

# Missing school in Australia due to gaps in Menstrual Health Management

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AUSTRALIA

*I would like to acknowledge the Jagera and Turrbal peoples- the traditional custodians of Brisbane. I pay my respect to Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*



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# Before we begin: My standpoint



'Growing Up' painting by girls and women (Central Australian Youth Link Up Service; CAYLUS)

# Impact of barriers to MHM in some Australian remote Indigenous communities



*Mothers and grandmothers have said that girls are missing school when they have their periods ... because they don't want to change [pads] at school ... [at schools] often there's no soap, ... there's often no rubbish bins or there's one rubbish bin outside the toilet which is really embarrassing to use.*

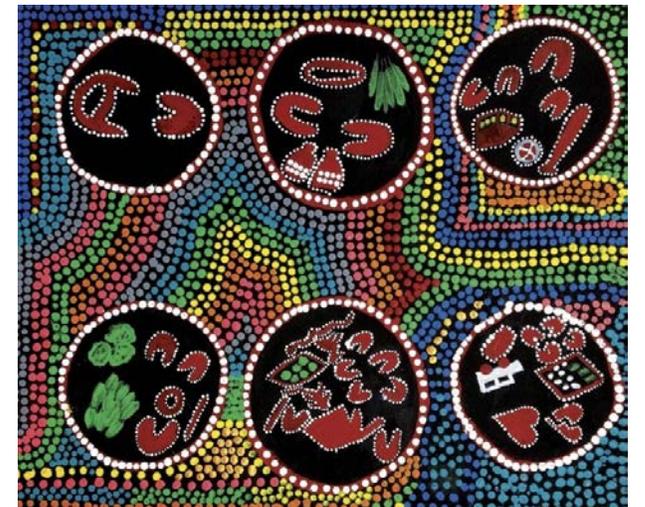
## Indigenous organisation representative #3

Discussion paper: WASH priorities in Indigenous Australian remote communities:  
<http://gci.uq.edu.au/un-sustainable-development-goals-water-sanitation-and-hygiene>



# Today's presentation

- Context of MHM in the UN SDGs and in WASH
- WASH in remote Australian Indigenous communities
- Emerging evidence and impact of MHM in remote communities
- Improving dignity for girls and women on MHM
- Call to action



# Contextualising MHM

SDG 6.2: ‘... access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all ... paying special attention to the needs of women and girls’.



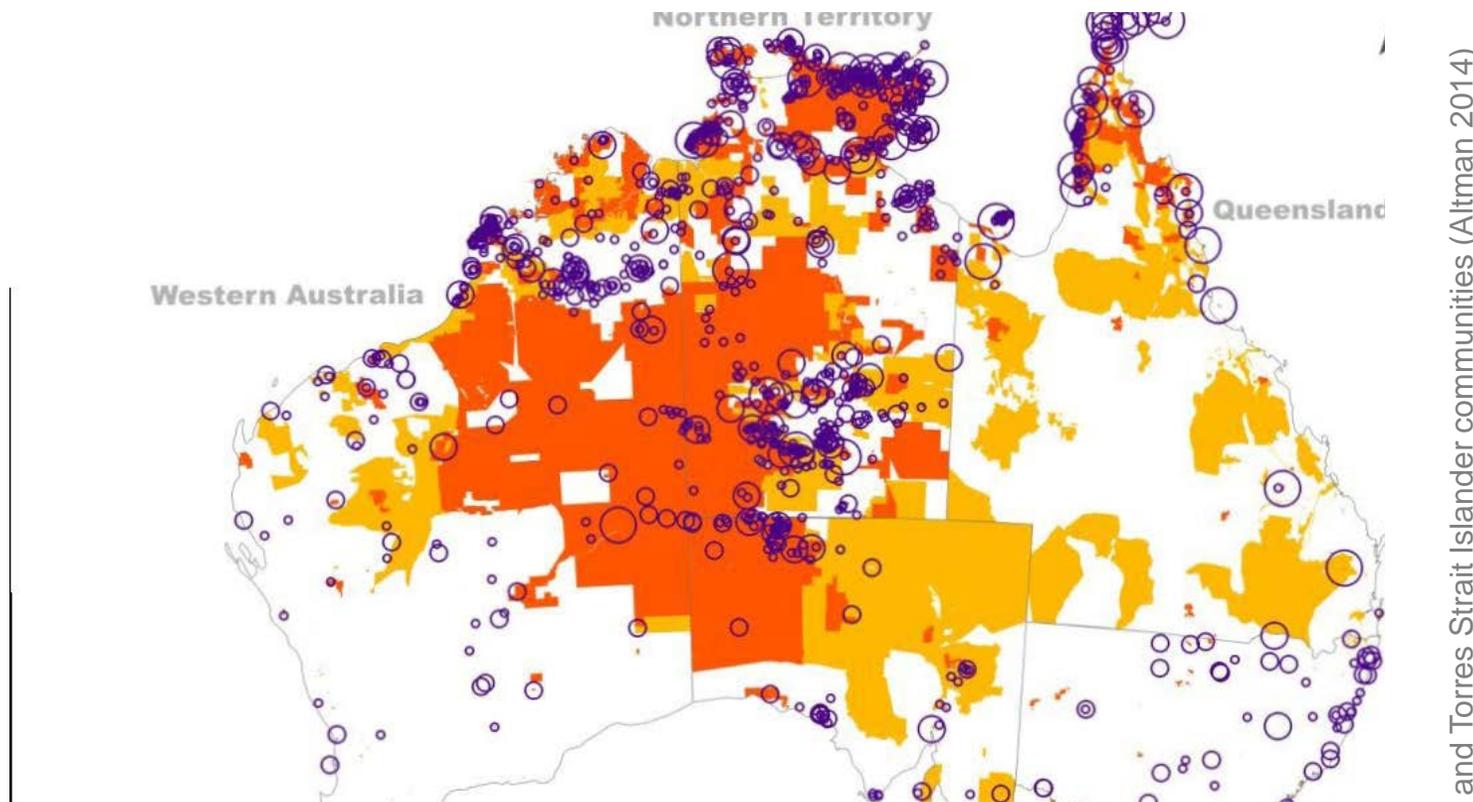
## Preamble:

*As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.*

UN 2015



# WASH in remote Indigenous communities: context



***Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage 2016*** report:

- Health for many remote Aboriginal communities is compromised
- Access to clean water and functional sewerage are key areas for action

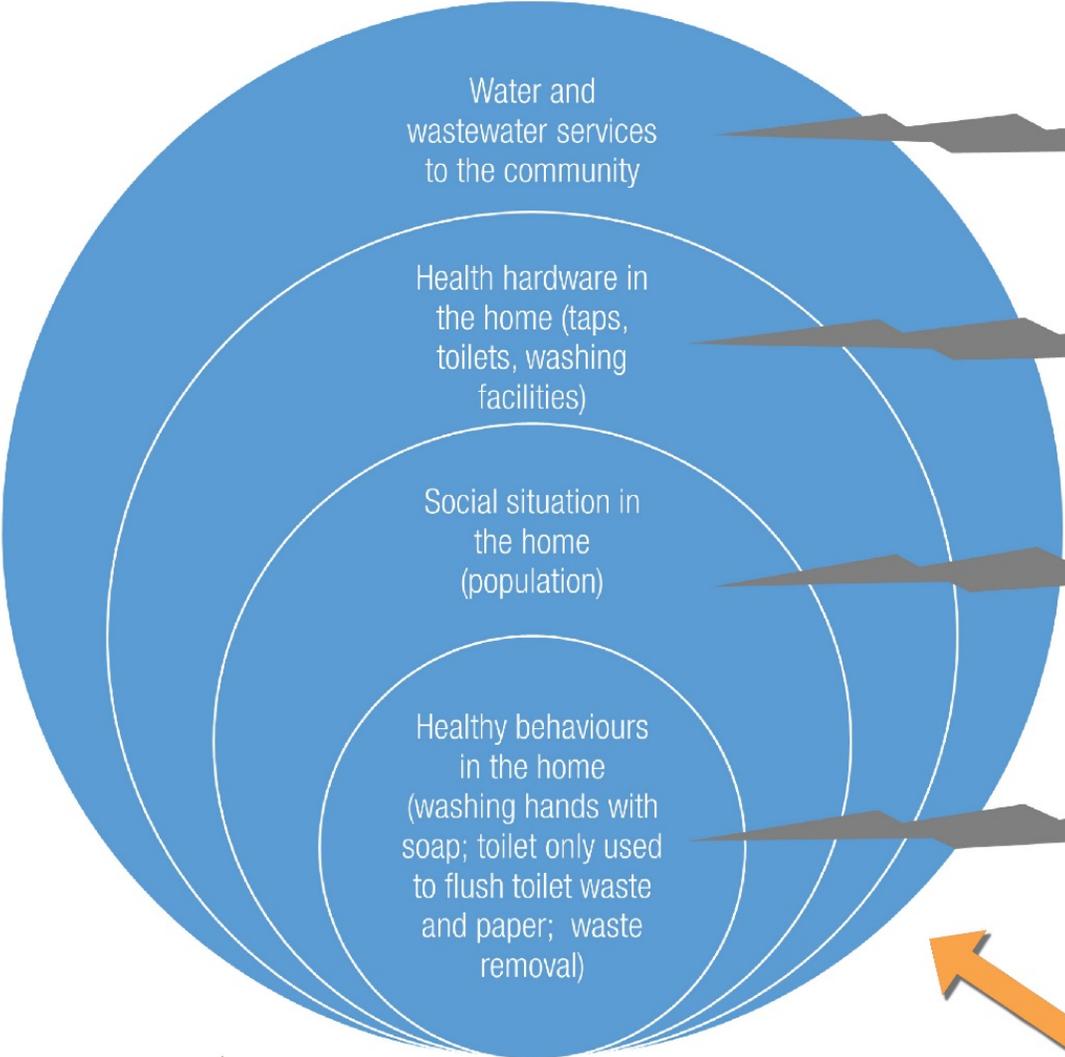
# Effective contributions

Some government programs provide well-funded, long-term service delivery; some utilities provide high-quality, well-maintained services

Some government programs provide regular and thorough health hardware maintenance to whole community

New housing being built in growing communities

Culturally and situationally-appropriate health promotion and education- to complement other layers



# Cracks in the system

Self-certification in some states enables substandard work

Old, cheap housing stock breaking down; housing not culturally appropriate

Chronic overcrowding (e.g. 20 people in a 3 brm house)

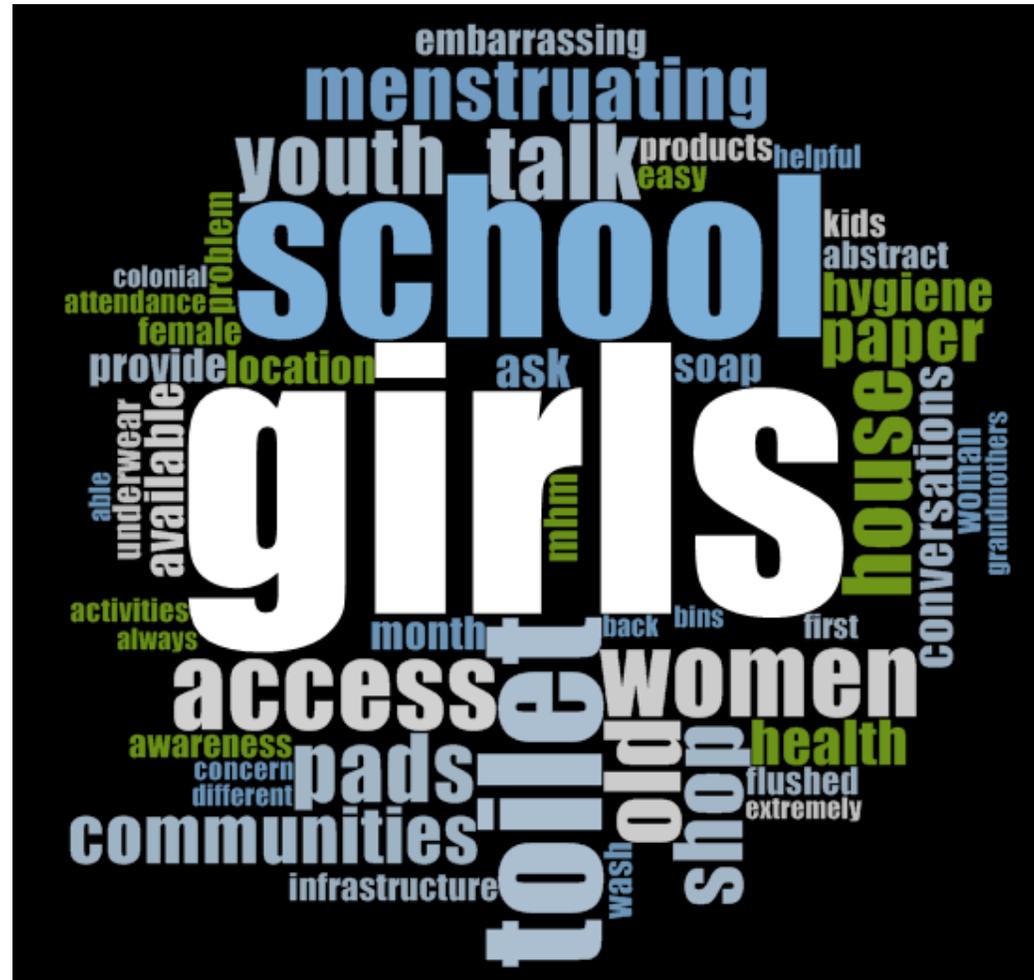
Soap, shampoo, pads, toilet paper too expensive and embarrassing to buy

Strong desire to live on-country

History of trauma and colonisation

buy

# MHM for indigenous women in remote communities



*Word cloud of MHM in Australian remote Indigenous communities  
(4 transcripts; 28 references; 50 most popular words- excluding un-descriptive words)*

# Barriers and alternatives to MHM

## Barriers:

- Knowledge of menstruation
- Purchasing ability
- 'Health hardware'
- Cultural issues

*People aren't going to the shop and buying it, because they're tiny places and people will know that you've bought it because you're menstruating ... There's sort of stigmatising or feeling ashamed.*

[\(Researcher #2\)](#)

**Alternatives used:** toilet paper, socks, t-shirts, underwear, rags

*... the local plumbing services say there are a lot of problems with not just tampons being flushed, but various pieces of clothing.*

[\(Indigenous organisation #3\)](#)

Positi

- Centre for Service engagement and access
- Share products
- Centre for board (includ

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## Indigenous girls missing school during their periods: the state of hygiene in remote Australia

July 3, 2017 6:09am AEST

A new report paints a disturbing picture about the lack of hygiene in Aboriginal communities, that particularly disadvantages girls. [brento/Flickr, CC BY](#)

Basic sanitary products can be unaffordable, unavailable or too shameful to buy for girls and women in Australia's remote Indigenous communities. A [report](#) released today, containing interviews with organisations working in multiple remote Australian communities, reveals anecdotal evidence girls are missing school during their periods.

The interviews indicate women and girls may use toilet paper, socks and rags instead of

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Disclosure statement

<https://theconversation.com/indigenous-girls-missing-school-during-their-periods-the-state-of-hygiene-in-remote-australia-79348>

Thank-Up Service  
CAYLUS  
Gentyere Council

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# Opening the MHM conversation in Australia!

Dear Nina,  
...  
It  
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I c  
cc  
overcrowding...

*I have responsibility for Indigenous Women and Girls policy and was deeply concerned to read these reports.*

*I would welcome any insight you have gained from your research that might help us answer some of the above questions, and support the Department to investigate the extent of this issue and its impact on school attendance.*

**Danielle Aeuckens** | A/g Assistant Secretary  
Early Childhood and Youth  
Education, Community Safety and Health, Indigenous Affairs | Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Tuesday, 15 August 2017

(Wendy Anders, National Coordinator, Victoria)

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# Call to Action for Australian MHM

We



*With the elected leaders of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA), November 2017*

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