

Partnership approach missing in Stronger Futures legislation

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is calling on the government to listen to the concerns of the Yolngu Nations Assembly in relation to the new Stronger Futures legislation proposed for the Northern Territory. “Lack of negotiations and the tight time frame of community consultations demonstrate a lack of community ownership and a breakdown in government relationships with communities,” said Vanessa Lee, Vice President of the PHAA.

“There is no evidence of community ownership in the legislation. This will make it difficult for the Australian government to achieve the Council of Australian Government’s broader objectives. There is also an underlying issue in relation to the ongoing abuse of trust by government services which continues to undermine community governance and create a sense of disempowerment amongst these people.

“The PHAA is concerned about the violations of human rights that are inherent in the proposed Stronger Futures legislation. The legislation also contradicts the strong evidence that self-determination - and being fully engaged as partners in decision making - are critical factors to improving the health of populations. In Australia, every major report published in the last decade or more supports this approach. Even the latest Productivity Commission report has as its first finding and recommendation, the need for the power to make decisions to be in Aboriginal hands.

“All the key reports have identified the importance of respectful partnerships. And there is strong evidence to support the relationship between these partnerships and improved health and wellbeing outcomes across all fields of social development.

“The PHAA supports the Yolngu Nations Assembly’s stance that the Australian Government needs to end the current interventionist policies and agendas. It is time to return to a mindset of partnership based on the principles of self-determination and respectful negotiation,” said Ms Lee.