

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Equality and the Closing the Gap Strategy



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The Closing the Gap Strategy was initially committed to by all Australian Governments in 2008. All Australian governments committed to achieving equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in health and life expectancy within a generation.

Despite promising initial investment, since then, mixed progress has been made across a range of targets on life expectancy, health, education and employment.

Cuts to funding and a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultation and shared decision making with Governments has limited results.

In 2020, only two of the seven targets – early childhood education and Year 12 or equivalent attainment - are on track to be met by 2031. Other areas such as employment and school attendance have not seen improvements.

The life expectancy gap persists, with Indigenous peoples continuing to experience higher rates of preventable deaths from treatable conditions. The life expectancy at birth is 71.6 years for Indigenous men (8.6 years less than non-Indigenous men) and 75.6 years for Indigenous women (7.8 years less than non-Indigenous women).

A new National Agreement on Closing the Gap was signed in July 2020. This was negotiated through a Partnership Agreement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies (the Coalition of Peaks) and the NFRFC.

The Commission expects that this partnership will address the power disparity in decision-making and allow the peak bodies and all governments to work together as equal partners for the first time on Closing the Gap policy and implementation.

Under the new Agreement there are four priority reforms and 16 socioeconomic targets. Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments have committed to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander



organisations to design and deliver on priority areas such as housing, out of home care rates for children, incarceration rates and land rights.

In order to achieve these fundamental reforms, new targets and outcomes, allocations of significant funding are required from all levels of Government.

The 2020 Report from the Close the Gap Campaign; [‘We Nurture our Culture for our Future, and our Culture Nurtures Us’](#) highlighted how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, equality and empowerment is critical to wellbeing and the full realisation of the scale of human rights enjoyed by other Australians.

This report emphasised the cultural determinants of health; the interconnected relationships between cultural expression, connection to country, family, kinship, community, leadership and self-determination and their critical importance in reaching equitable outcomes in health, education, justice and community safety.

Recommendation

Governments implement shared decision making and genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the Closing the Gap strategy, and commit to the funding and actions deemed adequate to achieve the new targets by 2031

