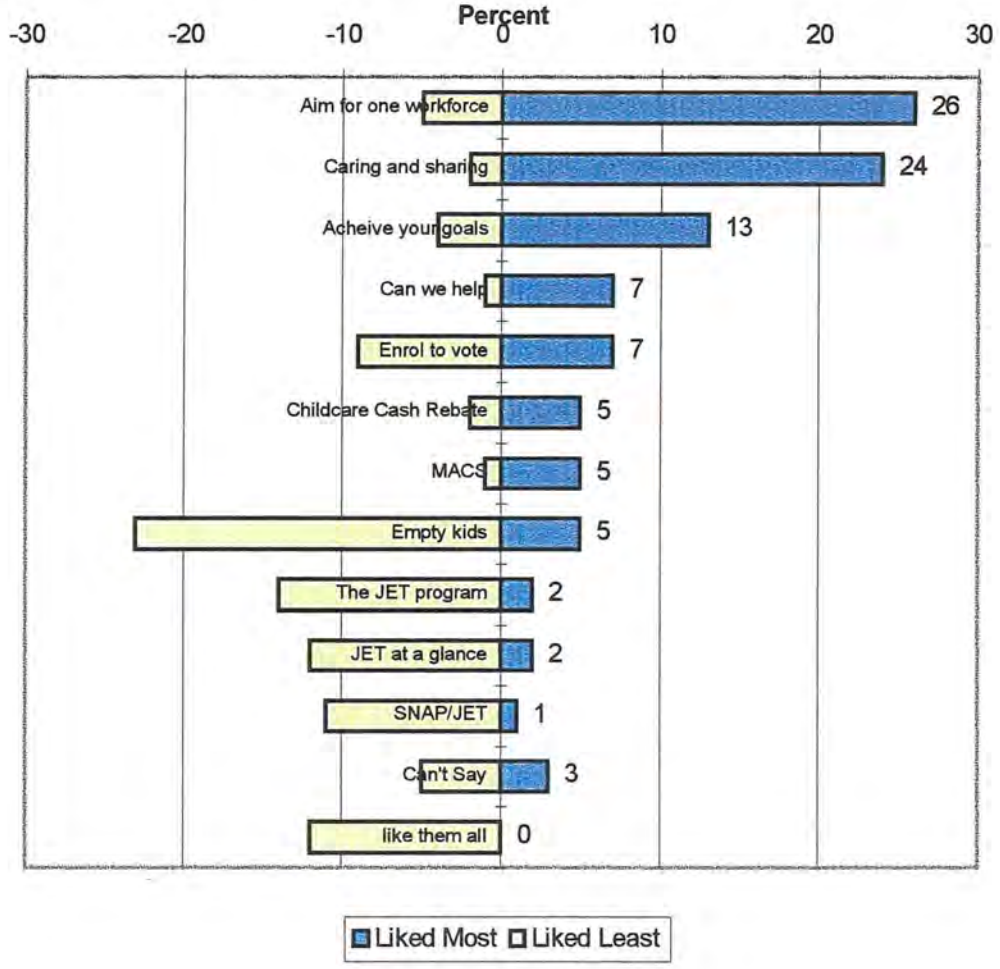
11. **Caring and Sharing.** This brightly coloured poster shows silhouette images of Aboriginal people engaged in a variety of activities. It depicts and encourages a sense of community, with the main message being "Caring and Sharing without Grog".

4.5.3.1 Perceptual Appeal of Posters

It was found that the poster with the greatest perceptual appeal was the "Aim for One Workforce" poster, closely followed by the "Caring and Sharing" poster. These two posters were significantly more likely to be selected by people as the most perceptually appealing compared to the others displayed. The poster which was least liked was clearly identified as the "Empty Kids" poster.

The responses to which poster was liked the most and the least is shown in the following chart.

Figure 20: Posters most and least liked.



It is evident from the above figure that there is a strong dislike for the "Empty Kids" poster, with nearly one in four people indicating they liked it the least. The JET posters were also poorly received in relation to others which were displayed.

Support for the "Aim for One Workforce" poster was greatest in the Bourke, Sydney and Victorian regions with 44%, 36% and 33% respectively, identifying this poster as the most liked. The regions which were less likely to identify this particular poster were Katherine, the Torres Strait and Darwin. In the Darwin and Katherine regions, the most popular poster was the "Caring and Sharing" poster (30% and 45% respectively), while in the Torres Strait it was the "Enrol to Vote" poster (32%).

Given the propensity for people in the Torres Strait to identify most strongly with the "Enrol to Vote" poster: the only poster specifically designed for a Torres Strait Islander audience, it would appear that the use of Torres Strait Island identifiers does raise the perceptual appeal of information products. This is further supported by the findings in relation to booklets, where the HIV/AIDS promotion booklet: the only booklet designed specifically for a Torres Strait Islander audience, was significantly more likely to be identified as having the greatest perceptual appeal.

The "Caring and Sharing" poster was also most likely to be identified as the most liked in Western Australian regions of Geraldton, Pilbara and Broome, and Alice Springs (40% and 53% respectively). In other regions, the most liked poster was fairly evenly divided between the two.

The posters identified as least liked also varied between regions. Significantly higher proportions of people in the Bourke, Pilbara/Geraldton/Broome, and Alice Springs regions indicated the "Empty Kids" poster was the least liked (39%, 30% and 33% respectively). People in Victoria, and the regions of Brisbane, Roma, and Katherine were significantly more likely to nominate one of the JET posters as being the least liked.

Some significant differences were identified between the preferences for males and females. Females were significantly more likely to prefer both the "Aim for One Workforce" (28% cf. 24%), "Caring and sharing" (28% cf. 20%), and the "Childcare Cash Rebate" (7% cf. 3%) posters, while males were more likely to prefer the "Achieve Your Goals" poster (19% cf. 8%). It could be hypothesised the sporting image of a footballer on the "Achieve Your Goals" poster has greater appeal among males. There was however, no significant difference between males and females in terms of the posters least liked.

Differences were also observed between younger and older age groups for the posters liked most, but not for the posters liked least. Those aged 14 to 19 years were also significantly more likely to identify the "Achieve Your Goals" poster (21% cf. 13% overall) when compared to other aged groups. Those aged 50 years or more were more likely to identify the "Caring and Sharing" poster (28% cf. 24% overall) and the "Enrol to vote" poster (12% cf. 7%) overall, but significantly less likely to identify the "Aim for one workforce" poster (16% cf. 26% overall).

No significant differences were observed between people with child care responsibilities and those without for either the posters liked most or the posters liked least.

There was however, some variation in the posters liked for people with other care responsibilities. Those with responsibilities for the care of an aged or disabled person were significantly more likely to identify the "Caring and Sharing" poster relative to those without such responsibilities (38% cf. 24% overall).

The reasons for identifying a poster as having the greatest perceptual appeal are similar the those identified for booklets and brochures. That is, the most frequently identified reasons for liking a poster tend to fall into at least one of the following categories:

- the picture on the poster;
- the colour of the poster;
- the topic of the poster; and
- the wording on the poster.

The complete list of reasons given are shown in the following table.

Table 50: Reasons for liking posters

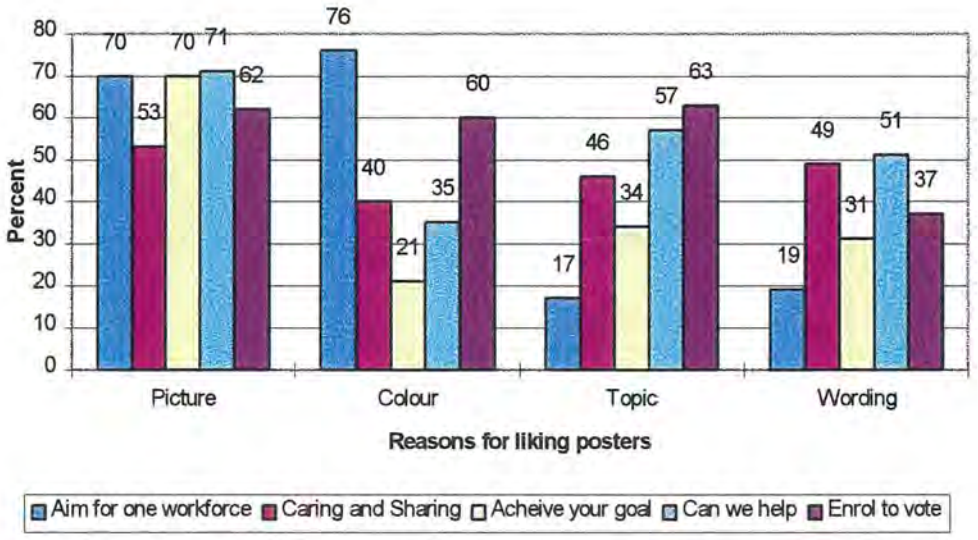
Reasons for liking posters	Percent of those who liked a poster (973) %
Picture on the poster	61
Colour of the poster	48
Topic of the poster	35
Wording of the poster	33
Eye catching/stands out	3
Like the message	3
Like sport/Chris Lewis	2
Like the artwork/design	2
Right amount of information	2
Involves kids	2
Other	10
Can't Say	1

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

Given the highly visual nature of posters, it is not surprising that many respondents primarily judge the appeal of the poster on the picture or graphic images displayed and the colours used. The topic and the wording of captions are secondary to these more aesthetic factors. This is not to imply that the topic and the wording used on a poster are not important, indeed, if the topic or wording was deemed to be inappropriate or offensive, then a poster would have virtually no success in meeting its objective.

The reasons given by people who nominated the poster which had the greatest perceptual appeal tended to focus on the pictures and colours as the reasons for their nomination. The following chart displays the reasons given by those people who nominated the five most popular posters.

Figure 21: Reasons for liking the five most popular posters



It can be seen from the above figure that a sizeable majority of the 26% of people who nominated the "Aim for one workforce" poster liked it because of the pictures and colours used.

In comparison, the "Caring and Sharing" poster was more likely to be nominated by the 24% of people who liked it, because of a combination of aesthetic and semantic factors. The sentiment expressed in this particular poster and the "Can We Help" poster were more prominent factors in people choosing those as the most liked relative to the others on display.

The reasons given by those who favoured the "Achieve Your Goal" poster certainly related to the picture of a prominent Aboriginal footballer. The proportion of 13% of people who indicated they liked this poster because of the picture was more than double the proportion who liked the poster for other reasons.

The 7% of people who selected the "Enrol to Vote" poster as having the greatest perceptual appeal gave reasons justifying their choice which were evenly spread over the picture and colours used, the topic and to a lesser degree the wording.

The reasons given for disliking posters were, as with the other printed information products, the antithesis of the reasons given for liking posters. The proportion of people who gave a type of reason for disliking a poster are shown in the following table.

Table 51: Reasons for liking posters

Reasons for disliking posters	Percent of those who disliked a poster (829) %
Don't like the picture on the poster	31
Don't like the wording	21
Not enough colour on the poster	20
Topic is not interesting	17
Don't like the colour on the poster	14
No picture on the poster	5
Don't understand what the poster is about	4
Poster/picture too small	4
Boring/dull	4
Don't like the message/subject	4
Plain	2
Too much to do with death	2
Not appropriate	1
Other	15
Can't Say	2

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100% as respondents could give more than one reason.

The posters which were most frequently identified as being the least liked seem to have been selected as such for slightly different reasons.

The poster most often rated as least liked: "Empty Kids" was most likely to be rated as such because people did not like the pictures used on the poster. Given the pictures used images of a skeleton and a coffin, this is not a surprising finding. Although this was the main reason for the "Empty Kids" poster being selected as the least liked, it was also likely to have a significantly higher proportion of people disliking for other reasons. These other reasons included 39% of those who did not like it because of the wording used, 19% because of the colours used, 12% because of the subject and message portrayed, and 6% because the poster dealt too much with death.

The JET program poster, which was mainly comprised of a black and white photograph of a mother and child in an embrace, was largely disliked because of the lack of colour. Sixty percent of 14% who indicated this poster was the one they liked least gave the lack of colour as the reason. A further 44% indicated they did not like the picture itself.

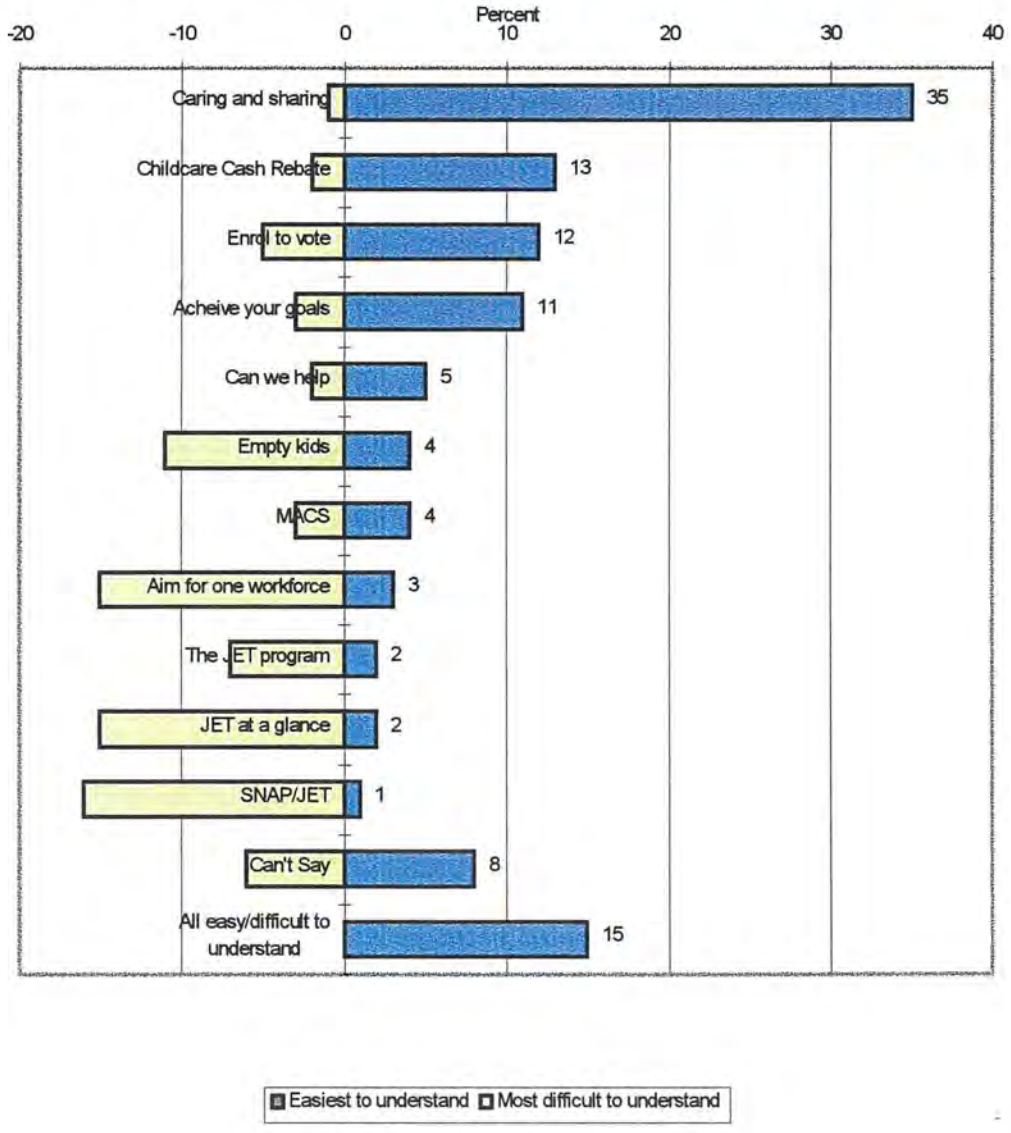
The "JET at a Glance" poster was also disliked because of a lack of colour even though some colour was used in the background image and for some text. Forty-eight percent of those who did not like this poster reported the lack of colour as the reason. A further 30% of those who did not like this poster indicated the wording used on the poster as a reason. This poster did have more text than any of the other posters considered, and the response is possibly in relation to the amount of text rather than the choice of words used.

The third JET poster: "SNAP/JET", was generally disliked because the topic addressed by the poster was not interesting, and the poster lacked colour despite the border of this poster incorporating a red, yellow and black indigenous design. Of the 11% who liked this poster the least, 33% indicated the reason for their judgement was due to an uninteresting topic, while 30% indicated the reason was due to a lack of colour.

4.5.3.2 Understanding of Posters

As with other printed information products, the posters with the greatest perceptual appeal were not always the posters considered easiest to understand. The perceived understanding of each poster is shown in the figure below.

Figure 22: Ease and difficulty of understanding by poster



The poster which stands out as easy to understand is the "Caring and Sharing" poster, with over one third of the population identifying this particular product. It is interesting to note how the poster most commonly identified as having the greatest perceptual appeal: "Aim for One Workforce", was one of the posters most likely to be nominated as difficult to understand.

There were few significant differences among different sub-groups within the indigenous population in terms of the brochures identified as easy or difficult to understand.

The main reasons given by people when indicating why a poster was easy to understand focused almost exclusively on two issues:

- the amount of information conveyed by the poster; and
- the amount of text on the poster.

The posters nominated as easy to understand typically "told respondents all they needed to know" about the topic, and did so with a minimum of textual information. Fifty-six percent of respondents who nominated a poster as being easy to understand gave a response which indicated they felt the poster gave them an adequate amount of information, while 38% indicated the poster had an appropriate amount of wording.

Of the posters considered the easiest to understand, the "Caring and Sharing" and "Enrol to vote" posters were significantly more likely to be nominated for both of these reasons (69% and 62% respectively for "tells me all I need to know", and 44% and 42% respectively for "not too much wording"). The "Achieve Your Goal" poster was significantly more likely to have been nominated because of the poster telling the respondents all they needed to know (74%), but was significantly less likely to be nominated because of having an appropriate amount of wording (22%).

The "Child Care Cash Rebate" poster tended to be nominated for the opposite reasons. That is, 70% of those who nominated this poster as the easiest to understand did so because the poster did not have too much wording, and a comparatively low 40% because the poster told them all they needed to know.

The reasons given as to why a poster was considered difficult to understand were a little more varied.

Table 52: Reasons why posters are difficult to understand

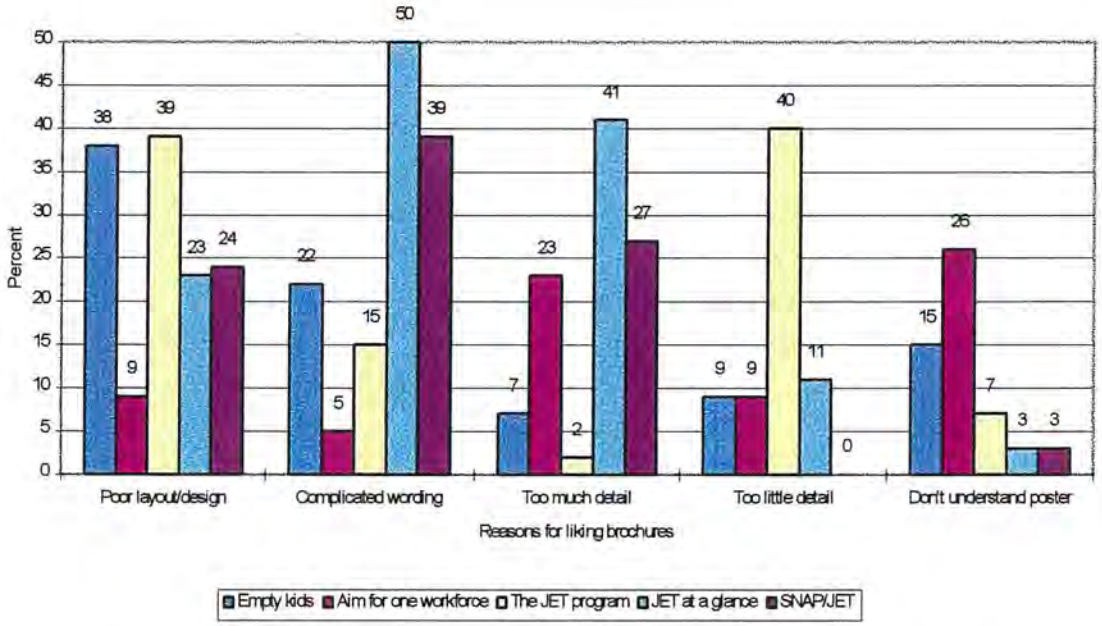
Why poster is difficult to understand	Percent who identified a poster as difficult to understand (791) %
Poor layout/design	20
Complicated wording	19
Too much detail	15
Not enough detail	13
Hard to understand/don't understand topic/message	8
Can't tell what it is about	6
Print is too small	4
Confusing	3
Not enough information	3
Too much text	2
Poster is too small	1
Other	14
Can't say	4

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% as not all respondents identified a poster that was easy to understand.

It is apparent, from the reasons given in the above table that layout and design are key features of a poster which will be easily understood. An understandable poster should also avoid the use of complicated wording or acronyms which may not be understood or recognised by the target audience. A fine balance also needs to be discovered between providing too much information on a poster and so little that the poster is meaningless.

The following figure displays the posters most likely to be nominated as difficult to understand, and examines the reasons given as to why these posters were perceived to be so.

Figure 23: Reasons for difficulty in understanding the posters which were most difficult to understand



It is evident from the above figure that the main reason for difficulty in understanding the "Empty Kids" poster can be related to a perceived poor layout and design. The layout and design of "The JET program" poster was also identified as a key reason for those who had difficulty in understanding it. A lack of detail was the other main criticism levelled at this particular poster. The "JET at a glance" poster suffered in terms of understanding for other reasons, namely too much information and use of complicated wording.

The reasons problems in understanding the SNAP/JET poster were more evenly distributed between use of complicated wording and provision of too much detail.

4.6 Media Usage

One of the main objectives of the study was to measure and compare the impact of different media on recall, recognition and acceptance of health and welfare information among indigenous people. It was decided that media usage patterns within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities would enhance this information and provide a practical guide for departments to plan future promotional activities by way of the most effective mediums specific to urban, rural and remote areas.

In order to provide a broad overview of media usage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it was necessary to use a research methodology that was a sound instrument in collecting the most accurate data possible. The methodology used in the study was one adapted from the Roy Morgan Research Readership Survey, conducted every week throughout Australia.

Respondents were asked which newspapers and magazines they had read, TV they had watched and radio they had listened to in the last 7 days. This method recognises the greater difficulty people have in remembering what they did several weeks ago than in remembering what they did last week. Times of the day, stations regularly watched and listened to, as well as estimates of hours spent watching and listening each week were also asked of people interviewed.

Where possible, comparisons with national figures have been tentatively made. While the methodology is similar, the sampling is different and hence makes direct comparability difficult.