

Cross Government Partnerships

PENNY ARMYTAGE: Thank you very much, Chris and Fran, for the welcome. I'm very pleased to be here with you this morning.

I guess this issue of partnership and how we work collectively across government to deal with some of the wicked problems is something that takes the attention of all of us and is increasingly on our agenda to try to work out how we refine our practice and approaches. So what I thought today I'd do is just share with you some reflections and examples about the way in which we have tried for tackle this issue within the Justice portfolio and most particularly where we've done that in partnership with the Department of Human Services and associated agencies. I was particularly struck by this graphic. It's very opportune at the moment, I think, in terms of issues that are confronting us, but I guess it's symbolic here because it does herald the fact that the days of silos within the public sector and service delivery in this sector are over, and these silos are symbolic of us having an inward-focused business unit whose thick walls slow execution, and now we're saying these silos are to be a thing of the past because, in fact, the public is demanding that we work together to come up with collaborative solutions and have timely implementation of initiatives that are designed to improve services for the broader community.

Those demands are being made very loud and clear in a whole lot of areas that we work in, not only with the wicked problems that we talked about earlier, and I guess that people in our communities are demanding that they don't care which department gets the job done but, rather, they want the job done. That's been something we've had to respond to in terms of expectations of how we deliver, and in our first instance I think there are some three key things that we've learnt in terms of what should stand behind principles of partnership and the way in which we work together.

The first is effective consultation and collaboration with all the

parties who may have a bearing on an issue; the second is communication; and the third is funding and budget planning.

Just to use a Justice example that might be a little different outside your spheres of normal discussions here at this group, I wanted to use an example of *Underbelly* and organised crime, and I guess I want to use that because I think it's a really good example of where the department in our portfolio was confronted about how we start to think about the benefit a system can gain from a partnership approach, so not just in dealing with an individual problem but actually taking a system-wide perspective.

You might be surprised, as Fran just was, to learn that the Australian Crime Commission 2005-6 report on illicit drugs confirmed that Victoria had the largest number of organised crime networks in the nation. We had nearly half of all cocaine and heroin arrests in Australia, more than one-third of drugs seized in clandestine labs were here in Victoria, and nearly one-third of arrests were for drug dealers, and drugs and organised crime go hand in hand. So whilst *Underbelly*, and I'm sure some of you might have seen it, gives you some insights into what happens in this network, it doesn't actually tell how government came to work together to keep gangsters off the streets, to make sure that they didn't clog our courts and we dealt effectively with the problems that started to emerge over a period of the last eight years and came to a head in 2002, when the court decided that Tony Mokbel needed to be bailed because it was an unacceptable delay that he was going to face before going to trial. One will then remember that he headed off to Greece and we had a significant controversy on how we handled that, but it was a catalyst for forcing us to try to start to think about how we plan for the impact of major organised crime on the Victorian justice system, and it was probably the first time that we did that when we started with a forum very similar to this, hosted by Victoria Police, where they started to look at the prevalence of the issue in this community and started thinking about what it meant for them. They were thinking from a policing perspective, and the challenge for us was to say: 'How do we look, not only at what happened for police but what implications would

that have all of the way through the criminal justice system, right the way through to how ultimately the correction system might deal with these people?’

That was really a landmark change for us. And you might not know, but 30 murders have been considered to be gangland-related murders over the last eight years here in Victoria, and we have had 271 trials go through the criminal justice system here associated with Melbourne’s gangland wars and 25 trials for former members of the Victorian Police Drug Squad. So it really was an absolutely massive impact that it has had from that time that we identified this as an emerging issue, but perhaps what was most profound was for the first time the justice system started thinking and planning together as a system as to how we would deal with that and, in doing so, we were unbelievably successful from a financial point of view because we actually introduced a new funding formula that for the first time recognised that if you invest in investigative activities in the front end with police, it has implications all the way through prosecutors, legal aid, our transcript and recording services in courts, our courts and our correction system, and for the first time we successfully were able to present a business case to Treasury and convince government that they needed to invest in a systems-wide response to organised crime, and we were very successful in 2004 as a result of that early planning in being able to resource our system to respond to that very high level of demand. I think increasingly there will be some issues like that that we have to think about from a system and working partnership across the system to deliver results demanded by our community.

We’re facing a similar challenge currently in relation to child protection in the Children’s Court. You’d be aware that in the Department of Human Services they introduced major reforms in 2005 into the way in which child protection matters were dealt with in this State, and that had implications for our court. Sadly, I don’t think we planned as effectively as we should have done in terms of what that was going to mean for our entire system or, alternatively, maybe we were just caught a little unawares about some of the

changing circumstances that were going to lead to the fact that now, by 2008, we have unacceptable delays and pressures within our Children's Court that we haven't been able to respond to. But I think we're now well placed, because, just as we did in that organised crime strategy, in responding to the pressures between the Department of Human Services and Justice in relation to managing the child protection issues and the implications for the Children's Court, we are planning from a systems-wide perspective, and we now have us working together using insights that were initially developed by Boston Consulting Group for DHS but who now subsequently Justice has also engaged to help understand what the drivers are for our service system so we can work together.

Recently both Fran and I participated in a workshop with a whole range of people from the Children's Court, from Child Protection, Law Court Services, Victoria Police, Legal Aid and others to start planning how we would respond from a systems perspective to some of the changes that we're now seeing in that jurisdiction as well. What has been really pleasing about that has been the fact that by taking that broad perspective we have been able to immediately implement some identifiable changes and also see what things we needed to work on together over the longer term. Whilst delays in our Children's Court are still substantial, there actually has been a slowing in that growth in delay in the last 12 months as we have started to do this planning and work together, and we're very excited about what that might mean in terms of the future because it does result in better management of court business, less demands on all the practitioners, including the DHS workers going before the court, and we've been able to see that by working on this systems-based perspective, using our collective data, engaging and working with consultants who can share insights from our various perspectives we've been able to deliver good results. I guess for us they are just two of the examples, and it's not, I guess, that unusual that governments have been demanding that we work together across departments, and I guess this was first brought to a head for us when the Blair

Government really did highlight the fact that in responding to demands that were placed in their community they needed to have a joined-up government response. People will remember that social exclusion was at the heart of that emphasis in 2006, when the Blair Government compelled their public sector agencies to start working together. One of the things that I liked in terms of their approach was the fact that they said complex and variegated decision making improved sharing of information between agencies, barriers between agencies being broken down, and flexibility enhanced and budgets pulled would result in much more improved services. I think that that rhetoric is equally applicable to today, particularly as we face the global economic crisis and we start to think about the demands that will be placed on us going forward.

The public expects and demands that we will be efficient in the way in which we deliver services, and they don't want us to waste tax dollars or double up in our efforts, and I guess this is where our problem gambling initiative is perhaps most illustrative of a new example where we've also worked together on a partnership approach. I guess from this particular example we see where partnership means sharing the workload and allowing for business to be done more effectively, and I think this is a very good example of a new initiative.

The Department of Justice recognised the value of that approach to prevention and early intervention and decided that DHS's primary care partnerships provided a common platform for service system reform that could also benefit our client groups.

In July 2008 all of our gambling health services became members of the primary care partnerships. As members, they have begun implementing practices and principles of service coordination and integrated health promotion. Prior to this, we funded all of our problem gambling services as stand-alone services. However, we've now recognised that the complex needs of problem gamblers actually benefit from them working in partnership with other primary community and mental health sector workers. So, by

levering off the PCP infrastructure we now have easier access to services that address the range of personal and health issues around problem gambling. It allows for much better integration of our problem gambling services with existing human services, resulting in reduction in duplication of services, and it allows for integrated health promotion, which enables us to introduce more proactive problem gambling health promotion messages.

Whilst DHS invested substantially \$4.3 million in core recurrent funding in PCPs each year and additional variable funding from your integrated health promotion and chronic disease initiatives, Justice has been able to complement this with a \$2.1 million initiative over the next three years to tackle problem gambling and deliver an integrated health promotion strategy. Working alone, Justice would not have been able to fund and deliver such a flexible system that integrated community health initiatives such as other health and human services providers can do. By joining forces with DHS, we are able to build on our achievements and contribute towards a more effective human service system. The partnership will allow our funds to go to PCP areas where problem gambling services are most needed, and finding a common ground was really essential in terms of establishing this partnership. That was one of the things that we found in our experience to date. By focusing on what we have in common rather than what differentiates us, allows us to think about how we can promote and achieve increases in services to the benefit of our clients. This does obviously require a commitment at the highest level, but we're very excited about the potential that we'll have and where we see that that partnership with PCPs has given us a capacity to leverage off the infrastructure of the health system to the advantage of Justice clients and where we can mutually get a benefit in terms of the way that we might go forward. So we hope that there will be other opportunities such as that into the future that will help us to make a difference in terms of the way in which we work.

We have also been dealing with some other of those wicked problems that we talked about earlier, and there's two of them that

I'd like to particularly focus on because they're more challenging in terms of how we achieve results. The first of those is in relation to alcohol. As I said earlier, the community demands that we work together, and sometimes actually they are the catalyst to forcing us to work together. In the instance of alcohol misuse and associated violence, the Victorian public has been clamouring for the government response to do just that, most especially in the last 12 months. They have asked our political representatives to take action and they have said that we now need to address this issue, and it has become firmly entrenched in the governments reform agenda at both the national and a State level. However, it is a very complex social problem and it really does require a whole-of-government integrated response in terms of the way in which we need to deal with these issues. Actions in the areas of health, community education, liquor licensing and enforcement and policing must take place together in order to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harm, and we must develop a common framework for long-term commitment to change.

I was talking yesterday to some people about just how far we've come in terms of our commitment around the Victorian Alcohol Action Plan, which is the embodiment of the goals that the community has and the Government has for the way in which it will respond to this issue. It was just announced earlier in the year with the Premier committing to a five-year strategy to restoring the balance between now in 2008 and 2013, but I do think we still have to be clear that we've got a shared end agenda, that we are clear about what we're ultimately aiming for and, therefore, how the bits of that strategy will work together. In this area we do have a shared policy position and a common framework that we've developed in terms of the way in which we might respond to this growing community concern, but we've got many commentators who are not sure about whether or not we've got the balance exactly right and who are suggesting that this needs to be the subject of ongoing dialogue between Justice, Health, community sector agencies, policing and others to come up with a solution.

I was mindful the other day when I was listening to an interview

and then subsequently looked at some work that was done by Kathryn Graham and Ross Hommel in terms of raising the bar, preventing aggression in and around bars, pubs and clubs, that this has been something we've taken a particular interest in since we had our trial of the lock-out here in the CBD of Melbourne and the entertainment precincts, and that has been the subject of some considerable commentary. But I was interested in the fact that Graham and Hommel put forward a pretty challenging assertion when they said that current knowledge suggested a shift in policy thinking is needed towards a public health perspective that emphasises empirical evidence and away from punitive, individualistic and unevaluated criminal justice approaches, and I thought they were probably giving the challenge to me saying maybe Justice has to think a little bit harder about the way in which we are responding to this issue of social harm and the way in which you intervene, but I don't think the answer lies in public health alone, because, really, when you look back at what has happened in alcohol, probably from our perspective since the 1980s with Neuenhausen we've focused much of our attention on letting a market drive competition and thinking that that will control and influence the way in which it's dealt with from a Justice perspective and a regulatory perspective, and now we find ourselves confronted with 484 late night venues in the entertainment precinct of Melbourne and wondering what we're doing with our 24/7 alcohol-fuelled entertainment culture. Whilst I'm happy to say it would be easy for me to say, 'That's Chris's and Fran's problem from a public health perspective to try to inform the way in which we're going to work,' I do know that tackling this wicked problem is going to mean that we need to rely upon all the lessons that we've learnt from those system-based responses, from the strengths of things like our PC partnerships if we're to go forward and make a difference in terms of this very real and stressing issue for our Victorian and Australian community.

Another area where I think we've got much to learn in terms of how we might also grapple with improving outcomes around a wicked social issue is how we make sure that we respond in a coordinated

way to the Government's challenges around closing the gap around Indigenous disadvantage. You'll all be aware that COAG has said that we've got some ambitious targets that we're going to collectively work on across a whole-of-government perspective in terms of reducing disadvantage for Indigenous people in our community, and they are very challenging in terms of what they've set for not only the justice system but the human services system when you think about how we're going to go about achieving that: closing the life expectancy gap within a generation; halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade; halving the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements within a decade; halving the gap in Indigenous employment; halving the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 completion and all four year olds in remote communities having access to early childhood education. Obviously, when you think about those very ambitious targets you could probably conclude that there's no way that government will achieve those ambitious targets along with the Indigenous community unless they work in partnership with that community and also have government departments such as ours working together in partnership.

I personally believe that some of the solution to that will be building on the strengths we've had from partnerships approaches in working in play-spaced initiatives, and I think they indicate not only through your own neighbourhood renewal programs but also some recent work that we've been doing down at Lake Tyers Aboriginal community in East Gippsland and further work we've just started doing in Mildura with some of the Indigenous communities up there that that's going to be the way for us to work forward. I think that for me I am struck by the fact that when I looked at the targets that we had set ourselves to try to achieve that reduction in those gaps between the Indigenous and the broader community here in Victoria that there will be some challenges. Neither at Lake Tyers nor in Mildura will that be easy, but I do think that we have got a very strong commitment here in terms of demonstrating a new model that's effective in achieving good social outcomes if we don't only work across government departments at

Commonwealth, State and local level but also in partnership with communities, building on their strengths to try to achieve some of those results. But I'm not kidding myself when I think that that will require a long-term sustained effort.

Just to give you a perspective around that, when you thought about halving the gap in mortality and improving health outcomes for Indigenous children, when I recently was involved in a meeting in Mildura, they confirmed that Indigenous births in Mildura were more likely to be low birth weight than total Mildura births. In fact, the low birth rate is below that in Mildura for all Indigenous births across Victoria; in 2000 to 2005, 45 births to Indigenous teens occurred over four years; the rates of Indigenous teenage births are six times that of the total teen births in Mildura; and the rate is nearly three times that of other Indigenous communities for Victoria.

So we haven't been shy in tackling some of the major issues and saying that we think that this partnership approach that's worked so successfully with us in terms of helping us to deal with some of those major social issues might also have some application in the work that we're doing in partnership with our Indigenous community.

I am very encouraged by progress that we've already made. We've been working now at Lake Tyers for the last five years, and whilst we've had the usual progress of two steps forward and one step back in terms of the way that we're working, we are starting to see some real difference being made, most particularly about attendance at school, levels of community violence declining within that community and higher rates of ongoing employment for members of that community after five years of effort. We hope to see similar things that might happen in terms of our engagement with the community in Mildura in coming years. However, one of the things that we've had to learn in that is that many of our Indigenous clients are suspicious of government and, therefore, harder to engage, and, just as with other partnerships where we are working across government agencies where communication is

the key, so too is it in working with Indigenous communities in trying to be successful in achieving these goals.

So I hope by those examples of saying there's some partnerships which have worked effectively from system-based perspectives and delivered not only increased dollars and resources for us within our service system and allowed us to deal with growing demand issues, we've also got examples through the problem gambling issues where we've been able to leverage off each other's resources to form a partnership that will ultimately benefit a wider range of clients, and, finally, through both the alcohol and the Indigenous issues that if we adopt a similar type of approach, there's some evidence that says we might be better placed to deal with some of the very real challenges that we have.

In summary, for me, the key to the success of any of those partnerships will be that effective consultation and collaboration, funding and budget planning. These initiatives are not cheap, and they are not the cheap alternative to producing results, so that funding and budget planning is absolutely critical to getting the resources. For example, in the case of Lake Tyers it resulted in us getting the Government to commit to a 10-year renewal strategy with funds that would be enduring throughout the lifetime of that commitment, and we wouldn't have done it without that sort of partnership approach. And communication, communication, communication, because, in fact, we each come to this from a different perspective.

Much as I was surprised when I first went over to Justice to see that Justice speaks a slightly different language to that of Human Services from time to time, I have now realised that it is very, very important that we spend enough time trying to understand each other's perspectives so we can make effective use of collaborative partnerships in the way in which we work going forward. But I am excited about this new way of working. I don't think we've got the answers in terms of how to do it, but I think the commitment is there and we've got some early wins on the board that would suggest that we're going to be working with all of you in

partnership much more into the future and collectively we'll probably produce far more than we might do on our own within our individual portfolios. So thank you very much, and I look forward to your deliberations over the next few days.

END OF TRANSCRIPT