

NACCHO Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health News Alert: Joint Council recommends historic National Agreement on Closing the Gap to National Cabinet, the Australian Local Government Association and the Coalition of Peaks for signing



The Joint Council met this afternoon by teleconference to discuss the final details of the draft National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The Joint Council acknowledged the work between Australian governments, the Australian Local Government Association and the Coalition of Peaks to negotiate the historic agreement.

This is the first National Agreement of its kind that will be signed by Australian governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, represented by the Coalition of Peaks. It has been developed in genuine partnership between all parties.

“We are making history,” said Pat Turner AM, Lead Convener of the Coalition of Peaks; CEO of NACCHO and Co-Chair of the Joint Council. “I’m proud to say that we are in the home stretch of bringing this historic National Agreement to light.”



“A real game changer for this next phase of Closing the Gap is that the expertise and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on what works and what is needed is at the centre,” Ms Turner said.

The draft National Agreement is informed by a comprehensive engagement process, led by the Coalition of Peaks, in late 2019 with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country on what should be included.

“The draft National Agreement does not include everything that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people want, but I know that we have pushed governments in their commitments because the Coalition of Peaks have been at the table. There is a significant difference from what governments alone were prepared to commit to in December 2018 and where we are now. That change has come about because of the work of the Coalition of Peaks.”

The draft National Agreement sets a strategy to close the gap that is strongly based on, and underpinned by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ priorities. It is built around four new Priority Reforms about transforming the way governments work with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in order to improve outcomes. The Priority Reforms were overwhelmingly supported during the engagements.

The Priority Reforms are:

1. Developing and strengthening structures to ensure the full involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in shared decision making at the national, state and local or regional level and embedding their ownership, responsibility and expertise to close the gap.
2. Building the formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services sector to deliver Closing the Gap services and programs in agreed focus areas.

3. Ensuring all mainstream government agencies and institutions undertake systemic and structural transformation to contribute to Closing the Gap, improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4. Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, relevant data and information to monitor the implementation of the Priority Reforms, the Closing the Gap targets and drive local priorities.

The draft National Agreement includes commitments to tangible actions from all governments to change the way they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and give effect to the four Priority Reforms. All four Priority Reforms will have a target to measure government action in these areas.

The draft National Agreement also establishes 16 national socio-economic targets in areas including education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, safety, housing, land and waters, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The targets will help to monitor progress in improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“The Coalition of Peaks have always said that targets alone do not drive change. We have seen this from the past 10 years. It is the full implementation of the Priority Reforms that will make the difference to our peoples’ lives. This is where we need to focus governments to focus and this is exactly what the new National Agreement will do,” Ms Turner said.

“The Joint Council considered the ambition of the closing the gap targets in the draft National Agreement and agreed that parity of outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians is the only acceptable outcome.”

“Expected parity dates are not fixed dates. If governments implement the Priority Reforms in full and invest in the outcome areas of health, education, employment and housing, parity will be achieved earlier,” Ms Turner said.

The National Agreement includes new engagement and accountability mechanisms that mean jurisdictions will work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to implement the Agreement. All parties to the National Agreement are fully committed to the outcomes of the Agreement.

“This new National Agreement has the opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of our people and has the potential to establish a strong policy foundation to finally give effect to what our people have been saying is needed, for a long time, to close the gaps,” Ms Turner said.

More information go to www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au