



MEDIA RELEASE

Senator Amanda Vanstone

Minister for Family & Community Services

Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women

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More Help For Indigenous Australians

Indigenous Australians remain the most disadvantaged group in our society. New research being announced today will give us a better understanding of the factors that are responsible for this unacceptable hardship.

Australia's first ever Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children will be funded to the tune of \$8.6 million over the first four years. The study will focus on the links between early childhood experiences and later life outcomes for Indigenous children. This ground breaking research will give us far better insight into how an Indigenous child's early years affect how they mature and develop.

Two age groups will be tracked comprising 2,000 babies aged under 12 months and 2,000 four to five year olds. The study will be preceded by two years of extensive consultations with Indigenous people, communities and organisations to ensure that its design reflects their interests and is done in a way that benefits Indigenous children and their families. Around one quarter of children participating in the study will be chosen from remote areas.

We will also ensure funding to the Centre for Aboriginal Economic and Policy Research (CAEPR) so it can continue to carry out research relevant to Indigenous policy. Its current contract with FaCS expires at the end of 2003. The institute is respected nationally and internationally for its specialist work.

Indigenous Australians in rural and remote communities will gain better access to Centrelink services through funding of \$8.2 million over four years to expand Centrelink's Agent and Access Point Network.

The funding will help Centrelink expand its network in remote communities by the opening of 50 new Agent sites to ensure that people living in remote locations gain access to a trained Agent, supported by Centrelink.

The Agents will help overcome cultural and linguistic barriers that Indigenous people face in their dealings with Commonwealth services, particularly in remote communities as Centrelink agents will be local community members with knowledge of local language and cultural issues.

The first 25 sites will be established by January 2004 with the remaining 25 sites being established by July 2005. The locations of the Agents will be chosen in consultation with the local Indigenous communities.

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