

MEDIA RELEASE

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Federal Government intervention in NT Indigenous communities misguided

The Government's attention to the urgency of the problems of child abuse, violence, poverty and demoralisation that exist in many Northern Territory Indigenous communities is welcome, however child-safe and child-friendly communities must be built on a basis of partnership and trust with those most affected, rather than on an interventionist short-term approach. The Government's focus on policing highlights an important part of community safety and child protection, but it is only part of the picture.

"This type of approach risks reinforcing these very problems by promoting widespread fear and distrust," said Amanda Gordon, President of the Australian Psychological Society.

"There is a need to focus on prevention as well as crisis responses. In addition to policing and medical teams, other professionals such as psychologists have the expertise to assist in community level education and prevention as well as service delivery.

"Where communities are struggling with the effects of historical and ongoing dispossession and cultural trauma, psychologists can be part of a process of empowerment, asking community leaders what they need most, and providing the supplementary services to promote healing, repair the damage and prepare for the next generation."

"We are also alarmed by the dominant media images of Indigenous people as problematic – psychological research on racism and prejudice warns of the negative effects of loaded representations of already marginalised groups," said Gordon.

"We believe that the short and long-term focus needs to be on addressing the infrastructure gaps, funding shortages, and limited resources for living that characterise Aboriginal communities, to our national shame," said Gordon.

An APS Statement on this issue is available at:
http://www.psychology.org.au/news/news_updates/

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