



7 October 2009

National Compact Section  
Dept. of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

By email: [australiancompact@fhcsia.gov.au](mailto:australiancompact@fhcsia.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam,

**Re: National Compact Consultation Paper**

I am writing on behalf of the Australian Federation of Aids Organisations (AFAO), in response to the request for feedback regarding the proposed National Compact.

The Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO) is the peak body for Australia's community sector response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. AFAO is charged with representing the views of our members: the AIDS Councils in each state and territory, the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS, the Australian Illicit and Injecting Drug Users League, the Anwernekenhe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander HIV/AIDS Alliance (ANA) and Scarlet Alliance (the national organisation representing sex workers). AFAO provides HIV (and STI) prevention education and health promotion to members of affected communities. We also provides HIV policy advice to the Commonwealth Government, advocates for our member organisations, develops and formulates policy on HIV/AIDS issues, and promotes medical and social research into HIV/AIDS and its effects.

We commend the Government for the National Compact initiative, and agree that the proposed principles and priorities set out in the discussion paper will promote healthy relationships between NGO's and the Government. We took part in the ACOSS consultations, and rather than respond to each of the questions posed in the paper we make the following general comments.

**The vision statement**

Our only criticism regarding the proposed vision statement is that it does not look beyond Australia's shores. While it could be argued that this is because the Government's Social Inclusion Agenda is limited to issues impacting on Australian society, the work of many Australian NGO's and Commonwealth departments necessarily extends to international work, at government and community levels.

AFAO's vision statement, "Living in a world with AIDS, working for a world without AIDS", effectively extends AFAO's partnership with the Australian Government in its Australian

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social inclusion agenda so as to encompass liaison with international HIV/AIDS and other health organisations. The development of policy and programmatic responses to HIV/AIDS at regional and global levels is an important and crucial part of our work, particularly our work with NGO's and governments in the Asia-Pacific. This work is directly relevant to the development of Australia's domestic policies and to the Government's current reform agenda, e.g., the enquiry into our migration treatment of disability, and the development of a suite of national strategies to respond to bloodborne viruses and STIs.

Capacity-building in the Asia-Pacific is a crucial and legitimate aspect of the work of the Government and also of NGO's such as AFAO. We therefore suggest that the draft vision statement be revised so as to read:

“... with better quality of life for Australians *and our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific.*”

### **Inclusiveness and diversity**

Given AFAO's role as the peak body for Australia's community sector response to HIV/AIDS, recognition of the role of our member organisations in the highly effective partnership response is crucial. Our position as a peak body needs to be respected, as should our members' input into policy development regarding HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment. The Government has generally been respectful in its dealings with AFAO, because we have a proven track-record and a solid membership base. However, smaller organisations representing marginalised or stigmatised members of the Australian community have at times had to fight for respect. Including **notions of mutual respect** in the Compact should assist in the development of effective relationships between the Government and the wide diversity of interests represented by Australia's Third Sector. This can only maximise the effectiveness of Social Inclusion strategies.

Over the years we have participated in many “consultations” (both large and small-scale), that have basically involved presentation of government policy agenda and strategies, with little time or opportunity for real input. This is time-wasting and frustrating for all involved, and generates cynicism. **Consultation processes** need to be developed which recognise community organisations' advocacy role in policy development, such that Government and departmental/agency representatives involved in consultations are empowered to genuinely give consideration to issues raised by NGO's, and to properly (and respectfully) respond to policy reform proposals.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to provide comment regarding this important initiative. If you require any further information regarding our comments, please contact Abi Groves, Manager, Policy and Communications.

Yours sincerely,



Don Baxter  
Executive Director  
AFAO