New Indigenous Affairs portfolio to coordinate work on closing the gap

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The need for a Territory Minister directly responsible for driving reform in Indigenous Affairs has been made plain in the latest ‘Closing the Gap’ report released today.

“This report paints a stark picture of life for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory who are caught up in the entrenched effects of a passive welfare system,” Chief Minster Adam Giles said.

“We are not seeing the improvements in life expectancy, chronic disease and education that we should be. We need to do better.

“While there is undoubtedly room for improvement, I do want to take issue with Mick Gooda’s characterisation of the current situation at the Alice Springs Hospital.

“Since we introduced our comprehensive suite of alcohol measures a year ago there has been a dramatic decline in alcohol-related violence in Alice Springs. A combination of policies, including stationing Police at bottleshops, Alcohol Protection Orders and paperless arrests, has seen alcohol-related assaults drop by 30 per cent.

“This approach has been controversial but the results speak for themselves. The success of these measures has been acknowledged by the People’s Alcohol Action Coalition and yet Delia Lawrie still maintains these policies are “stupid”.

“We can no longer blindly accept and defend the status quo. It’s time to do things differently and I will be using my new Indigenous Affairs portfolio to drive the policy change needed to turn the indicators around.

“Job creation and economic development are at the heart of this process and they are the key to helping the next generation break free of the welfare cycle.”

In the past, Indigenous Affairs and Advancement portfolios have involved the creation of stand-alone departments to deal with the Indigenous issues in various portfolios.

“I have always felt this separate arrangement encouraged a view that Indigenous policy and service delivery was not the core business of individual departments and agencies. I don’t believe this process is in the best interests of Indigenous Territorians,” Mr Giles said.
"I acknowledge that without a single Minister driving these issues, there has been a lack of significant improvement in some areas of government despite the massive amounts of money spent.

“That’s why I have established this new coordination portfolio which is aimed at driving reform across agencies and across Government ensuring we are all on the working on the same page and treating Indigenous policy issues with the priority they deserve.”

The portfolio will see the creation of a coordination unit within the Department of Chief Minister but there will not be a standalone department as existed in the past.

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