



ican Strategic Plan 2014

Empowering Indigenous Consumers

Executive Summary

Over the past 6 years, the Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network Ltd (ICAN) has been working to achieve its vision of Empowering Indigenous Consumers by providing financial counselling assistance to alleviate consumer detriment, education to make informed consumer choices and research/advocacy to highlight consumer disadvantage. Whilst these are all important functions of ICAN's ongoing mission, a new way of thinking has emerged based on the barriers to Indigenous financial capability.

Financial Counselling and money management are at the core of ICAN's service delivery. An integral activity in the provision of these services is the development of a budget, income and expenditure being the two main variables. Unfortunately for many ICAN clients, the income is often low and fixed and the cost of living (expenditure) is high due to a number of factors including higher than average costs for food, fuel, essential household items, financial services and electricity to name a few.

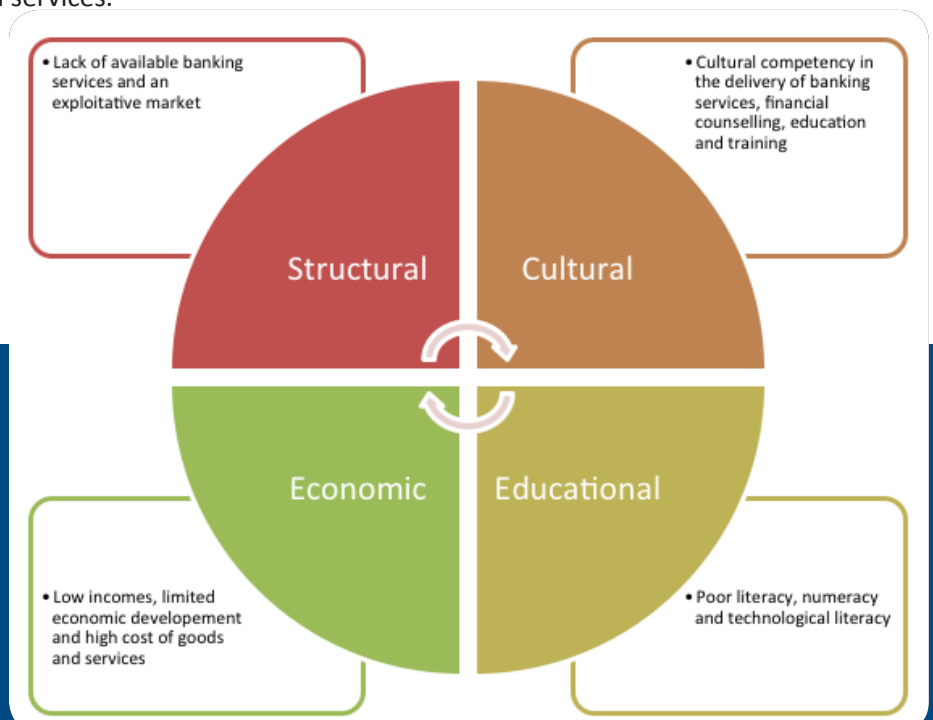
In order to address these two budgetary variables, ICAN has explored the structural and economic barriers to Indigenous financial capability and the relationship between the two. The general characteristic of a structural barrier in a regional/remote Indigenous community context is either a lack of easy access to a service and an uncompetitive and exploitative market. Some of the economic barriers are limited economic development opportunities, high unemployment, low incomes and the high cost of goods and services.

Structural barriers need to be addressed in the pursuit of building Indigenous financial capability and empowering Indigenous consumers. They include limited to no access to face-to-face banking/financial advice and lower cost financial services. Without personalised access to banking and financial services the success of Indigenous economic development, home ownership and financial literacy programs may have limited effect on participation and social inclusion. Providing these access points can build the necessary foundations for economic development initiatives and addresses the economic barriers to Indigenous financial capability.

Through research and experience, ICAN identifies the take up of high market demand products (such as telecommunications, banking/financial services, rent try-buy businesses, car dealerships and funeral insurance schemes) by Indigenous consumers as further barriers to personal financial capability.

ICAN believes there is a need to build financial service & consumer programs to address these barriers. Rather than advocating on what is wrong with the provision of banking/financial services in remote communities, there is a need to devise alternative services that create pathways to sustainable economic development. The mission for ICAN in the next 3-5 years is to create and support the development of alternatives to market forces that exploit Indigenous consumers, to provide ethical alternatives to market demand.

**Chart 1:
Barriers to Indigenous
Financial Capability**



Background

ICAN began as an Indigenous consumer advocacy, assistance and education program. ICAN was originally named the Consumer Affairs Unit and housed at the Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council (ACC), the peak statutory body for Queensland's Deed of Grant in Trust (D.O.G.I.T) Aboriginal communities.

After the closure of the ACC, ICAN was established as part of the Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council's Cairns office, continuing to provide valuable community services to Indigenous consumers in Queensland communities.

In 2006, ICAN's management and steering committee recommended a move away from the umbrella of local government, to become a not for profit company. The primary reasoning for the move was to create its own identity and secure long-term growth and sustainability. ICAN was registered as a Not for profit company limited by guarantee on the 1st of October 2007.

Since incorporation, ICAN has played a key role in bridging the gap between Indigenous consumers and government consumer regulatory bodies including the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission, Australian Securities and Investments Commission, state and territory fair trading offices and Ombudsman services. ICAN's reputation as a leader in Indigenous consumer affairs is backed by numerous consumer investigations, awards and government advisory roles.

ICAN has formed community, government and industry partnerships to build financial capability within Indigenous communities. Key partners include the former Commonwealth Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, Commonwealth Bank of Australia and Good Shepherd Microfinance. These partnerships have resulted in the development and delivery of specialised financial literacy

programs, money management services including Tax Help, the provision of microfinance and financial counselling, and the development of Indigenous employment opportunities through the award winning Indigenous Financial Counselling Mentorship Program, sponsored by the Commonwealth Bank.

The organisation achieved a major milestone in 2012 when nine Indigenous ICAN employees graduated with the Diploma of Community Services (Financial Counselling). This success led to the program operating nationally with Indigenous community agency employees/participants from Western Sydney, Port Augusta, Yarrabah, Cairns, Derby and Alice Springs. ICAN is continuing to lead the way in the development of Indigenous financial counselling across Australia.

Awards

2012 – Money Smart Week Awards – Highly Commended, Advancing Financial Literacy in Australia - Community Awards category

2009 – Finalist Queensland Government, Reconciliation Business Awards (Partnership Category)

2007 – Minister's Award for Excellence & Consumer Advocacy Award, Queensland Office of Fair Trading, Consumer Protection Awards

2005 – Consumer Advocacy Award, Queensland Office of Fair Trading, Consumer Protection Awards

Consumer Representation

Australian Competition and Consumer Commission – Consumer Consultative Committee

Australian Securities & Investments Commission – Consumer Advisory Panel

National Indigenous Consumer Strategy – Implementation Reference Group

Reconciliation Australia – Indigenous Financial Services Network Coordinator - North Queensland Indigenous Consumer Taskforce

CEO Consumer Roundtable(s) – National Australia Bank and Telstra

ICAN plays a key role in bridging the gap between Indigenous consumers and government consumer regulatory bodies.

Identity of the Organisation

Vision

Empowering Indigenous Consumers

Mission

The Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network Ltd (ICAN) will achieve its vision of Empowering Indigenous Consumers by providing financial counselling assistance to alleviate consumer detriment, education to make informed consumer choices and research/advocacy to highlight consumer disadvantage.

ICAN will expand on its core mission statements by concentrating on the barriers to Indigenous financial capability. It aims address the **Structural** and **Economic** barriers through the:

- Provision of increased access to appropriate banking and financial services
- Promotion of cost saving activities (e.g. Electricity)
- Development of ethical alternatives to uncompetitive and exploitative markets
- Provision of financial advice and education to Indigenous economic development programs
- Development of social impact measurement frameworks that evaluate program success against **Structural** and **Economic** barriers
- Provision of support to external organisations that pursue ICAN's mission objectives and share our vision of Empowering Indigenous Consumers.

Values

'Empowerment' - The Indigenous Consumer Assistance Network Ltd believes that to create positive change, financial and consumer capability needs to be built within the Indigenous community and that there needs to be an emphasis on respecting Individuals existing

knowledge and culture in delivery.

'Innovative' – Striving to develop innovative long-term solutions built from the wants and needs of the communities we service.

'Accountability' – An organisation built on outcomes not rhetoric supported by a solid evidence base.

'Partnership' – A developed, integral understanding that working with community, government and industry collectively creates real change and that positive relationships are key to moving forward.

'Community' – responsibility to the communities we service, recognition of the importance of family and a respect for the work life balance.

Theory of Change

Respecting organisational core values, ICAN will continue to develop innovative and sustainable consumer and financial solutions that address the needs of communities that we service and provide ongoing support to organisations in other regions of Australia. ICAN will achieve this by building on the successful partnerships and achievements realised over 6 years of incorporation. ICAN will ensure sustainability through its data capture, measurement, evaluation processes and advocacy.



A developed, integral understanding that working with community, government and industry collectively creates real change and that positive relationships are key to moving forward.

Strategic Priorities

Introduction

ICAN has developed its strategic priorities based on organisational strengths. An analysis of ICAN's service delivery model identified the following strengths:

- Over 6 years of incorporation ICAN has built strong working relationships and established networks with consumer regulatory bodies, EDR Schemes, banking industry, community agencies and government departments and is regarded as a lead advisor on Indigenous consumer and financial issues.
- The organisation's greatest asset is its qualified and skilled staff in the areas of financial counselling, financial literacy, microfinance delivery, consumer advocacy, training, research and multi media resource production. ICAN has built this asset through the award winning and nationally recognised in-house training model (Diploma Community Services, Financial Counselling)
- Has a structured supervision framework that includes service plans, individual work plans and performance appraisals.
- ICAN has an emphasis on building financial capability of staff through professional development and training.
- Program reporting reflects ICAN's high level of service provision.
- The success of the Indigenous Financial Counselling Mentorship Program has proven that ICAN is able to replicate a local program, nationally.
- ICAN programs and services are conceptualised and developed with a focus on building financial/ consumer capability through experiential learning.

- The organisation's client successes have resulted in ICAN being a trusted brand within the communities that it services.
- The development of Indigenous financial counsellors has increased the cultural competence of the organisation.
- ICAN's service delivery is physically supported through an established training facility, a fleet of vehicles to deliver services both regional and remote communities, a media production facility and IT equipment.
- ICAN has expanded its training and media production facilities.
- ICAN has created a body of research in Indigenous consumer affairs and money management that will be built upon through its online community services database (csd.org.au) and investment in professional development in the research space.



The success of the Indigenous Financial Counselling Mentorship Program has proven that ICAN is able to replicate a local program, nationally.

Strategic Priorities

ICAN's strategic priorities will advance our vision of Empowering Indigenous Consumers in the following service delivery areas:

Money Management

1. Expand and maintain the scope of the money management program to include access to banking and financial services through partnering with government, banking and financial institutions
2. Increase partnership base with a focus on increasing financial capability within remote Indigenous communities

Financial Counselling

1. Expand funded outreach services to communities throughout Queensland
2. Promote the Indigenous Financial Counselling Mentorship Program nationally

Consumer Advocacy

1. Maintain and expand the Far North Queensland Consumer Taskforce and investigate administrative funding opportunities.
2. Create an Indigenous consumer compliance and enforcement strategy based on internal and external research.

Training

1. Continue to develop staff capability in the delivery of financial literacy and external professional development training.
2. Indigenous Financial Counselling Mentorship Program:
 - Expand the CBA sponsored Indigenous Financial Counselling Mentorship Program both internally and nationally.

- Develop an accredited training program for qualified financial counselors, that addresses the national standards of Financial Counselling supervision.
- Build on the provision of support to agencies that provide financial counselling services to Indigenous communities across Australia, this would include mentoring and supervision support service.

Research

Build ICAN's research capabilities by:

- Utilising ICAN database to identify priority consumer/ financial issues.
- Identifying funding opportunities for research, through partnerships with research institutions (advocacy).
- Providing an evidence base for the sustainability of ICAN programs, should become a built in budgetary item (evaluative).

Governance

ICAN will develop and strengthen governance practices by:

- Implementation of the annual portfolio strategic planning process
- Annual review of organisation's risk management plan, operations and governance annually
- Providing professional development opportunities to directors in line with the new Australian Charities and Not For Profits Commission priorities
- Recruiting new directors with required skills e.g. financial management
- Developing and implementing updated governance policies and procedure.

Expand and maintain the scope of the money management program to include access to banking and financial services through partnering with government, banking and financial institutions.



ICAN Financial Counsellor, Drew Dangar fishing in Yarrabah with Commonwealth Bank representative for reconciliation video



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