

Speech by Mayor Logan K Howlett, JP

GOV 31 National Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing Forum

Monday 13 February 2017

Pan Pacific Hotel, Perth

Kaya, Wanju Wanju Beeliar Boodjar

(Hello, Welcome to the land of the Beeliar people)

I thank Dr Richard Walley OAM for his 'Welcome to Country' as he shared with us significant aspects of his continuing culture and how it shapes our daily lives in so many different ways.

I am delighted and indeed honoured to join you today to address the subject of:

Who should do what?

Gauging the role of local government in Aboriginal mental health issues.

I acknowledge the Whadjuk - Beeliar People of the Nyungar Nation the Custodians on whose land we are meeting today.

I pay respect to their Elders both past and present and extend that respect to Indigenous Australians from across our nation and the representatives of the First People of other Nations who are with us today.

The month of February is reflected in the Nyungar 6 seasons calendar as 'Bunuru'.

Just recently I undertook to learn the Nyungar language, initially through the Nyungar dictionary and then working towards bringing the words into phrases. I'll know more in 12 months as to my progress.

One of my granddaughters, Caitlin, has learnt many Nyungar songs. She often says it's easier to learn through song, picking up the rhythms and beats than using my approach. Hmmm! Food for thought, if you've got a great voice.

Ladies and gentlemen – the statements I make today are of a personal nature and do not necessarily reflect that of the City of Cockburn.

Gauging the role of local government in Aboriginal mental health issues is a shared responsibility. It is one that we can all play a vital role in shaping the outcomes.

There is also no doubt that all levels of government have an important role to play in the mental health and well-being of their respective communities.

While there continues to be much talk about this subject it is the facts and figures that reveal the true story.

It is a story that says what we are doing is not good enough – it is not good enough for the many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People where we have not ‘Closed the Gap’.

We need to address the fact that only 6% of local governments have a Reconciliation Action Plan and ask the question, why?

Yes, only 6% of local governments.

There remains much unfinished business that we need to partner on if we are to move forward.

Who should do what?

Gauging the role of local government in Aboriginal mental health issues.

In doing this I will comment on the following:

- Examining current policies and evaluating their outcomes and identifying gaps and successes;
- Evaluating how local governments can support Aboriginal health services in remote and rural areas; and
- Looking ahead – defining the next steps to tackle mental health issues among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Firstly, Examining current policies and evaluating their outcomes and identifying gaps and successes.

Local governments across Australia have variously adopted and implemented policies for the health and well-being of their communities.

Like all policies and procedures there are successes and failures.

The City of Cockburn has a strong record of working with members of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People across a range of programs and activities value adding wherever possible.

Our aim is to inform, engage and educate our community in partnership with our Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander community about the rich history and culture of our First Nation People.

Examples include:

Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)

First introduced in 2011 the RAP has been reviewed and updated on a regular basis and is used as a guiding tool to 'Close the Gap'.

Aboriginal Reference Group

- Membership includes members of our Nyungar community, including Elders;
- It meets on a monthly basis;
- Provides a point of contact and liaison between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the City of Cockburn;
- Provides a leadership, advocacy and advisory role;
- Encourages communication, participation and sharing of information and knowledge; and
- Strengthens our understanding and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, culture and achievements.

Aboriginal Community Development Officer

- A full time role that builds and strengthens relationships between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the City of Cockburn;
- Supports the development and implementation of culturally appropriate events, activities, and programs; and

- Raises awareness of Aboriginal culture and history.

Disability Access and Inclusion Plan

- Dedicated officer working full time; and
- Works to ensure all events and activities are accessible and inclusive as possible.

Kwobarup Social Club

- Kwobarup Social Club is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander seniors and people with a disability.
- The Club provides transport and meals and provides a chance for people to get out of their home, make and maintain friendships, pursue hobbies and interests, get regular exercise and enjoy what the community has to offer.

My Time: Our Time

A Cockburn Early Years & Cockburn Family support event and an Aboriginal Parents & Grandparents Support Group that involves sharing friendship, sharing time, sharing experiences - Listening, Craft, Food, Fun, Friendship, Stories, Learning Family Connection.

There is no cost involved for participants and childcare is also provided.

Nyungar Wardan Katitjin Bidi Derbal Nara (People's Ocean Knowledge Trail of Cockburn Sound & Districts)

A partnership with the Derbalnara, Coast West, Curtin University, the Coastal Collaboration Cluster and the City of Cockburn to define the knowledge trail of place names and features.

Nyungar Tourist Trail at Port Coogee

The trail includes seven glass artworks created by local artists in Debra Bonar, Wendy Hayden and Joanna Robertson covering stories of re-generation, hazy summer, gathering, wetlands in spring, shallow waters, crossing Cockburn Sound and Beeliar Boodjar.

It also includes the recently named, Ngarkal (Seagull) Beach.

Other initiatives/activities include:

- Adopting appropriate strategies ie 'Cultural Strategy'
- Fremantle Street Doctor;
- partner with Act Belong Commit, a mental health promotion campaign;
- South Lake Ottey Family Centre;
- Bibra Lake Regional Playground – Nyungar theme – story telling;
- Karri – Wongin - a Community Celebration of the Spirit of the Lakes;
- A boardwalk and bird hide - the boardwalk is named “Narma Kullarck” a Nyungar phrase that means ‘Family Place’;
- Nyungar story telling at various locations;
- A planned Nyungar Information and Visitors Centre near the shores of Bibra Lake;
- Youth Centre for 10 – 24 year olds;
- Nyungar walks covering plants, animals and their relationship to community;
- NAIDOC Week Celebrations;
- National Reconciliation Week;
- Cultural competence training for all staff;
- Holding forums ie Protective Behaviours, Methamphetamine, Cyber Safety etc;
- Extensive Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander art collection – I add that my family have an extensive collection of Aboriginal artworks including that of Noel Morrison, painting in the Carrolup Style which dated back to the 1960’s and noting that Curtin University, Western Australia was recently involved in a major exhibition of the Carrolup style;
- Citizenship ceremonies;
- Acknowledgement of Country;
- Indigenous Calendar;
- Subsidised hire of halls for funerals and other events;
- Receiving First nation People from other countries and bringing them together with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People to share knowledge and experiences; and
- Many more activities.

Leading by example is one true way of getting results.

Nyungar and Torres Strait Islander People are bringing about change in our City and further afield.

As the Mayor, City of Cockburn our Council is committed to partner to bring about positive change that reflects on the health and well-being of our community.

I know our staff are involved in the implementation of our RAP and the partnerships we are forming are growing in strength day by day.

Today, I particularly thank the Nyungar Elders from our community and the Aboriginal Reference Group – their leadership, knowledge and commitment are highly valued and respected.

Secondly, Evaluating how local governments can support Aboriginal health services in remote and rural areas;

It is often said that local government is the one closest to the people – at the grassroots of a community – most able to respond to the needs of the community in a timely and effective manner – able to gain maximum results for the dollars invested.

Although the City of Cockburn is a Perth metropolitan based local government I believe there are fundamental opportunities whereby local governments can support Aboriginal health services in remote and rural areas.

The recent Western Australian Public Health Act 2016 that came into effect on 24 January 2017 places certain responsibilities on local governments.

It is an Act to protect, promote and improve the health and wellbeing of the public of Western Australia and to reduce the incidence of preventable illness, and for related purposes.

Partnerships with their respective local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, State Government departments, the business sector and the wider community can result in cost effective outcomes for everyone.

Other ways local governments in rural and remote communities can support Aboriginal health services are:

- Identify **CHAMPIONS** in their community to get the ball rolling;
- Learn from the experience of other local governments;
- Push for a dedicated public health officer and a community engagement officer within your local government;
- Partner with a larger local government who have the 'runs on the board';
- Adopt a Reconciliation Action Plan;
- Adopt policies and procedures (modified to local circumstances);
- Seek out community volunteers;
- Engage with the corporate sector to fund local programs;
- Seek sponsorship for health related equipment;
- Liaise with Rotary Clubs, Lions Clubs and other service organisations to support community initiatives from afar;

Finally, Looking ahead – defining the next steps to tackle mental health issues among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We must acknowledge that the challenge is one for all levels of government, the Elders of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities, health practitioners and other stakeholders who are involved in the mental health field.

I am aware that the Government of Western Australia announced regional services reform in May 2015 to improve the lives of Aboriginal people in regional and remote Western Australia. The reform aims to bring about long-term, systemic change.

Regional services reform is focusing on three main areas:

1. Improved living conditions that enable families to prosper and don't hold them back.
2. Supporting families to build their skills, and overcome any barriers to doing so, through improved service redesign and delivery.
3. Education, employment and housing opportunities, and support for families to take them up.

The City of Cockburn is facilitating partnerships through the Collective Impact Model ie part of the South West Metropolitan Partnership Forum and the Connecting Community for Kids Project for the Early Years.

The challenges are to build and maintain relationships over time by:

- Mutual respect and understanding;
- Investing time and championing the cause;
- Establish programs and activities aimed at prevention;
- Community engagement;
- Capacity for effective reach into the community;
- Listening and being available;
- Minimising bureaucratic red tape;
- Putting the resources on the ground;
- Adding value or don't get involved;
- Believing that you can bring about change

In closing, I thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

Mental health issues can be addressed if a holistic approach is taken.

The more we can do together in terms of respecting the culture, heritage and values that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, our First Nation People, hold for the land and their families, the better off we will be.

A statement from our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People is: "Cockburn's Solid".

Each and every local government should set out to achievement the same or similar comment from their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – it would mean that we have progressed along a journey walking side by side – wearing our heart on our sleeve – determined to make a difference – determined to 'Close the Gap'.

Thank you.