



HUNTER NEW ENGLAND
NSW HEALTH

Toomelah Boggabilla Strategy

Indigenous Health

Prepared by Ms Kim Browne
Population Health, Planning and Performance
Hunter New England Health Service

October 2007

Toomelah Boggabilla Strategy

Aim:

To develop an effective, long-lasting partnership with the Aboriginal communities of Toomelah and Boggabilla, and with government agencies in NSW and Queensland to build community capacity and improve the health and wellbeing of these communities.



HUNTER NEW ENGLAND
NSW HEALTH

© Hunter New England Area Health Service 2005. All rights reserved.



Indigenous Rural Women's Steering Committee, 2006, also including elders from St. George, Mitchell and Roma.

Nature of the Problem

- Toomelah and Boggabilla are isolated Aboriginal communities with an array of social and health problems
- In early 2005 the Toomelah community elders approached government agencies seeking agreement to work with the community to address a range of issues of concern. They nominated as priorities: (1) health, (2) child sexual abuse, (3) policing.
- The issues are complex and require coordinated and sustained response from wide a range of government agencies in order to make a difference.

Extent of the Problem

- 1988 Toomelah Report by Justice Einfeld for the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
- 1991 Community Profile, written in collaboration with community members
- 2001 Boggabilla/Toomelah Community Link Report by Jill French for the NSW Premier's Department
- 2002 Toomelah Community Consultation Report by the Indigenous Health Division of the School of Population Health, University of Queensland.
- In 2005 the community elders indicated that many children have been sexually abused and that “enough is enough”, i.e. they are ready to work collaboratively with Government to put an end to this ongoing abuse.

Strategic Importance

- Two Ways Together, to a whole of government approach to working with Aboriginal communities.
- State Plan and State Health Plan
 - addressing Aboriginal disadvantage, and
 - taking a whole of government approach.
 - In particular, NSW Health Strategic Direction 4 – Build regional and other partnerships for health.
- Hunter New England Health has nominated in its strategic plan the following objectives:
 - Reduced gap in health and wellbeing between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people
 - Engaging our partners in improving the health of our communities



Healing Weekend Retreat at Yamba



HUNTER NEW ENGLAND
NSW HEALTH

© Hunter New England Area Health Service 2005. All rights reserved.

Planning & Implementing Solutions

- Met with elders of the communities, to hear their concerns and discuss approaches to tackling the issues.
- Two additional positions:
 - Family and Child Counsellor (Child Sexual Assault)
 - Community Development Facilitator.
 - Add to the RN's, AHW's, part time GPs and other visiting health professionals who also service the communities.
 - Many projects and activities
- Regional Coordination Management Group (RCMG) nominated Toomelah/Boggabilla as a key strategy
 - meets regularly to progress multi-agency approaches
 - HNEH is an active participant.

Proposed Solutions

- Child protection

- Multi-agency reference group
- analysed recent JIRT cases (Police) , Child Protection Reports (DOCS), NSW and Queensland Health data on child suicide attempts, sexually transmitted diseases and other potential indicators of abuse
- Root cause analysis
- Recommended a number of changes in how the three key agencies (Health, DoCS and Police) operate together, and how systems can support a more effective response to at risk children and families.
- DoCS continues to coordinate immediate response,
- DoCS, Police and Health, Education and Housing & other agencies, and NGOs involved

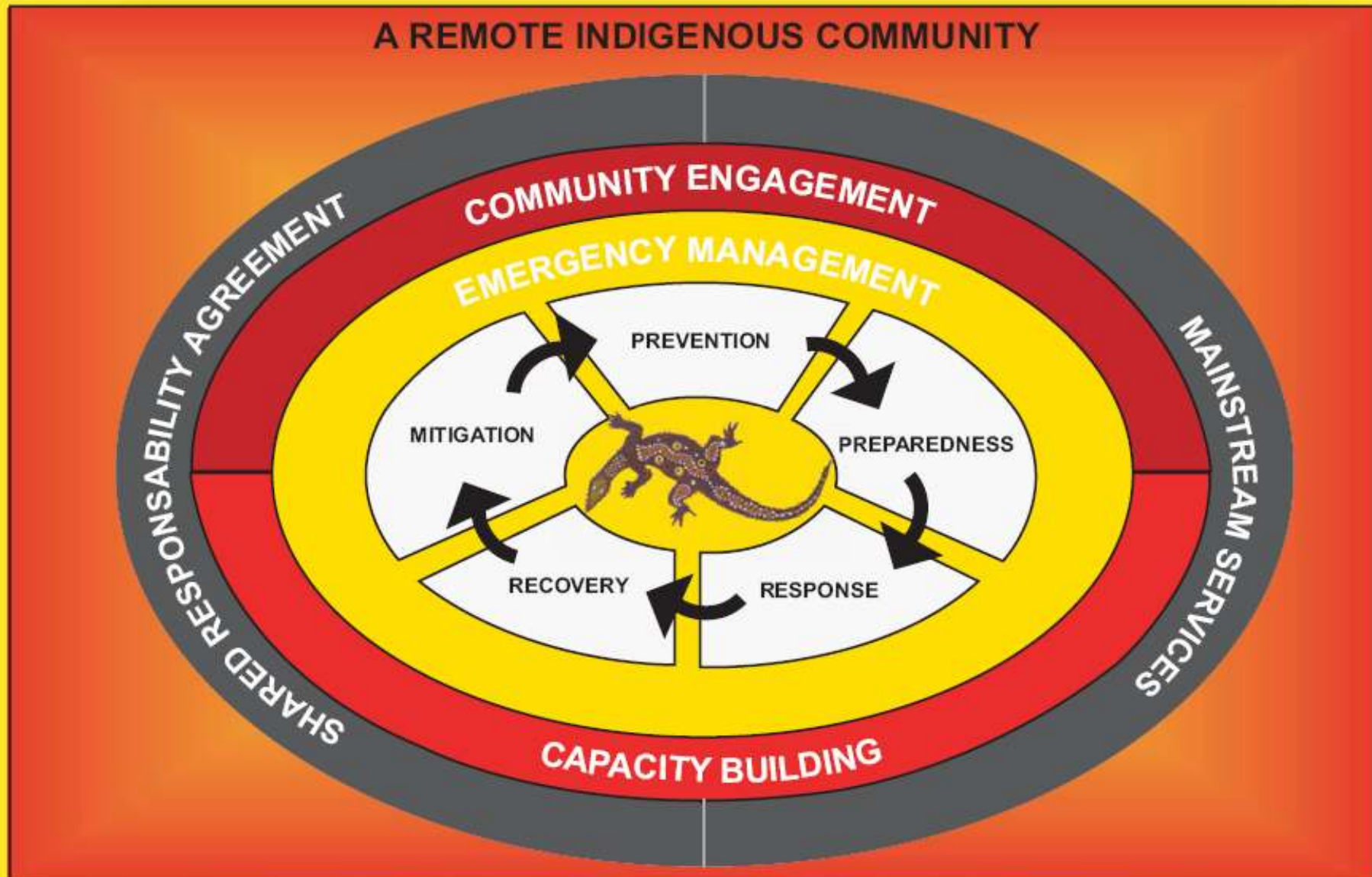
Proposed Solutions

- Water quality in Toomelah
 - working group involving many agencies
 - Water Quality day with the community
 - agreement to a wide range of specific actions

- Response to community emergencies
 - HNEH led the development of a Social Emergency Management Framework for Remote Aboriginal Communities, and
 - protocols for response, based on existing JIRT protocols, to instances of child sexual abuse as a first specific example of how the framework can operate.

SOCIAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

FOR THE IMMEDIATE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL EMERGENCIES IN REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES, TO BE COMPLEMENTED BY MEASURES THAT REMEDY THE CAUSES UNDERLYING THE EMERGENCY.



Outcomes & Evaluation

- Long-term program of activity
- Partnerships stronger, regular collaboration and higher level of trust.
- Community remains engaged
- Statement from a community advocate at a meeting: “it feels like government are now listening to us”.
- Used as model for locational responses under the Government Response to the Aboriginal Child Sexual Assault Taskforce Report.
- Representatives asked to lead the recent JIRT Review



Holiday program with Boggabilla children at the park

HUNTER NEW ENGLAND
NSW HEALTH

© Hunter New England Area Health Service 2005. All rights reserved.

Sustaining Change

- Growing community confidence to work with government.
- Many other objectives, such as improved health, wellbeing, and community capacity, require a long lead time to show the benefits.
- Agreement on a model for community governance and ongoing engagement between the community and government.
- The RCMG continues to focus on moving forward.
- Next strategies include employment opportunities for young Aboriginal people from these towns, other community building work, and ensuring the agreed community engagement structures are developed and become sustainable.



Lessons Learned

- Requires:
 - strong and enduring commitment from the most senior levels of all government agencies
 - Regular discussions with community representatives and
 - visible action on the ground
 - Persistence, patience, cultural respect, time



Holiday program with Boggabilla children fishing

HUNTER NEW ENGLAND
NSW HEALTH

© Hunter New England Area Health Service 2005. All rights reserved.

Future Scope

- Greater linkage of Community Development Facilitator to other agencies
- Approach can be used in any isolated Aboriginal community.
- Within our Area, a similar approach has now been adopted for the Purfleet/Taree community, which has also identified as a community with significant social problems including child sexual abuse.