



Jennie Rogers, Jane Cooper, Haley Williams, Beverly Russ, Annie Wilson and Christine Armit with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder dolls at the Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service. Picture: Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service

Big tick for three Kimberley health projects

■ Peter de Kruijff

Three Kimberley Aboriginal health projects have been recognised as implementing best practice principles in an independent review of 184 other programs in WA.

The Holman Review found 12 programs across WA were examples of best practice.

These included the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services' Ear Health Project focusing on early intervention, the Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services Primary Health Care Program which has a focus on alcohol, smoking and nutrition programs, and the Ord

Valley Aboriginal Health Service's Maternal and Child Health Lifestyle Choices alcohol and pregnancy project, based in Kununurra.

The latter group's model has been adopted by the Menzies School of Health Research to develop information resources and training support based on OVAHS foetal alcohol syndrome disorders prevention model for 85 other programs nationwide. The program has run for about seven years.

While these three projects will continue to receive their share of \$88.7 million in State Government funding out of the Footprints to Better Health scheme over three

years, other programs were not as lucky.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said the comprehensive Holman Review evaluated the effectiveness of Aboriginal health programs funded by WA Health focusing on the measurement and achievement of clinical health outcomes.

"Programs rated as marginal or poor in the Holman Review will not continue to be funded, and the Men's Health Program in the Kutjunga region of the Kimberley is one of those," she said.

Such programs will be offered a two-month contract extension to the end of August 2015.

Plan to tackle 'complex' high custody rates

■ Amanda Banks and Kelly Bell

People who commit minor offences could escape a charge by signing a "contract" to promise to keep out of trouble as part of the State Government's plan to tackle the high rate of jailed Aboriginals.

Premier Colin Barnett said a working group of ministers would develop reforms to tackle the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the justice system and deaths in custody.

"The high rate of incarceration of Aboriginal people is an extraordinarily complex and difficult problem that has troubled our community for many years, but it is something no State Government should ever give up on," he said.

Introducing laws and policies to avoid jailing people for low-level offences was one of three key areas for the working group, which takes in the police, corrective services and Attorney-General portfolios.

Aboriginal people account for 40 per cent of the adult prison muster, with 40 per cent of those behind bars for "low-end" offences.

The plan would include adult diversion options such as the

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Carol Roe

"pre-charge contracts" for minor offences based on a British model.

The idea was floated by Police Commissioner Karl O'Callaghan and backed by Chief Justice Wayne Martin last year.

The changes would also include measures to create safer environments behind bars and to prevent young Aboriginal people entering the justice system.

Mr Barnett made a public commitment to reduce deaths in custody and Aboriginal jail rates last year in response to protests after the death of 22-year-old Ms Dhu.

Ms Dhu, whose first name is not used for cultural reasons, died in Port Hedland after she was locked up for unpaid fines.

Her grandmother Carol Roe said she was glad the Government was acting but it brought her no relief.

"My granddaughter had to die before they'd do anything," she said.