



## **STRAIGHT TALK 2009**

**Bringing women together to advance reconciliation, justice and equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

### **What is it?**

*Straight Talk* is a national summit bringing together 80 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women with female parliamentarians. It will give them the opportunity to build relationships with each other and explore ways to work together to advance reconciliation and achieve greater justice and equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **What's the purpose?**

It is our hope that *Straight Talk* will help to:

- Establish ongoing relationships and networks between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their female political representatives.
- Demonstrate that Indigenous and non-Indigenous women care about many of the same issues and highlight what those issues are.
- Increase the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to access their political representatives.
- Raise greater awareness and understanding in parliament of the issues confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Strengthen the skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to bring about change.

### **What will Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women get out of *Straight Talk*?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants will come away from *Straight Talk*:

- With greater confidence and increased skills to actively engage with Australia's political system;
- With new friendships and networks with other women who share their commitment to bringing about positive change in people's lives;
- Personally knowing one or more parliamentarian(s) who they feel comfortable maintaining contact with.



### **What will women parliamentarians get out of *Straight Talk*?**

Women parliamentarians will come away from the event:

- With a greater understanding of the issues and concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from their state;
- Having heard personal experiences from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- Personally meeting new Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander women who they can contact for information and advice;
- Having had the opportunity to participate in a groundbreaking event with their female colleagues from all political parties.

### **When and where is *Straight Talk*?**

The event will be run over three days from 25 – 27 February 2009 in Canberra.

The first two days, for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants only, will be held at University House at the Australian National University. The final day, which will involve the women parliamentarians, will be held at Parliament House.

### **How will it work?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants will be selected through an application process designed to identify women who have some local leadership experience but limited or no engagement with parliamentarians or political processes.

The first day of the event will give the women time to get to know each other. Facilitated sessions will draw out the experience, skills, resilience and strength already existing within the group. The women will then break into small groups to discuss issues they have identified as most important to them – for example, health, education or employment. Participants will have varied experience and opinions, and this session will aim to identify what positive changes they want to see in those areas.

The second day will focus on strengthening skills and equipping participants to engage effectively with Australia's political system to bring about positive change. A particular objective will be to increase participants' confidence to engage with decision-makers. The final part of the day will focus on applying new knowledge and skills to the key issues identified on day one and preparing for the discussions with parliamentarians.

The final day will be held at Parliament House. Following an opening ceremony, participants will break into small groups with two or more women parliamentarians. The purpose of these groups is to build relationships, identify common priorities and objectives and explore ways to work together to bring about positive change. All attempts will be made to partner participants with parliamentarians from their electorate or state. However, this may not be possible in all cases.

A facilitator will assist each group in identifying common priorities, exploring opportunities to work together and agreeing ways to carry the relationship into the future. This could involve a community visit by the parliamentarian, extending invitations to participants to an electorate or



state event such as the NAIDOC ball or introducing participants to key people either in the community or in federal or state governments. Oxfam will assist in facilitating further contact where necessary.

The event will conclude with a luncheon at Parliament House. This lunch will provide a celebratory and informal opportunity for the groups to continue their relationship building and networking.

### **Who can participate in *Straight Talk*?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who:

- are over 18 years of age
- have demonstrated leadership at a local level
- have little or no experience of engaging with parliamentarians but are interested in doing so
- do not have a good understanding of political processes but are interested in learning about them.

In addition, all federal women parliamentarians will be invited to participate in the final day of *Straight Talk*.

### **How will participants be selected?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who apply to be part of *Straight Talk* will be assessed on how well they meet the following criteria:

- Willingness to travel to Canberra in February 2009
- A demonstrated ability to commit to something and follow through on that commitment
- Commitment to contributing to the aims of the program
- Commitment to make follow up contact with Parliamentarians in 2009
- Willingness to be open and honest in forging new relationships.

Participants in *Straight Talk* will represent the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. For this reason, we will be looking to select Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women of all ages, family types, and education and employment levels, from all parts of Australia.

### **About Oxfam Australia**

Oxfam Australia works in 24 countries around the world, supporting individuals and communities to realise their basic rights. We do this by supporting community based development projects, responding to emergencies and campaigning to address the root causes of poverty and injustice. We are committed to strengthening the role of citizens in holding governments, corporations and charitable organisations, including us, accountable.



### **Why is Oxfam Australia organising *Straight Talk*?**

Through our work with communities around the world, Oxfam Australia has observed that women have a particular ability to work with each other across traditional, cultural and political boundaries. We have seen many examples of women coming together to bring about change – from women parliamentarians in Malawi to women from warring tribes in the highlands of Papua New Guinea.

Based on this experience, we believe there is much scope for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and non-Indigenous women to work together to advance reconciliation and achieve greater justice and quality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **How will Oxfam Australia know if *Straight Talk* has been successful?**

Evaluations of *Straight Talk* will be conducted both immediately after the summit and 12 months later. Feedback will be collected from participants in the program – the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and the female parliamentarians – as well as participating staff and volunteers.

The evaluation will specifically examine:

- Whether *Straight Talk* achieved its objectives and intended outcomes;
- Whether *Straight Talk* met the expectations of participants;
- How well the program was managed and if there are any improvements which could be made; and
- Whether this program might work effectively in other countries in which we work.