



THE NATIONAL AGREEMENT ON CLOSING THE GAP

Background

The National Agreement for Closing the Gap is a formal partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and the Australian Government. Prior to this agreement, inclusion of Indigenous peoples into the policies that affect them has been limited. Therefore, the National Agreement symbolises a new and collaborative approach to improving the outcomes of Indigenous Australians.

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The next ten years

Effective as of March 2019, the Agreement will be in place for ten years, legally binding the Coalition of Peaks and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to a shared decision-making process that utilises transparency, agency and accountability to achieve targets set by the Closing the Gap agenda. Since a decade of Closing the Gap reports have detailed consistently inadequate progress, this approach aims to refresh the government-led initiative that has been in effect since 2009.

The National Agreement as a voice for communities

The National Agreement is the contract between the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the implementation of policy that affects them. Distinct needs of communities across Australia filter up through The Coalition of Peaks to the Joint Council, where decisions are henceforth made collaboratively as per The National Agreement. This process enhances the autonomy of communities and the Indigenous organisations affiliated with their interests.

The Joint Council

The Joint Council is the organisational body that ensures effective communication between all Parties. The main role of the Joint Council is to support the implementation of the Closing the Gap agenda, as well as advise the COAG on policy implementation where necessary. Furthermore, The Council will monitor performance of the Closing the Gap agenda in order to assure consistency. The Council meets twice a year and enacts decisions based on consensus. The Council guarantees the inclusion of indigenous voices and opinions in the design and execution of the Closing the Gap agenda.

Shared beliefs for better outcomes

This partnership synchronises a common goal for Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islanders and the Australian Government. The National Agreement unites all parties under a shared goal. That is:

“to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians.”

Priority Reforms

The National Agreement centralises four priority reforms. These reforms are a product of shared-decision making and constitute the basis of all targets set by the Closing the Gap agenda, as well as the manner in which they are conducted. The reforms are as follows:

1. Formal partnerships and shared decision making

Building genuine partnerships and strengthening foundations as a means to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through shared decision making with the COAG.

2. Building the community-controlled sector

Building community-controlled sectors that deliver services to support Closing the Gap, additionally providing employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

3. Transforming Government Organisations

Improving accountability and responsibility to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This will include measures to eradicate systemic racism and embed a practice of cultural safety.

4. Shared access to data and information at a regional level

Enabling communities and governments to equal access of data and information as an integral aspect of collaborative management. The National Agreement prioritises transparency as the foundation for successfully achieving the first three Priority Reforms.

Targets in Focus

The framework is subsequently divided into 16 socio-economic targets. These targets cover the following sectors:

- Education and employment
- Health and wellbeing
- Justice
- Safety
- Housing
- Land and waters
- Languages

Executing the Implementation Plan

Under the new Agreement, all parties, including the Australian Government, will deliver an Implementation Plan on Closing the Gap in July 2021. The Parties will report annually on the actions they are taking to achieve the targets in the Spring sitting period.

How accountability will be ensured

The National Agreement is designed to hold The Commonwealth, states and territories, local governments and The Coalition of Peaks equally accountable for the design and implementation of all programs that serve the CTG. The Productivity Commission is responsible for annually publishing data associated with progress made towards the targets. A productivity review will be published every three years to inform further action to achieve better outcomes. Accompanied by this, an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander review will also be published annually to report on the changes to people's lived experience.

Measuring the Outcome

Results will be monitored by both communities and governments. The collected data will be available for those concerned. This data will indicate the successes and pitfalls of policies and programs. Transparent access to this data, as outlined in Priority Reform 4, is fundamental to the success of the National Agreement. Previous Closing the Gap agendas did not allow such data transparency.

Who's involved?

The Joint Council is Co-chaired by Pat Turner, CEO of NACCHO, and The Hon Ken Wyatt, Minister for Indigenous Australians, as nominated by the Commonwealth. Twelve internally elected representatives from the COP also hold seats in the Joint Council. A single representative from each state and territory government, as well as one senior official from the Australian Government Association, also constitute the Joint Council.

The following is a list of representatives from the COP who constitute Indigenous representation in The Joint Council:

- The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP (Co-chair)
- Pat Turner AM (Co-chair)
- Muriel Bamblett AO
- Jamie Lowe
- Cindy Berwick
- Jill Gallagher
- Donnella Mills
- Vicki O'Donnell
- David Warrener
- Katrina Fanning PSM
- John Paterson
- Scott Wilson

For more information

- <https://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/new-national-agreement-on-closing-the-gap/>
 - <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement-closing-the-gap>
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