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## **Indigenous leaders reject Abbott's paternalism**

Health Minister Tony Abbott's proposal for a "new paternalism" to replace self determination in Indigenous Affairs was divisive, ill informed and doomed to failure, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) said today.

ANTaR Indigenous Reference Group members, Professor Larissa Behrendt and Lester-Irabinna Rigney said Minister Abbott appeared to be unaware that the primary cause of Aboriginal disadvantage was policies identical to the one he was advocating.

"One of the lessons of the last 40 years is that paternalism doesn't work. It was paternalism that condemned generations of our people to poverty and welfare dependency," Professor Behrendt said.

"Contrary to what Minister Abbot claims, self determination has never been tried in Australia. Indigenous people have always been managed and governed by non-Aboriginal politicians and bureaucrats," she said.

Professor Behrendt said that in Minister Abbott's own area of health, all the research indicates that the best outcomes are achieved when communities determine their own programs.

"Minister Abbott's views are driven by his own rigid ideological position, not by the evidence of what actually works," she said.

Mr Rigney, a senior lecturer at Flinders University said that Minister Abbott's comments even appear to be out of step with the views of his Prime Minister and Indigenous Affairs Minister on mutual partnerships for improved Indigenous outcomes.

"Shared Responsibility Agreements between Indigenous peoples and the government toward local management is the centre piece of John Howard's Indigenous policy. Mutual responsibility toward mutually agreed solutions recognizes the importance of collaboration," Mr Rigney said.

Mr Rigney said that history has shown that supporting Indigenous communities in partnership toward accountability and planned improvement has been more successful than the "big brother" approach espoused by Minister Abbott.

"Indigenous Affairs is difficult enough without further confusion exacerbated between Liberal ministers who contradict each other on the way forward," he said.

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