A REPORT ON ENGAGEMENTS WITH
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

TO INFORM A
NEW NATIONAL AGREEMENT
ON CLOSING THE GAP

JUNE 2020

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June 2020

Coalition
of Peaks

Preface

This landmark report has been prepared by the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Peak Organisations on Closing the Gap (the Coalition of Peaks), in partnership with Australian governments – federal, state and territory – and the Australian Local Government Association. It provides detailed feedback on what representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities across Australia said about what should be included in a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap during engagements coordinated by the Coalition of Peaks in late 2019.

Good progress is being made on settling the National Agreement after many months of negotiations between governments and the Coalition of Peaks. I am confident that agreement will be reached before the end of July, most importantly, that it will strongly reflect the feedback we received from our people.

This report came about because of the conviction of the Coalition of Peaks that, if Australia is to truly close the gap in life outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians, there needs to be a new way of working established between us and governments. Australian Governments confirmed its support for this when it agreed to a formal partnership with representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to underpin the next phase of its Closing the Gap strategy. Subsequently, Australian governments, including the Australian Local Government Association, signed off with the Coalition of Peaks a formal Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap, which is a historic demonstration of this new way of working.

For the Coalition of Peaks, a new way of working also requires that governments reform the way they engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on changes to policies and programs that affect them. All governments need to ensure that they engage fully and transparently; allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a leadership role in the design and conduct of engagements; ensure they know the purpose and fully understand what is being proposed; know what feedback is provided and how that is being taken into account by governments in making decisions; and are able to assess whether the engagements have been fair, transparent and open.

The engagements on the National Agreement, led by the Coalition of Peaks in partnership with Australian governments, including the Australian Local Government Association, implemented this new approach. Senior representatives of the Coalition of Peaks, including me, led meetings with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia and the Coalition of Peaks published an online national survey. The engagements were underpinned by a discussion booklet, A new way of working, which was made public and widely distributed before meetings and included questions to guide the feedback. A report on what was said was prepared for each meeting and agreed between representatives of the relevant government and the Coalition of Peaks. The participants also had the opportunity to complete an evaluation sheet on how the engagement went and whether they felt they had an opportunity to be heard. A snapshot of the feedback was published and distributed to participants and an Aboriginal consultancy firm was contracted to independently review the engagements. This report has also been published.

Engagement processes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people like this one rarely occur in Australia. It is incredibly important because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been saying for decades that they want to be listened to by governments. The process we have undertaken will allow them to know if they have been heard properly when the Agreement is settled shortly. In the meantime, I hope that Australian governments will see this as a new benchmark for how they go about engaging with us.

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge that it would not have been possible to conduct the engagements, which are the subject of this report, or prepare the report itself, without the support of the Australian governments and I want to sincerely thank our partners for this.

Patricia Turner AM
Lead Convenor
Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Peak Organisations
CEO, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

Contents

Abbreviations and short titles

TERMS	
ACCHO	Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation
ACCO	Aboriginal community-controlled organisation
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
CDP	Community Development Program
Coalition of Peaks	Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Peak Organisations
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
EC	Empowered Communities
Joint Council	Joint Ministerial and Coalition of Peaks Council on Closing the Gap
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
National Agreement	National Agreement on Closing the Gap
NGO	non-government organisation
NIRA	National Indigenous Reform Agreement
NPY Lands	Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
Partnership Agreement	COAG and Coalition of Peaks Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap 2019–2029
PMC	Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PWG	Partnership Working Group
Qld	Queensland
RAP	Reconciliation Action Plan
SA	South Australia
Tas	Tasmania
Vic	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

ORGANISATIONS	
AEC	Victorian Aboriginal Executive Council
AHCWA	Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia
AIDA	Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
AMSANT	Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT
APO NT	Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory
ATSIEB	ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body
CATSINaM	Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives
CLC	Central Land Council
FNMA	First Nations Media Australia
FPDN	First Peoples Disability Network
FWCPA	Far West Coast Progress Association
IAHA	Indigenous Allied Health Australia
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
NATSIHWA	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association
NATSILS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
NFVPLSF	National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services Forum
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency (Commonwealth)
NLC	Northern Land Council
NNTC	National Native Title Council
NSW AECG	NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
NSWALC	NSW Aboriginal Land Council
NSW CAPO	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peaks
NTAHF	Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum
QAIHC	Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council
QATSICPP	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak
QIFVLS	Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service
SAACCON	South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network
SNAICC	SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children
TAC	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
No abbreviation	Healing Foundation
No abbreviation	Lowitja Institute

Executive summary

Engagements to seek feedback on what should be included in a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap were held between September and December 2019. This report provides an opportunity for all Australians to understand what representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people told the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks) and Australian governments in those engagements.

The primary focus of the engagements was on three proposed priority reforms to change the way Australian governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

1. To develop and strengthen structures to ensure the full involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in shared decision making, embedding their ownership, responsibility and expertise to close the gap

2. To build formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service sectors to deliver Closing the Gap services and programs

3. To ensure all mainstream government agencies and institutions that service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities undertake systemic and structural transformation to contribute to Closing the Gap.

New Closing the Gap targets were also discussed, including reviewing the targets agreed in draft by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in December 2018.

Key findings of the engagements

- The three priority reforms were overwhelmingly supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who participated in the engagements.

- An additional, fourth priority reform emerged on shared access to and use of data to support decision making by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments.

- New Closing the Gap targets are needed, such as for the preservation of culture and languages, and existing targets need to be further developed, such as to expand health targets to include mental health and suicide prevention.

Additional key findings include:

- Establishing and maintaining formal partnerships, such as agreements, between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, were an important way of achieving priority reform one and were needed at a national, state/territory and regional/local level;

- Priority areas for developing and strengthening formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service sectors, in response to priority reform two, included housing, aged care and disability support;

- Priority reform three requires mainstream service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be reformed to address systemic racism and promote cultural safety, and to be held much more accountable;

- The need to build on the national structure of the Coalition of Peaks to allow state/territory-based coalitions of peak bodies to develop where they do not currently exist;

- Improving engagement by governments with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on changes to policies and programs to ensure it is done fully and transparently.

Informed by the engagements, the new National Agreement is being negotiated between the Coalition of Peaks and Australian governments. It is expected to be finalised and made public before the end of July 2020.

The Closing the Gap strategy

In 2007–08, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) set out to address long-standing concerns about entrenched differences in life outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians through the Closing the Gap strategy.

To this aim, COAG formed partnerships between all levels of government and set ambitious targets to close the gap in the key areas of life expectancy, child mortality, access to early-childhood education, educational achievement and employment outcomes. This intention was formalised in November 2008 through the establishment by COAG of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA). The NIRA, which is still in existence:

- commits all Australian governments to achieving the Closing the Gap targets
- defines responsibilities and promotes accountability among governments
- provides a roadmap for future action
- notes the commitment by COAG of $4.6 billion in new initiatives for Indigenous Australians across early childhood development, health, housing, economic development and remote service delivery.

Central Land Council community engagement

Dubbo community engagement

However, progress on Closing the Gap targets has not met expectations. On 12 February 2020, the prime minister, in the annual statement to the Australian Parliament on Closing the Gap, informed the nation that only two of the seven targets were 'on track to be met this year, and in 2025', and that the results were not good enough.

A number of challenges slowed progress on these targets, such as only partial implementation of some Closing the Gap strategies, a lack of continued funding and reduced commitment by governments to the NIRA. Most importantly, decision making on Closing the Gap, from the outset, lacked the involvement of representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

At a COAG meeting in 2016, it was identified that four Closing the Gap targets set to expire in 2018 would not be met. As a result, during 2017–18 COAG held consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations and other stakeholders about a new approach to Closing the Gap, with more realistic and achievable targets.

In 2018, COAG focused its new approach on 'refreshing' the targets for the next phase of Closing the Gap. It facilitated a 'special gathering' of prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, which presented COAG with a statement setting out priorities for a new Closing the Gap agenda in February 2018. The statement called for the next phase of Closing the Gap to be guided by the principles of empowerment and self-determination, and deliver a community-led, strengths-based strategy that would enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to move beyond surviving to thriving.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, on behalf of COAG, then led consultations across Australia over the course of 2018 with representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about a refreshed Closing the Gap agenda.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations, however, considered that a genuine partnership, beyond consultation, was needed if more progress was to be made on Closing the Gap. Subsequently, in October 2018, fourteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak organisations wrote to the prime minister seeking formal input and support from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in decisions regarding the next phase of Closing the Gap.

Leaders of these peak organisations were then invited by the prime minister to a meeting, in the lead-up to a COAG meeting in December 2018, to discuss the importance of ownership and shared decision making on Closing the Gap. Led by the prime minister, COAG then agreed that a genuine formal partnership was required for the next phase of Closing the Gap between the federal, state, territory and local governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through their representatives.

COAG also issued a statement on the Closing the Gap Refresh outlining a strengths-based framework that prioritises intergenerational change and the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all Australian communities. COAG said that the finalisation of this framework and associated draft targets would be agreed through a formal partnership.

Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Peak Organisations

In January 2019, the initial fourteen organisations that had written to the prime minister reached out to all community-controlled peak bodies across the country to form a Coalition of Peaks.

The vast majority ultimately became members and there are now almost fifty member organisations. All support a vision for a genuine partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Australian governments, including the Australian Local Government Association, in developing and implementing the next phase of Closing the Gap.

These organisations and their members support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families and people, and have represented them for decades. All service sectors are covered, including health, native title and land, media, legal services and support for families and children. Members of the Coalition of Peaks are either national, state- or territory-wide community-controlled peak organisations. National members include the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO),

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) and the National Native Title Council (NNTC). State and territory members include the Northern and Central Land Councils (NLC and CLC) in the Northern Territory, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC), the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC), the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA) and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB). The Coalition of Peaks can decide to allow any other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisation to join the Coalition and it has approved an application form for this purpose. For more information see: www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au.

In some jurisdictions, state and territory peaks have formed their own coalitions to support partnerships with state and territory governments. These are Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT (APO NT), the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO), the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network (SAACCON) and the Victorian Aboriginal Executive Council (AEC).

The Coalition of Peaks structure is based on self-determination. The governing boards of all member organisations are elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and/or organisations and are accountable to that membership. The Coalition of Peaks is not an incorporated body, but it

The Coalition of Peaks - January 2019

has a terms of reference that governs how its member organisations work together, how it is structured, its membership and how it makes decisions. Senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives of all member organisations of the Coalition of Peaks make decisions as equals in relation to policy, strategy and governance.

Lead Convenor Ms Pat Turner was appointed with a key role to bring representatives of member organisations together for face-to-face meetings and teleconferences. The Coalition of Peaks meets regularly, through fortnightly teleconferences, to discuss policy matters and agree positions to take to meetings with governments. Before the coronavirus pandemic, the Coalition of Peaks also came together in face-to-face workshops a few times throughout the year to reconnect and to progress large pieces of work.

A small secretariat, hosted by NACCHO, has also been established to support the Coalition of Peaks in negotiating as equal partners with governments to design and monitor the Closing the Gap strategy. The Commonwealth provided $4.6 million over three years in a funding agreement in April 2019 to support the costs of the secretariat and meetings. Never has a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak bodies come together in this way to agree and negotiate with governments.

Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap

In March 2019, a historic Partnership Agreement on Closing that Gap came into effect that was initially proposed and drafted by the Coalition of Peaks. This agreement is the first of its kind in Australia's history and commits to shared decision making between Australian governments, including the Australian Local Government Association, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, through the Coalition of Peaks, over the next ten years on Closing the Gap.

It recognises that shared decision making between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled representatives and governments on the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Closing the Gap strategy is essential to improving the life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Partnership Agreement has established the Joint Council of Australian Governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People on Closing the Gap (Joint Council). Its membership comprises one minister from each jurisdiction, with responsibilities relevant to Closing the Gap, nominated by each government (federal, state and territory), twelve members of the Coalition of Peaks it nominates, who provide broad geographic and subject matter coverage, and a representative of the Australian Local Government Association.

This is the first Australian governments' council to include members from outside government, representing a historic step forward in the working relationship between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Joint Council drives and monitors the implementation and progress of the Closing the Gap strategy and provides advice to COAG. At its first meeting, on 27 March 2019, the Joint Council agreed on its terms of reference, including that it will be supported by a Partnership Working Group (PWG) comprising representatives of each Australian government, including the Australian Local Government Association, and the Coalition of Peaks, with the role of developing and progressing issues for upcoming meetings.

The Partnership Agreement also includes a commitment to review NIRA, with the scope of that review and the way in which it will be undertaken to be agreed by the parties. The terms of reference for the review are also to include consideration of national legislation being developed to give effect to this Partnership Agreement and the agreed framework, targets and implementation arrangements for the next phase of Closing the Gap.

A new National Agreement on Closing the Gap

At its first meeting, on 27 March 2019, the Joint Council put in place arrangements to review the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) to be carried out by the Partnership Working Group (PWG).

That review concluded that the NIRA was a significant step forward in the way governments committed to coordinated and collaborative action to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, the review also found that the potential of NIRA was hampered in several ways and efforts under the NIRA were not sustained over time.

At its second meeting, on 23 August 2019, in response to the review, the Joint Council agreed to develop a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The new National Agreement will replace the NIRA. The Joint Council also proposed that it build on the lessons learned, continue NIRA's successful elements, strengthen others and address foundational areas that were previously excluded from consideration under NIRA. The most significant of those was that NIRA was only an agreement between Australian governments, whereas, in the new National Agreement, for the first time, it was agreed by the Joint Council that the representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, namely the Coalition of Peaks, will also be a party.

At the same meeting, the Coalition of Peaks also gained the in-principle agreement of the Joint Council to the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap being built around the following priority reforms to accelerate improvements in life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and closing the gap:

1. Developing and strengthening structures to ensure the full involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 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 service sectors to deliver Closing the Gap services and programs in agreed priority areas

3. Ensuring all mainstream government agencies and institutions that service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities undertake systemic and structural transformation to contribute to Closing the Gap.

National principles and activities for action to achieve these priority reforms were also to be included in the National Agreement while the Joint Council also proposed that it contain Closing the Gap targets and indicators, building on, but not limited to, those draft targets agreed by COAG at its meeting in December 2018.

Of great importance to this report was that, to help build understanding and support for the new Agreement and approach to Closing the Gap, the Joint Council agreed that the priority reforms be tested through an engagement process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, organisations and communities.

Approach to the engagements

The Coalition of Peaks was determined that the engagement process would be done in a very different way from how governments and others had engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait people in the past. The Coalition of Peaks also wanted to demonstrate the benefits of a new approach in order to set a national benchmark for how this can be done much better in the future.

Critical elements of that new approach are that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have a leadership role in the design and conduct of engagements; know the purpose and fully understand what is being proposed; know what feedback is provided and how that is being taken account by governments in making decisions; and are able to assess whether the engagements have been fair, transparent and open.

The Coalition of Peaks took a proposal built around these elements to the Joint Council, which was agreed and implemented. Starting in September 2019, for about three months the Coalition of Peaks led an inclusive engagement process it designed, with the support of governments. The objectives were principally to build understanding of the three priority reforms, seek feedback on the level of support for them and COAG's draft Closing the Gap targets, and for that feedback to be able to inform the finalisation of the new National Agreement.

Senior representatives of the Coalition of Peaks attended and led the meetings with representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations across Australia. The engagement process included developing engagement materials, such as the discussion booklet published before the engagements began, to enable participants to be aware of the issues. A detailed engagement proposal for each jurisdiction, including the location and dates of meetings, was agreed bilaterally between the Coalition of Peaks and the relevant governments.

It was also agreed that a comprehensive report on the engagements would be released to participants and be made public, and that an independent reviewer would be engaged to report on the transparency of the engagements, to also be made public. The costs of the engagement process were shared. The Coalition of Peaks paid for the production of the engagement materials and attendance of their senior representatives at meetings. State and territory governments agreed to pay for convening the meetings in each of their jurisdictions while the Commonwealth paid the costs of convening a national meeting and of the independent reviewer.

To provide multiple ways in which people could participate, and to increase the cross-section of those providing feedback, a four-tier approach was agreed with the Partnership Working Group (PWG) to guide the engagement process.

Tier 1: Engagement of members of the Coalition of Peaks with their own members

All Coalition of Peaks member were asked to engage with their own membership through existing channels of communication. This was proposed to build on the engagement already happening with their respective boards and to capture the views of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations that were members of a national or a state or territory peak. One example is NACCHO, which has a membership of 143

Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations (ACCHOs) across Australia. Another is FNMA, which has over 200 members from media organisations across Australia.

Tier 2: Engagement with representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within each state and territory

Senior representatives of members of the Coalition of Peaks led meetings with representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations in every jurisdiction in Australia. The intention was to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations that were not members of the Coalition of Peaks.

These meetings were mostly organised by the relevant governments, with public servants also attending the meetings and preparing reports on the outcomes. The report on the outcomes was agreed between the relevant Coalition of Peaks members and government. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilitators also attended these meetings and it was agreed that interpreters could be engaged if needed.

Tier 3: Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and subject matter experts in a national forum

One national meeting in Canberra was led by the Coalition of Peaks, in partnership with the federal government though the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). This meeting aimed to obtain the feedback of national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives not included in the state and territory meetings.

Tier 4: Engagement with the public through an online survey

As a vehicle to obtain the views of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people unable to participate in the Tier 1, 2 or 3 engagements, it was also agreed that the Coalition of Peaks publish, manage, analyse and report on an online survey. The survey also served as a vehicle to engage with the public as a whole. Originally, Tier 4 was for the Coalition of Peaks to use the public mailing list it established after the announcement of the Partnership Agreement and the media networks of FNMA to build awareness of the engagement process, including the reform priorities. While that was still carried out, it was decided that the online survey should be the primary mechanism for feedback under Tier 4.

Engagement materials

Engagement materials were developed by the Coalition of Peaks and agreed with the Partnership Working Group. They were designed to provide an overarching and coordinated approach to the engagements to serve a number of objectives. These were: to build understanding among representatives of Aboriginal and Torres people from across Australia for the three priority reforms; to allow them to have genuine input, through a transparent process, into the development of the National Agreement; to enable national consistency in the way the engagements were carried out; and to support the preparation of a public report on the feedback.

The set of materials that was distributed to all members of the Coalition of Peaks, relevant government agencies, meeting organisers and facilitators before the engagements commenced comprised:

1. Meeting guide and checklist

2. Suggested meeting invitation

3. In-depth discussion booklet *(A new way of working)*

4. Illustrated PowerPoint presentation on the new way of working

5. Suggested talking points for Coalition of Peaks facilitators

6. Record of meeting form

7. Meeting participant evaluation form.

The meeting guide and checklist included a suggested agenda for meetings, as follows:

1. Meeting commencement, including agreement to record and housekeeping (facilitator)

2. Welcome to Country (traditional owner)

3. Participant introductions (facilitator)

4. PowerPoint presentation on discussion booklet (facilitator)

   a. Closing the Gap – the story so far

   b. Shared decision making on Closing the Gap – Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap

   c. Developing a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap

      i.   Priority Reform 1

      ii. Priority Reform 2

      iii. Priority Reform 3

      iv. Closing the Gap targets

   d. Next steps

5. Feedback on the meeting (participants).

The most important items of the agenda were seeking feedback on the priority reforms and Closing the Gap targets. To ensure the feedback was structured, the questions asked were the same as those in the discussion booklet on a new way of working and similar to those asked in the online survey. The Coalition of Peaks is satisfied that these engagement materials were used in almost all the engagements, noting that because of time constraints it was not always possible to complete the meeting agenda.

Gilimbaa, an Indigenous creative agency registered with Supply Nation, designed the discussion booklet *(A new way of working)*.

Engagements with the membership of peak organisations in each state and territory and nationally (Tiers 1, 2 and 3)

A high level of community participation was achieved. Across Australia, in urban, regional and remote locations in every state and territory, more than 2300 people participated. Table 1 lists all formal meetings, 75 in total, including the locations and numbers who attended.

Feedback from these engagements was recorded by note-takers at each meeting using the record of meeting form. The forms were submitted to the Coalition of Peaks for collation and analysis. In the case of the Northern Territory, New South Wales and Australian Capital Territory, the reports were also collated into a jurisdiction-wide report. NSW CAPO published its Tier 1 report at www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/close-the-gap/reports.

Table 1. Engagements held across Australia on the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap

ENGAGEMENT	ORGANISER OR LEADER	DATE	LOCATION	ATTENDING
Tier 1 Meetings	Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA)	24 Sept 2019	Perth, WA	26
	Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT)	16 Oct 2019	Tennant Creek, NT (Julalikari Council meeting)	10
	APO NT	29 Oct 2019	Yulara Pulka, NT (Central Land Council meeting)	95
(Final Meeting Report combined Tier 1 and 2 discussions)	ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB)	5 Sept 2019 17 Oct 2019 28 Oct 2019	Multiple locations, ACT	55
	First Nations Media Australia (FNMA)	9 Sept 2019 11 Sept 2019 24 Sept 2019 28 Nov 2019	Online, Thursday Island, Qld; Alice Springs, NT	80
	Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA)	26 Sep 2019	Darwin, NT	89
	Lowitja Institute	26 Sept 2019	Carlton, Vic	5
	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)	4 Nov 2019	Darwin, NT	450
	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (NATSILS)	24 Sept 2019	Teleconference	8

ENGAGEMENT	ORGANISER OR LEADER	DATE	LOCATION	ATTENDING
	National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services Forum (NFVPLSF)	16 Oct 2019	Teleconference	7
	National Native Title Council (NNTC)	3 Sept 2019 24 Oct 2019	Darwin, NT Adelaide, SA	40
	New South Wales Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO)	14-31 Oct 2019	Multiple locations, NSW (28 consultants)	568
	Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC)	21 Oct 2019	Brisbane, Qld	5
	Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (QIFVLS)	25 Nov 2019	Teleconference	6
	SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children	3 Sept 2019	Adelaide, SA	55
	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC)	14 Nov 2019	Videoconference Nipaluna, Hobart and Launceston, Pataway, Burnie, Tas	25
Tier 2- Meetings	Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT)	15 Oct 2019	Alice Springs, NT	13
	APO NT	30 Oct 2019	Darwin, NT	24
	APO NT	4 Oct 2019	Katherine, NT	21
	APO NT	14 Oct 2019	Maningrida, West Arnhem, NT	14
	APO NT	16 Oct 2019	Tennant Creek, NT	21
	Elders Council of Tasmania	11 Oct 2019	Launceston, Tas	26
	NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSWAECG)	21 Oct 2019	Redfern, NSW	29

ENGAGEMENT	ORGANISER OR LEADER	DATE	LOCATION	ATTENDING
	Qld Dept of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP)	20 Nov 2019	Cairns, Qld	40
	Qld DATSIP	28 Nov 2019	Goodna, Qld	43
	Qld DATSIP	26 Nov 2019	Mount Isa, Qld	24
	Qld DATSIP	20 Nov 2019	Rockhampton, Qld	33
	Qld DATSIP	11 Nov 2019	Thursday Island, Qld	25
	Qld DATSIP	19 Nov 2019	Townsville, Qld	55
	South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network (SAACCON)	31 Oct 2019	Adelaide, SA	11
	SAACCON	15 Oct 2019	Ceduna, SA	8
	SAACCON	30 Oct 2019	Port Augusta, SA	12
	SAACCON	29 Oct 2019	Port Lincoln, SA	12
	Victorian Aboriginal Executive Council (AEC)	14 Oct 2019	Bendigo, Vic	22
	AEC	16 Oct 2019	Melbourne, Vic	55-60
	AEC	24 Oct 2019	Morwell, Vic	24
	Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA)	14 Oct 2019	Broome, WA	48
	AHCWA	4 Dec 2019	Geraldton, WA	35
	AHCWA	21 Oct 2019	Kalgoorlie, WA	35
	AHCWA	7 Nov 2019	Katanning, WA	42
	AHCWA	28 Oct 2019	Perth, WA	51
	AHCWA	23 Oct 2019	Port Hedland, WA	58
Tier 3 Meeting	NACCHO/NIAA	23 Oct 2019	Canberra, ACT	14

Online survey

The Australia-wide online survey was publicly launched on 9 September 2019 and, after being extended, closed on 8 November 2019. It used SurveyMonkey software and was available on the NACCHO website, with links promoted by Coalition of Peaks members through their online networks and by the federal, state and territory governments, and then to their networks. The survey asked 39 questions that were similar to those in the discussion booklet and were also asked of participants during the Tier 1–3 engagements. The questions were both quantitative and qualitative, in order to understand people's perspectives on the three priority reform areas and COAG's draft Closing the Gap targets.

While the survey was available to the general public, it targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and was widely promoted through the networks of the Coalition of Peaks and First Nations media.

In total, 1674 responses were received for the online survey. More than 70 per cent of respondents were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The majority of responses were from New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory. Around 180 responses were from organisations.

Port Hedland community engagement

Analysis and presentation of the responses

The following sections on Priority Reforms 1 to 4, the Closing the Gap targets and other feedback set out what people said in response to the questions asked through the engagements and the online survey. The information is presented in a way that the Coalition of Peaks sincerely hopes will enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including their representatives, to be able to see whether they have been listened to and the extent to which their feedback is reflected in the proposed National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The analysis of the responses, particularly to the questions asked in the engagements, was done by the secretariat of the Coalition of Peaks with the assistance of Abt Associates Ltd, a human services consultancy with social research capacity.

A pragmatic approach to the analysis was taken, which involved reviewing all of the meeting reports and survey responses and identifying discernible trends, particularly what most or a significant number of people said in response. What most said is then summarised under each question for Priority Reforms 1 to 3 and the draft COAG Closing the Gap targets, noting that Priority Reform 4 was not settled until after the engagements. The participants' words, included in the meeting reports, have been used as much as possible. Direct quotes from meeting reports that support what most said or convey an idea important to the new National Agreement, have also been included frequently in the analysis.

The only quantitative part of the analysis undertaken was in relation to the specific survey questions. The analysis of the data collected in the online survey usually follows the responses reported from the meetings. For some questions, this was not practical and quotes from the engagements and the survey responses are intermingled as they are very similar. The responses to some survey questions are also represented by a graph, taken from the survey itself, showing the number and percentages of each response. Open-ended questions are not represented graphically.

Effort has been made to ensure the wide range of ideas and opinions expressed in the engagements have been captured for each priority reform. It is also important to note that there was considerable overlap in the responses to questions and many of the issues raised are interrelated. The numbering of the questions presented in this report generally matches the order of questions presented for discussion during the engagements but differs from the online survey, as they were numbered consecutively throughout the survey.

Port Hedland community engagement

Priority Reform 1:

Developing and strengthening structures so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share in decision making with governments on Closing the Gap

1

Priority Reform 1 focuses on the structures needed to ensure the full involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in shared decision making, at national, state, local and regional level, in order to embed their ownership, responsibility and expertise in Closing the Gap strategies.

It responds to the call for decades from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to have a much greater say in how programs and services are delivered to their people, in their own places and on their own country.

The feedback from the engagements showed there is almost universal support for the inclusion of Priority Reform 1 in the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

PRIORITY 1: QUESTION 1

Is Priority Reform 1 important to be included in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

Engagement type: Coalition of Peak member organisations with their own membership

All Coalition of Peaks organisation members who were engaged by their national and state or territory peak bodies supported the inclusion of Priority Reform 1 in the National Agreement.

The biggest of the national peaks, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), conducted a workshop with its members at its national

conference in Darwin on 4 and 5 November 2019. About 450 representatives of over 140 Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations (ACCHOs) across Australia participated in the workshop. There was unanimous support for formal partnership structures for a range of reasons, the following in particular:

- Closing the Gap will not succeed without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people included in the decision-making process.

- Formal agreements are a way to hold everyone accountable.

- It provides a way to avoid governments imposing decisions on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- It allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to raise their views and ideas directly to governments.

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) led three sessions with its members, including at the Remote Indigenous Media Festival on Thursday Island, attended by 80 people. FNMA summarised the response of its members to this question as:

> *Yes, definitely. Members supported reversing the approach to Closing the Gap to a community approach rather than a systems-based approach.*

The feedback from the membership of SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children – was that it is essential that formal partnerships are included in the National Agreement, and these need to exist at the national, state, territory, regional and local levels.

At a state level, the New South Wales Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) held 28 forums across New South Wales to engage their memberships and other community members. Approximately 570 people attended, and participants strongly supported Priority Reform 1. They said successful achievement of this reform priority would require:

- a genuine partnership that gave Aboriginal people a voice and built trust, through proper community consultation
- a partnership underpinned by open lines of communication
- cultures to be recognised, respected and embedded in the partnerships
- funding to be provided longer term, where it was needed locally, without duplication of services
- documented accountability in the partnerships from governments and communities.

Direct feedback from participants included:

There needs to be (a partnership), but not just on paper – [it] needs to be living. (Griffith, NSW)

Aboriginal people need to be involved in the decision-making … Aboriginal people know what is best for their communities [and] need to work with government. (Muswellbrook, NSW)

However, there was a caveat to this support to the extent that issues of trust were frequently raised, expressed in this way by a participant from Bathurst, NSW:

There has been a lack of consistency and transparency in the partnerships that have been established previously between government and Aboriginal people.

Engagement type: Representatives of communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in each state and territory

Support for Priority Reform 1 in the jurisdictional face-to face meetings was as strong as what it was in the membership meetings.

The 93 participants in meetings led by Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) all considered that formal partnerships with governments are critical to Closing the Gap, but 'must be related back to the local context and require ongoing government commitment to working with Aboriginal people and organisations'.

Participants in Queensland, in support of formal partnership arrangements, emphasised the need for strong community involvement, including in the structures that represented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Participants in Mount Isa and Rockhampton said the membership should include community leaders, who then have the responsibility to provide feedback

to the community on outcomes. Townsville participants stressed the need for smaller and local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) to be included in the formal partnership arrangements.

Apart from support for Priority Reform 1, the consistent feedback in the face-to-face meetings in South Australia was that, since the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) was disbanded in 2005 (including its regional councils), there had not been any Aboriginal regional structures that allowed the community to be engaged or to organise themselves for regional communications.

In Victoria, the more than 55 participants who attended its Melbourne meeting generally supported Priority Reform 1 being included in the National Agreement. They said: 'Partnerships need to be genuine, community-led and inclusive of all Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander voices.'

Participants in Tasmania supported effective partnerships being part of the National Agreement, while across every session in the Australian Capital Territory there was strong support for Priority Reform 1. Participants considered it should provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT with a voice in decisions that affect them and selected by the community.

In Western Australia, Priority Reform 1 was supported in every face-to-face meeting. As was the case in other jurisdictions, participants responded how important it is for the partnerships to include leaders of communities, young people and ACCOs as they have the lived experience and cultural knowledge vital for better results. At the Geraldton meeting, it was agreed that Priority Reform 1 is important, but it was noted that partnerships need to have a regional focus. At Katanning, participants concluded:

Shared decision making would work better if existing structures at the local level were liberated and strengthened. (meeting report, Katanning, WA)

Engagement type: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and subject matter experts

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders also supported Priority Reform 1. They observed that:

Consultation and co-design are terms that are bandied around, but we need to have a voice in whatever process is happening, in whatever work we're doing, at whatever level. (national meeting report, ACT)

1

Feedback from online survey

More than 90% of the survey respondents said it was either important or extremely important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have formal partnership arrangements with governments to share decision making on Closing the Gap. This is consistent with the support for Priority Reform 1 in the face-to-face meetings.

**Priority 1, Question 1 survey response:
How important is it to have formal partnership arrangements between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to share decision making on closing the gap?**

(Answered = 1052, Skipped =622)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	81.75	860
Very important	12.93	136
Somewhat important	4.09	43
Not so important	0.38	4
Not at all important	0.86	9
Total	**100.01**	**1052**

- Extremely important — 81.75%
- Very important — 12.93%
- Somewhat important — 4.09%
- Not so important — 0.38%
- Not at all important — 0.86%
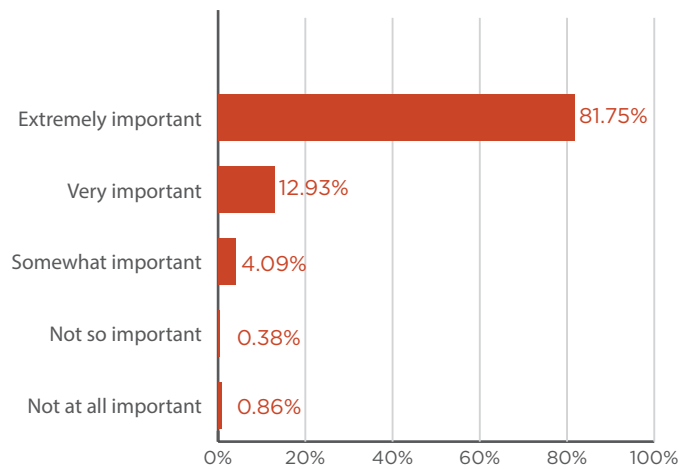
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association community engagement

PRIORITY 1: QUESTION 2

What is an example of a good partnership arrangement that allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make decisions with governments, what are things that make it work and what would help it work better? (open-ended responses)

In response to this question, many participants identified specific partnerships, such as the following:

- ATSIC
- Empowered Communities initiative, including the Barang Regional Alliance in New South Wales
- Midwest Aboriginal Organisation Alliance in Western Australia
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership (QATSIHP)
- Aboriginal Children's Forum in Victoria
- Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (NSW) and their Regional Tripartite Agreements with the New South Wales and Commonwealth governments
- ACT Steering Committee for the Our Booris, Our Way review
- NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service's Aboriginal Joint Management Program
- The WA Aboriginal Health Partnership Forum and the Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum
- Joint Steering Committee on Housing established under the COAG National Partnership on Remote Housing, Northern Territory
- Queensland Department of Education's Ipswich Elders Reference Group
- Gippsland Lakes Community Health Partnership
- The Kimberley Aboriginal Health Planning Forum

However, a small number of participants suggested that they did not know of any effective partnerships, while others did not directly address this question.

Participants also described aspects of partnership arrangements that make them work well, in relation to the specific examples of good partnerships, as well as more general comments about what makes partnerships work well.

Participants across all face-to-face meetings thought that good partnership arrangements were ones that had Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and enabled equality in decision making. Inclusive representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels was considered important, and it was also critical that these representatives were elected by the community, not the government, to ensure that they represented the views of the community.

Several participants also highlighted the need for information sharing between partners and the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having access to the data required to make informed decisions for their community.

Embedding culture in these partnerships and governance arrangements and ensuring culturally safe practices, potentially through cultural training, were other considerations described by several participants. Participants explained that underlying good partnerships was a recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the experts in culture and what is needed and most effective for their communities, which was considered critical to self-determination and empowerment of local communities.

> *Partnerships must include practice of cultural safety and protocols set by traditional owners/custodians/elders. (Bathurst, NSW)*

> *Structured on Aboriginal cultural protocols for decision making, leadership, engagement and negotiation. (SNAICC)*

Participants also agreed that good partnership arrangements were genuine and based on trust, honesty and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. To support effectiveness, the majority of participants described the need for these partnerships to be transparent and include mechanisms to ensure that all members were held accountable for actions and outcomes.

> *Partnerships must be genuine, transparent, with all parties accountable. (Darwin, NT)*

It was also suggested by several participants that these partnership arrangements should be action-focused, have achievable targets and have direct access to decision makers (e.g. ministers, state premiers and other key stakeholders). Cooperation between all levels of government and between community-controlled organisations was considered important to achieving the goals of the partnership. Direct feedback included:

No use having a partnership if there's no action. (Melbourne, Vic)

… formal partnerships are important, but they need to be realistic, with meaningful targets. (Wagga Wagga, NSW)

The importance of effective, ongoing and open communication was also emphasised by most participants. This was often described as governments listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly at the grassroots level, consulting broadly with different communities, allowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to set the agenda for discussions and providing regular updates and feedback to inform communities of changes and developments. Several participants also highlighted the need for communication to occur in accessible, appropriate languages.

Speak with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, be curious, never make assumptions, treat us as equals. (Bendigo, Vic)

Ongoing and long-term conversations that are secure from short-term political cycles and priorities. (IAHA)

Government must truly listen to Aboriginal people, particularly at the grassroots level. (Darwin, NT)

Regular communication and the capacity for the group to set the agenda as things arise, rather than government determining the discussion topics. (FNMA)

We need clearer information – a communications strategy that shares relevant information with all communities in an easily digestible format. (Townsville, Qld)

We need a way to celebrate successes when they occur – like a social media page or a website, to change the narrative to strengths based and recognise the good work that is being done. (Mount Isa, Qld)

Many participants also described the need for consistency, continuity and planning in partnership agreements. To achieve this, a number of strategies were suggested, such as succession planning, upskilling of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including potential future leaders, and longer-term funding arrangements for these partnerships.

While funding was noted as important by a number of participants, one group also highlighted that

partnerships need to be resourced, but a funding agreement is not a partnership [and that] a partnership is about working together, even if there is no funding. (Melbourne, Vic).

Others also stated that ACCOs should have greater input into the allocation of funding.

Aboriginal organisations need to be the organisations that determine what kind of funding, and how much funding, they should receive for Aboriginal programs. (Redfern, NSW)

Aboriginal Elders and leaders must be involved in decision making and community-level engagement, and youth must be given the opportunity to have a voice. (Kalgoorlie, WA)

Mentoring and teaching Aboriginal young people in building the skills, experience and knowledge to work with communities and organisations to bring the voice of Aboriginal people in shared decision making. (Ceduna, SA)

In response to this question on good partnership arrangements, many participants described features of partnerships that had been mentioned above, further highlighting the high level of agreement among participants regarding important features of effective partnerships. For example:

Respect and acknowledgement. (Port Augusta, SA)

No more government-appointed Aboriginal advisers. (NACCHO)

It was important to have a partnership agreement based on a realistic purpose, with a framework for engagement with community and documented accountability on both sides. (Wagga Wagga, NSW)

… involvement with community grassroots, not just high-level representatives. (NACCHO)

… there must be opportunities for the voices of upcoming leaders and the next generation of Elders. (Perth, WA)

Support to train and equip people to take on leadership roles and take part in decision making. (Ipswich, Qld)

Some participants also identified additional ways in which partnerships could be designed or supported to work better. Common suggestions included: the need for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work in senior roles in the public service; the need for partnerships to be appropriately resourced to allow members to be reimbursed for their time and contributions; and the importance of strengthening community-controlled sectors. Constitutional reform was also described as a potentially supportive factor.

Government structures have so many different agencies, but there are limited Aboriginal people in higher government positions … We should have identified Aboriginal positions in the public service. (Darwin, NT)

The lack of funding for committees is a significant barrier to action. (Ipswich, Qld)

There needs to be remuneration for members of any committee or structure. (Ipswich, Qld)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors are invested in and strengthened. (QAIHC)

A process in Queensland that would unite community-controlled organisations. (QIFVLS)

Constitutional reform is needed to recognise and raise decision making of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (Ipswich, Qld)

Treaty – as a stepping stone. (Bendigo, Vic)

PRIORITY 1: QUESTION 3

What is the best way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to choose their own representatives in partnership structures and how important is it they choose them rather than governments?

The majority of participants believed that representatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be chosen by the community. Many participants suggested that these representatives should be selected through methods such as community consultation and election processes. Some participants suggested that representatives could be selected through ACCOs, such as elected ACCO board members. Many participants also highlighted the need for everyone to have the opportunity to have a voice, including Elders and young people.

It is important that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people choose their own representatives, and that government doesn't choose advisers on behalf of the community. (Townsville, Qld)

Through ACCOs who are better positioned in the community with the knowledge and skill of providing needs-based services to the community. (QAIHC)

Representation should be directed through the structures of the national peaks, which are voted on by their members, such as with the National Family Violence and Prevention Legal Services Forum. (NFVPLSF)

[We need] … people to vote in own jurisdictions – ATSIC model. (NACCHO)

We should ensure the local representatives talking to the government include people in remote communities. There should be voting processes, ensuring these are monitored, and local community yarns to feed into the bigger picture. (Mount Isa, Qld)

The ACT ATSIEB model was well supported by those in attendance but increased visibility to community on workplans, outcomes and focus areas is needed. (meeting report, ACT)

Many participants also wanted to ensure that chosen representatives effectively represented the needs of the community and that there was still consultation and representation at a grassroots level. Several participants noted that this was important because the strengths,

ideas and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities varied greatly across Australia and that representatives needed to support these diverse needs.

Some participants suggested that effective community representation could be achieved through the creation of community forums, committees or groups in each region to allow the community to have their say. To support this, several participants also highlighted the need for people to be given information and the opportunity to ask questions in a safe space to inform their decision making.

> *Create cultural hubs and voices in sub-regions to allow different communities to influence. (NACCHO)*

> *[They] … must provide a culturally safe space for our people to ask questions and feel free to express concerns and make their decisions. (NACCHO)*

Overall, there was strong agreement among participants that it was critical for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to choose their own representatives to provide advice to government.

> *It was recognised that it is essential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to select their representatives and that there needs to be diversity of representation to truly represent the community and give voice to marginalised people. (meeting report, IAHA)*

Feedback from online survey

Nearly all survey respondents indicated that it was important (somewhat important, very important or extremely important) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to choose their own representatives (98.86%), with most people reporting that this was extremely important (85.06%). Participants in the face-to-face meetings also emphasised its importance, with many describing it as an important feature of partnerships that work well.

Priority 1, Question 3 survey response: How important is it for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to choose their own representatives to provide advice to government, rather than governments appointing people?

(Answered = 1051, Skipped = 623)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	85.06	894
Very important	10.85	114
Somewhat important	2.95	31
Not so important	0.29	3
Not at all important	0.86	9
Total	**100.01**	**1051**
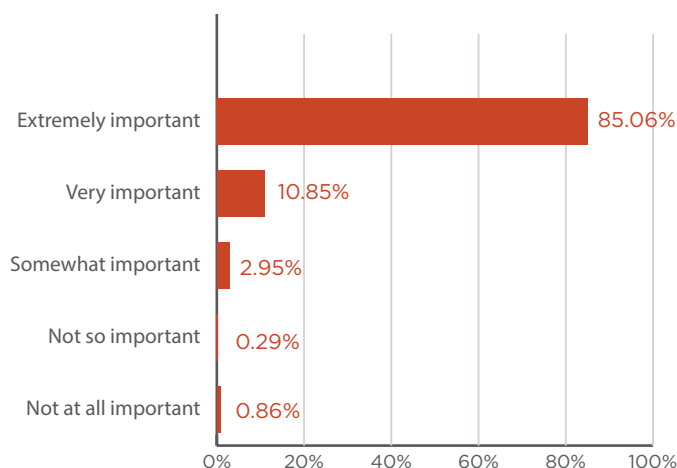
PRIORITY 1: QUESTION 4

How important is it for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have independent advice when making decisions with governments on Closing the Gap policies and programs?

This question was not directly addressed in the face-to-face meetings. However, the few comments made that related to this issue supported the need for independent advice to inform decision making.

> *Aboriginal people have their own support for policy advice and don't rely on governments. (NACCHO)*

> *Partnerships must be supported with resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop their own policy advice. (Ipswich, Qld)*

Feedback from online survey

There was overwhelming agreement among survey participants that it was important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have independent advice when making decisions with governments on Closing the Gap policies and programs. In response to this question on the survey, 98.57% of people indicated that it was important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have independent advice for decision making, with the majority of people (79.18%) stating that this was very important.

Priority 1, Question 4 survey response: How important is it for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have independent advice when making decisions with governments on Closing the Gap policies and programs?

(Answered = 1047, Skipped = 627)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	79.18	829
Very important	16.05	168
Somewhat important	3.34	35
Not so important	0.57	6
Not at all important	0.86	9
Total	**100.00**	**1047**
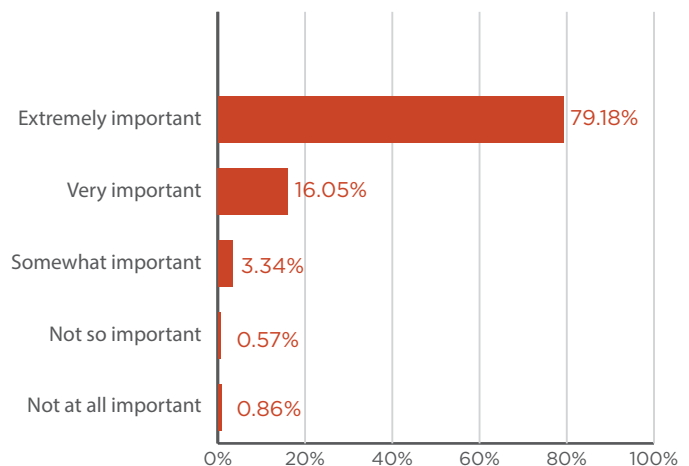
PRIORITY 1: QUESTION 5

How important is it for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have the same data as government to make informed decisions on Closing the Gap policies and programs?

Although this question was not directly asked of participants in the face-to-face meetings, many participants discussed the issue of data. Participants described the need for access to currently collected data, such as census data. A significant number of participants also highlighted the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to collect and maintain ownership of their own data and ensure that the data collected was culturally appropriate, relevant and useful for communities.

> *The importance surrounding data. Every single table talked about sharing information; and we know through reports in the Productivity Commission, and also at the State level, we have had so many examples where data has been a real challenge. We're getting better at it, but what I'm hearing from here is that there is a real problem here. The data is there, but it's not necessarily being shared, and that needs to be shared in order for the right decisions to be made (meeting report, NSWAECG)*

> *Aboriginal people having more involvement, including ownership of data, policies, legislation and KPIs. (NACCHO)*

> *Government departments should provide Aboriginal Organisations with the data to be able to inform decision-making, ensuring that data is accurate and up-to-date (meeting report, Port Hedland WA)*

As a result of this feedback, the Coalition of Peaks created an additional priority reform on data collection, ownership and use. Further detail is described in the section of this report on Priority Reform 4.

Feedback from online survey

In addition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having their own independent advice to inform decision making, it was also considered important that they had the same data as government to make informed decisions on Closing the Gap policies and programs. Most survey respondents indicated that it was extremely important (86.67%) or very important (10.38%) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have the same data as government.

Priority 1, Question 5 survey response: How important is it for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have the same data as government to make informed decisions on Closing the Gap policies and programs?

(Answered = 1050, Skipped = 624)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	86.67	910
Very important	10.38	109
Somewhat important	1.81	19
Not so important	0.38	4
Not at all important	0.76	8
Total	**100.00**	**1050**
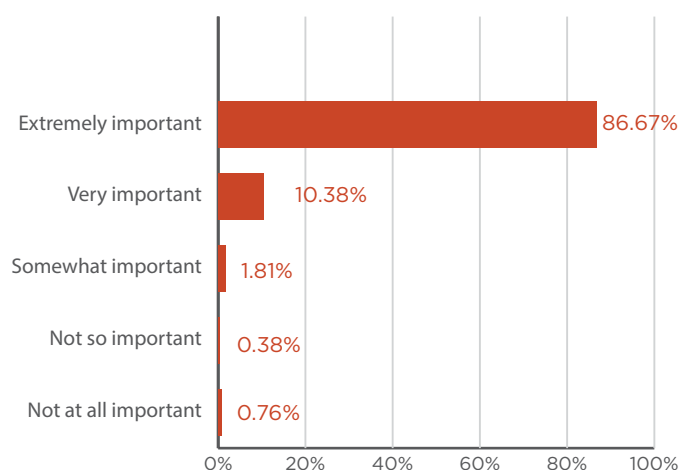
PRIORITY 1: QUESTION 6

What additional steps are needed to make sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are equal partners with governments and can make shared decisions on issues that are important to them? (open-ended responses)

Equality was considered an important component of good partnerships and, similarly, the components described by participants as critical for good partnerships were also considered important to equal partnerships. Participants in the face-to-face meetings and the online survey identified a range of features considered important to establishing equal partnerships between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the majority of which had also been described as features of partnerships that work well.

For example, many participants emphasised that a one-size-fits-all approach would not be effective, and that partnerships and structures would need to be developed through collaboration between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to address the unique situation and needs of each community.

The importance of the shared decision-making process and cooperation between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations were described by many participants. Many participants also highlighted the need for accessible, inclusive community consultation (e.g. with Elders, young people, people from rural, remote and metropolitan areas) and representatives who had been selected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to represent the ideas and needs of the community.

> *Formal mechanisms [are needed] that ensure equal partnership in decision making and accountability and enforceability embedded to make sure it happens. (survey response)*

> *There needs to be a genuine approach from government with decision-making processes. There is the need for communities to define their own decision-making processes and, once identified, government needs to determine how it then interacts and engages with that process. Not the other way around. (survey response)*

> *[People] must be involved at outset of any policy creation – not consulted after planning phase. Must cease consulting at second stage of processes. (survey response)*

> *Government needs to go out to regional areas rather than expecting the community to 'come to them' in the big smoke. (survey response)*

> *Open and transparent communication [is essential]. (survey response)*

Many participants explained that, to achieve this, support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and capacity building of individuals and communities would be required. This could include training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and appropriate funding to enable this training.

> *Need stronger community support structures, work with communities to build their capacity so that they are able to build capacity of all other community members, making stronger communities, and better people making better decisions. (survey response)*

> *Support to train and equip people to take on leadership roles and take part in decision making. (Ipswich, Qld)*

> *Funding and training to enable us to organise ourselves into a regional voice on the ground. (Port Augusta, SA)*

Many participants suggested that equality in partnerships would require a shift in government structures and processes, demonstrating an underlying understanding of culture and the need for self-determination. Several participants suggested that cultural training and education could be useful to increase the cultural competence of people working in government. Stronger representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in government was also discussed by several participants.

> *For Aboriginal people to be true equal partners with governments requires systematic change in mainstream attitudes and practices, and incorporation of Aboriginal peoples in all stages of policy design at a national, state and local level. (survey response)*

> *Need governments to be better coordinated, across agencies and three tiers. Government needs to be culturally competent at the local level. Government needs to be more flexible and use place-*

based approach across different regions/ communities, no 'blanket' policies unless they are deliberately designed to allow place-based implementation and design. (survey response)

... compulsory cultural training within all governing bodies [is needed] so that the wider society has a firm understanding of the issues our people face on a day-to-day basis, and the restrictions in place that hold us back from achieving things our own way. (survey response)

Equal representation on government boards, steering committees and parliamentary select committees. Most issues do have an effect on Aboriginal communities, so strong representation allows for a voice, plus to ensure cultural rights and needs are respected and included in policies and programs. (survey response)

... valuing the Indigenous paradigm and worldview equally to Western ones. This means acknowledging that there are multiple realities and ways of living, and that Western ontology is not the only or the more correct one. (survey response)

Many participants also highlighted the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having access to data and information to inform decision making. The types of data, collection and analysis methods and additional details of the suggestions provided by participants are described under Priority 4.

For organisations that are looking to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander empowerment within their communities, available data to see the current picture in those communities is imperative, to alert them to the issues and allow programs to be set to tackle those stats. Also, community being passed this data, in an appropriate and tailored way, is very important. The trusted partners should be supporting orgs like Empowered Communities, who can build these data pictures and work with the data for the good of the community. Also, the community collects its own data. If the government has an interest in that (because it is usually difficult to obtain in very remote areas) then there should be an agreement between government and these orgs via a data management agreement, where it is agreed what can be shared. (survey response)

Documents need to be in a language lay people can understand; any spreadsheets need to have a decent key and any key points highlighted; access to free, independent advisers to help with deciphering and understanding literature. (survey response)

While equal partnerships were considered critical, many participants also emphasised the importance of self-determination and the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to make decisions and direct the action taken. Several participants believe that constitutional recognition and endorsement of the Uluru Statement from the Heart were important to achieve this.

Firstly, agreements and plans, especially those that were co-developed or endorsed both by government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities (e.g. The Uluru Statement, the Victorian Aboriginal Affairs Framework, Korin Korin Balit-Djak, to name a few) must be adequately resourced and implemented. (survey response)

Recognition of First Nations sovereignty and sovereign right to self-determination as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the first step. Makarrata and truth-telling commission, formal apologies and reparations. (survey response)

Several participants described that addressing inequalities and issues related to Closing the Gap and working towards strengthening outcomes across a range of areas such as education, health and culture would also contribute to equality of partnerships. Inequality of power was also discussed as an issue that must be overcome to allow equality in partnerships. It was also highlighted that people must feel equal and able to express their views without fear of repercussions

Equal partnership MUST mean equal power and decision making! (survey response)

PRIORITY 1: QUESTION 7

Do you agree there should be an agreed target for formal partnership structures to share decision making included in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

There wasn't always time to discuss this question in the face-to-face meetings, but it was supported when it was, such as in most of the WA meetings. Most participants in NACCHO's engagement with its membership supported a target for this purpose. SNAICC's membership also agreed to a target and said it will be important that the target is able to measure multiple forms of partnership and is not focused solely around a single example of partnership.

Feedback from online survey

The online survey asked if respondents agreed that actions in this area (Priority Reform 1) should be measured and made public. The results show that over 90% agreed, including 70% strongly agreeing.

Priority 1, Question 7 survey response: Do you agree that actions in this area should be measured and made public?

(Answered = 1045, Skipped = 629)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	70.33	735
Very important	21.82	228
Somewhat important	6.41	67
Not so important	0.57	6
Not at all important	0.86	9
Total	**99.99**	**1045**
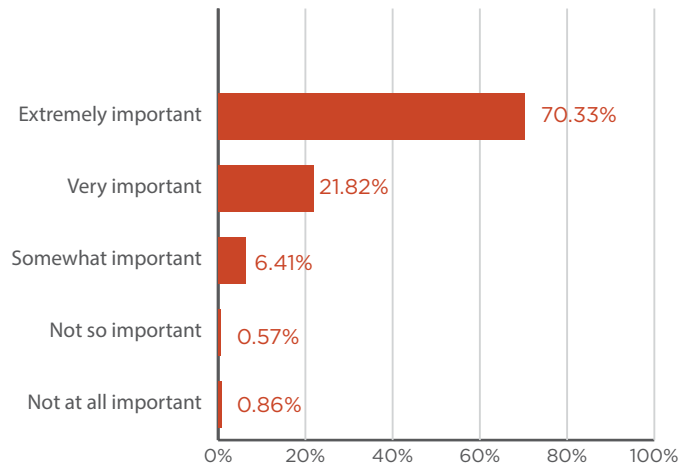
PRIORITY 1: QUESTION 8

What do you think we should measure to show action is being taken in this area? (open-ended responses)

Participants described a range of considerations and potential measures to assess and demonstrate whether action is being taken to establish decision-making partnerships. Some suggested measures related to the development of partnerships, such as the number of formal partnerships or the number of community-led decision-making models. Other suggestions focused on the process and structure of these partnerships.

Increase in the number of Aboriginal community-led decision-making models. Increase in the number of Aboriginal community-led decision-making models with formal working relationships (MOUs) with government and private sector. (survey response)

What formal arrangements are in place to establish the partnerships – i.e. to make them real and sustainable mechanisms? Somehow measure how representatives are chosen (to ensure they are actually representative). Measure how many decisions are made that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners are happy with. (survey response)

… the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or organisations contracted to undertake government work related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (survey response)

You would need to measure participation rates and rates of involvement by the people involved, through yarning groups and community forums. (survey response)

Measures could be: improved community knowledge, changes within community (actions) and improved regional policy planning (specific to regions). (Port Augusta, SA)

Efforts governments have made to learn about Indigenous perspective e.g. immersion of government people in Aboriginal organisations; 2. Capacity building of organisations – journey closely and respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to share knowledge, develop skills, build relationships. (survey response)

Report on the numbers of Aboriginal people

on governance boards. Set requirements for those agencies that make decisions about Aboriginal people to fill a set number of positions with Aboriginal people. (survey response)

Target should be that every region is given the opportunity to formally develop a structure. The measure would be how many structures developed. (Adelaide, SA)

Other measures suggested focused on broader potential outcomes from those partnerships. For example:

… measuring whether Aboriginal decision making has carried into policy implementation. (SNAICC)

Successful formation of an Indigenous-led government department responsible for closing the gap. (survey response)

As most participants believed that effective partnerships were central to improving many different outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, suggestions relating to areas such as health, employment, education and services were also made by participants.

Improvements to health and welfare, employment, education etc. (survey response)

… poverty, homelessness, prisoners, health, mental health. (survey response)

Land rights; autonomy; self-determination; educational processes and outcomes that are meaningful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culture, language knowledge and use. (survey response)

Level of funding that is actually distributed to non-Aboriginal organisations including both NGO and governments. (survey response)

Many participants also emphasised the importance of these measures being selected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their chosen representatives to ensure that they reflect community aims and definitions of outcomes. Several reported on the need for transparency of what would be assessed, how it would be assessed and the results of these assessments. A few participants also provided suggestions as to how these progress measures and results should be shared publicly. The importance of accountability for achieving (or not achieving) targets was also reiterated by a number of participants.

The way that this should be measured should be decided by Aboriginal

representatives from a number of areas and communities who are properly resourced to make the decision and who are listened to and respected in a real and meaningful way. (survey response)

Local community satisfaction and happiness self-judged so that all value and cultural differences can be considered. (survey response)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples possess their own criteria for determining their wellbeing. In Central Australia, Anangu people of the Western Desert have described their determinants of self, health and wellbeing in five key concepts of Ngurra, Walytja, Tjukurrpa, Kulinytjaku and Nintinytjaku. These elements and the process of their application is determined by Anangu. The result of which is to restore and maintain the kurrunpa (spirit) of Anangu. This is the key measure for Anangu. It is not all numbers and dollars. (survey response)

Six-monthly community reports newsletters, emails, social media. (survey response)

Measure the happiness (and what is working well for communities to account for that happiness) and mental wellbeing of communities. Pay close attention to communities that are thriving and succeeding in their own right and according to the data. Complete surveys in language and with interpreters and ensure a genuine cross-section of the community has a genuine opportunity to participate. How many people in Aboriginal communities are genuinely engaged in whatever makes them happy (this may be employment opportunities)? If change came about and there was a genuine Aboriginal leadership body in government, then we would need to measure people's engagement and desire to interact with these groups. We need to measure the before and after. I am sure there would be a lot more engagement if people saw that they had a genuine voice listening to many of their real and genuine concerns. (survey response)

There were variations in the types of measurements and data that people believed should be used, with some suggestions focusing on quantitative data, others on qualitative or narrative reports. Several participants also highlighted the need to move from a deficit-focus model of targets (what isn't being done) to one that also provided opportunities to capture and celebrate successes.

Ask Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities how they rate the partnership; monitor this rating over time. Report in narrative format what's being achieved periodically. (survey response)

Instead of targets by certain dates, I favour the [traffic] light system of monitoring. Much less negative. And where the area is red, current plans, proposals and work being specifically done to respond to this. … excessive negativity is counteractive to progress. Indigenous people do not need any more negative stereotypes. It would also be worth noting what positive actions have been made, even if they are not quite measured by a specific target. (survey response)

Measure what is appropriate for the community needs, outcome focused and strength based over deficit models. (survey response)

PRIORITY 1: QUESTION 9

Is there anything else you would like to say about arrangements for shared decision making on Closing the Gap?
(open-ended responses)

Many participants confirmed their support for governments listening and working much better with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve better outcomes.

The need for community members, including Elders and young people, to be able to participate in partnerships was often also reiterated.

Responses that made additional and important points about arrangements for shared decision making included:

The key role of traditional owners in decision making and the central role of PBCs [prescribed bodies corporate] as community-controlled services-sector organisations on their country should inform the development and refinement of all priority reform areas, targets and outcomes. This perspective must be emphasised, as governments of all persuasions have taken a compartmentalised and fragmented approach to funding and service delivery for First Nation communities. This has resulted in under-resourcing, ineffective coordination and support and a lack of legitimacy in decision making about the delivery of services for First Nation Peoples. (NNTC)

Partnerships are extremely important. It takes time to build relationships and it's important there are formal mechanisms in place to maintain [them] because if certain individuals leave it can be a risk. (survey response)

A partnership approach is a new way of doing business both for governments and for Aboriginal people and the nuances and practical steps required should be fully (and jointly) explored and articulated at the earliest possible stage. Giving early attention to what partnership means, what it should look like, who it should include and how it will be measured are essential. (Empowered Communities)

These arrangements must also be independently evaluated on a regular basis and review [of] the arrangements and recommendations must be implemented. (survey response)

Closing the Gap arrangements should drill right down to the local level where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can negotiate set timeframes and needs that are measured [by] annual reporting by both groups. (NSW)

Broome community engagement

Priority Reform 2:

Building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service sectors to deliver Closing the Gap services

2

Priority Reform 2 proposes that the new National Agreement focus on building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service sectors in priority areas important to Closing the Gap.

A formal sector is where several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations are governed by the same principles, deliver services through an agreed approach, have dedicated employment and funding streams and can be supported by a peak body.

There are already successful, formal sectors for health, land, native title, legal aid and media. However, sectors are still developing in other service areas needed to close the gap, such as housing and its delivery, aged care and disability support, despite these service areas including some well-established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

Support for Priority Reform 2 was very strong in all the engagements and in all states and territories across Australia.

PRIORITY 2: QUESTION 1

Is Priority Reform 2 important to be included in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

Engagement type: Coalition of Peaks member organisations with their own membership

All Coalition of Peaks membership who were engaged by their national and state or territory peaks supported the inclusion of Priority Reform 2 in the National Agreement.

Many members of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) said it was a necessity. Meanwhile, all 89 members of Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), at its 2019 AGM, supported Priority Reform 2 and commented that there was a need for greater trust in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led organisations and services and that those services were recognised as having more impact and being more effective than mainstream services.

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) members strongly supported growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services for reasons including that community-controlled organisations are more helpful with education and health within communities in the way they operate. The members of SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children – agreed with the inclusion of Priority Reform 2 in the National Agreement and that the role of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) needs to encompass not only service delivery but also policy and the design of programs and services.

At a state level, the New South Wales Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) reported that participants in its 28 forums across New South Wales supported Priority Reform 2 without exception, saying that they were an efficient and effective means of providing the services actually needed by communities and were essential

for allowing Aboriginal communities to be involved in decision making. Participants also said that successful achievement of Priority Reform 2 would require:

- community control of program development, service delivery and capacity building

- government to understand and respect the diversity of Aboriginal cultures

- more services delivered by Aboriginal-controlled, locally based organisations

- local engagement and more flexibility

- evidence-based research to demonstrate the services that actually make a difference.

Direct feedback from participants included:

We need to grow the community-controlled sector to deliver services and build capacity. (Bateman's Bay, NSW)

[We need] … more Aboriginal community-controlled services. (Broken Hill, NSW).

Engagement type: Representatives of communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in each state and territory

Support for Priority Reform 2 in the jurisdictional face-to-face meetings was very strong.

In the engagements in the Northern Territory, participants all agreed that this priority is very important.

This was the case in Queensland also, which included a face-to-face meeting on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait led by the CEO of the National Native Title Council. Participants argued that state and federal governments need to think about a different funding model for community organisations that supported the community's own initiatives, including single-line budgets (block grants to allow maximum flexibility in budgeting and expenditure). A good example is Mura Kosker Sorority Inc, a member of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICCP), which is recruiting 15 local support workers across the islands from each community to work alongside 22 domestic and family violence champions.

Participants at the Townsville engagement supported growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services with a recommendation to ensure small community-controlled organisations are also included in progressing this priority. Direct

feedback from participants included:

Mainstream services do not have the same rigour. (Thursday Island, Qld)

Without exception, participants at the New South Wales jurisdictional meeting supported this priority. Direct feedback included:

Community control is essential.

It's a celebration of Aboriginal people's achievements.

It implicitly recognises the strength, the expertise and the right to self-determination by Indigenous communities.

[It's] not just about service delivery. [It] includes advocacy, program development, data capabilities [and] capacity building.

All engagements in South Australia supported Priority Reform 2. Participants indicated the need to re-establish and grow local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, which would provide jobs for Aboriginal people, build community capacity and deliver services where people lived. They were adamant in every meeting that, if Priority Reform 2 was to be achieved, governments must fund local ACCOs to deliver services to Aboriginal people instead of mainstream organisations.

In Victoria, Priority Reform 2 was also supported and a theme of all three meetings was that more long-term funding needed to be provided to ACCOs that responded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities.

Participants in the meeting in Tasmania supported Priority Reform 2 while noting, as in other jurisdictions, that more funding needs to be provided to ACCOs across all sectors.

In the Australian Capital Territory, the inclusion of Priority Reform 2 in the National Agreement was endorsed by all participants at all meetings. The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ATSIEB) reported that participants were very clear that the best services and outcomes in their experiences came from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services, particularly when they are appropriately resourced and enabled to deliver in a holistic manner.

In Western Australia, there was universal support among participants for progressing Priority Reform 2. Participants in the Katanning meeting noted that WA only has a small number of peaks compared with other states and that more peak bodies are needed in order to have equal representation. In Broome, participants said that Aboriginal community control must be applied more

broadly than just to service delivery. This was summarised in the following way:

> To be architects of the future, ACCOs must be equipped to influence and make decisions; money is not the full solution, there must be a coalition of people, innovation and accountability. (meeting report, AHCWA, Katanning, WA)

Perth participants returned to a common theme expressed in all jurisdictions that governments need to maintain funding for ACCOs, including small ones.

Engagement type: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and subject matter experts

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders also supported Priority Reform 2. Participants noted that:

- When growing community-controlled organisations, it is important to recognise that some are strong, but some will need capacity building and they will need support to do so.

- The forecast increase in First Nations' population means we need to be strategically positioned to respond to that growth.

- To grow the community-controlled organisations sector we need to know how many there are now and where we want to be in three years.

Feedback from online survey

Some 91% of the survey respondents said it was either important or extremely important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to deliver services to their communities. This is consistent with the support for Reform Priority 2 in the face-to-face meetings.

Priority 2, Question 1 survey response: How important is it for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to deliver services related to your communities?

(Answered = 806, Skipped = 868)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	74.32	599
Very important	17.62	142
Somewhat important	6.58	53
Not so important	0.87	7
Not at all important	0.62	5
Total	**100.01**	**806**
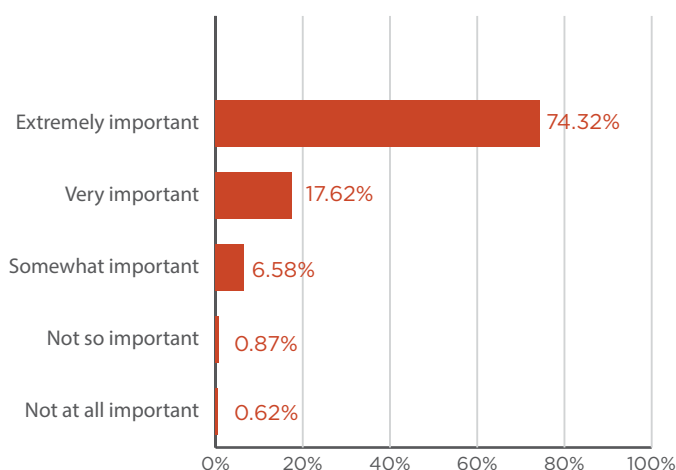
PRIORITY 2: QUESTION 2

Where do we have strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors now and which sectors or services should be strengthened further? (open-ended responses)

Participants named a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors that they believed were strong. The sectors identified frequently included (but were not limited to) health, native title, child protection and legal services. Direct feedback included:

> Land councils are strong because there is security around funding and legislation, Aboriginal Land Rights Act. (Tennant Creek, NT)

> Health – we've been doing this stuff for a long time now. We have local health forums here, then through AHCWA [Aboriginal Health Council Western Australia] at a state level, then nationally through National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). We have a direct line to Canberra – it's a powerful model. We should ask other service providers in our community if this could work for them. (Geraldton, WA)

> The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health sector is a best-practice model of care. ATSICCHOs [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health organisations] are well established, strong and are a high-performing network across the state. ATSICCHOs with QAIHC, the peak body, work in collaboration to improve health outcomes. (QAIHC)

Although these sectors were considered to be strong by many participants, a number of participants also highlighted the need to continue to strengthen these sectors. Other participants identified that sectors may be strong in some regions and not as strong in others, and that this could be improved to provide the best possible services, outcomes and experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. Several participants also believed that the number of ACCOs and the strength of the community-controlled sector had decreased in recent years due to defunding of services. Meeting reports included the following:

> Historically, Far West Coast Progress Association (FWCPA) was responsible for successfully developing and delivering all programs. When competitive tendering was introduced, mainstream organisations undercut the FWCPA and basically put them out of work. Aboriginal community-controlled [organisations] should be running the full lot of programs and service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (Ceduna, SA)

> Community noted that there has been an apparent change in the funding system – and funding that was previously allocated to community-controlled services now goes into mainstream services and organisations. Under this model, few community-controlled organisations have managed to grow and develop. In 2001 there were 65 community-controlled organisations in the Mount Isa region, and in 2019 there are only 6 or 7 remaining. (Mount Isa Qld)

> Attendees noted that many community-controlled sectors in Tasmania have been weakened or lost in recent years. These include the education, legal, economic development, justice, and housing sectors. Attendees acknowledged that health, land and water management, and children and youth services sectors still exist in Tasmania but that government funding for all these sectors is becoming scarce. (meeting report, Launceston, Tas)

Participants also identified sectors or services that they considered important to strengthen further. These included:

- Health (including for example primary health care, maternal and child health, dental)
- Housing and homelessness
- Mental health
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Education and training
- Employment
- Family services
- Child and youth services
- Aged care
- Disability
- Alcohol and other drugs services

AHCWA's report of the Perth meeting states that:

> Attendees expressed that the following key areas for service delivery are important to

the Perth Metro region: language, culture, youth, drug and alcohol, legal, family and children, and land. It was agreed that all Aboriginal organisations, including smaller organisations, must be included in building the ACCO sector to deliver services that meet community need. (meeting report, AHCWA, Perth, WA)

Feedback from online survey

The survey also asked which community-controlled services should be made stronger? Open-ended survey responses included the following:

Health, housing, employment, economic. If you have access to good affordable housing you and your family can get better access to employment, education. People live a better life. All are interrelated. (survey response)

Education as this will aid understanding of culture. (survey response)

Health, employment, housing, education – anything affecting the social determinants of health. (survey response)

Some respondents indicated that the sectors and services that need to be strengthened further may differ depending on the geographical region and that this should be decided by communities to support self-determination and ensure specific community needs were met.

This needs to be site specific. One size does not fit all. Some examples include health and wellbeing, community housing (the frameworks are already there), tenancy programs and childcare services. (survey response)

Community services that are managed and driven by Aboriginal persons within each community should be acknowledged and invested in to continue program delivery relevant to their community. (survey response)

Others responded that all community-controlled sectors and services should be strengthened.

ALL services the community identifies as needing to be stronger. Ask at the local level. (survey response)

There should be a general aim to strengthen all community-controlled services … (survey response)

PRIORITY 2: QUESTION 3

Which service do you think is most important for a community-controlled organisation to deliver and can you tell us why? (open-ended responses)

Participants in engagements considered that most of the services important to closing the gap were important for a community-controlled organisation to deliver. Most frequently mentioned services included (but were not limited to):

- Health
- Housing
- Mental Health
- Language and Culture
- Education and Training
- Disability
- Aged care
- Legal and Justice
- Alcohol and other drugs services
- Native title
- Land management
- Child protection services
- Family services

Some participants also provided an explanation as to why they believed some services were particularly important. For many of these participants, the reason went to community-controlled services considered to be the best and most culturally appropriate way to deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Participants also explained that they had listed service sectors that were connected to a number of other service areas and outcomes, such as health, legal and education, which they considered important to deliver through community-controlled services due to the flow-on effect that these services could have on other areas of a person's life. Others reported that important services for community-controlled organisations to deliver were those where outcomes were currently poor or needs were going unmet, and those that involved people who were particularly vulnerable, disengaged or at risk.

For example, if health isn't actually working, it will then lead to everything else. Or if education isn't working, it will lead to everything else. I don't think you can

actually pick out one over the top of the other. (NSW CAPO)

… [sectors] focused on the members of our community who are most vulnerable, disengaged or at risk. Our community members in these categories are less likely to be connected to or able to access any other kind of services. This is seen as especially true for children, young people and Elders. (ACT ATSIEB)

All areas of overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (QAIHC)

Other participants did not identify any service as most important for community-controlled organisations to deliver, but rather suggested that community-control was important for all services being delivered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ACCHOs need to be delivering a broad range of services and programs. (NACCHO)

It is important to have community-controlled organisations providing health services, childcare, education, housing and employment. All services are interrelated (e.g. child protection, DFV and mental health). (Ipswich, Qld)

Feedback from online survey

Survey respondents also commented on services that that should be delivered by community-controlled organisations and the following were frequently identified.

- Health
- Mental health
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Alcohol and other drugs
- Education, training and employment
- Housing and homelessness
- Aged care
- Disability
- Child, youth and family services
- Out of home care
- Culture, language and arts

Examples of survey responses included:

Health services should be appropriately transferred to community control to ensure that services are provided in a culturally competent manner. (survey response)

Aboriginal medical services – every other aspect of your life depends on your health. If you're not healthy how are you supposed to look after your family, get a good education or find a good job. Aboriginal-controlled health services are the only ones that care about and know how to get their community engaged in health. Aboriginal health services understand the many different barriers that prevent Indigenous people from accessing good healthcare and know all the tricks to overcoming these barriers. (survey response)

Housing, as this is where significant health issues can be arrested before they become major health issues. (survey response)

Aged care: support services to our elderly [Elders] in their homes. We understand their needs and can provide for them in a culturally appropriate way. (survey response)

Healthcare with cultural focus. Connection to culture, country and community remains central to healing in general. (survey response)

Language and culture – it is important for future generations to keep their culture alive. (survey response)

Legal service is crucial for our mob. Delivering a service to community that helps advocate on their behalf is important. (survey response)

As with participants in engagements, several respondents emphasised the importance of access to (or the option to access) community-controlled services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and reported that it was important that there were community-controlled services available across all sectors. Survey responses included:

There should be options for all services to be Indigenous controlled and a pathway for those communities to be in control sustainably. (survey response)

All services that have a definite focus on the provision of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (survey response)

Ideally, all services should be delivered by ACCOs – health services, legal services, land rights and native title, child and family services, housing, employment, business. (survey response)

ALL services that the community decides it is ready to control. (survey response)

All of them. Which dimension of life is more important than others? They all need to be delivered, informed, designed and/or evaluated by CCOs. (survey response)

While community-controlled services were viewed as critical by most respondents, several suggested that capacity and interest in the transfer of some mainstream services to community-controlled services would likely be different for different communities. Several respondents also cautioned that community-controlled services and organisations would need to be adequately supported and strengthened for this transfer to be effective and sustainable.

No limits should be applied, nor should it be assumed that all places will want all services transferred to community control. A community may have a trusted service provider, with long-term, stable relationships, and be happy with the service, even though it is not community-controlled. But this situation can change. (survey response)

To support this, issues for consideration include: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations must be effectively engaged, appropriately supported and adequately resourced to build and demonstrate service capacity and governance capability to incorporate a broader range of services. In other words, services must not be left to the community-controlled sector where the service infrastructure and governance arrangements are not fully equipped or prepared. Any transfer of services into the sector must be incremental to allow time for the development and trial of any new or significantly expanded service models. (survey response)

As many as can be done but not to the detriment of the ACCO, transfers must ensure success in providing the service. (survey response)

Several participants also expressed the view that mainstream services still had a role to play in service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Delivery and use of mainstream services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is discussed further in the section on Priority Reform 3.

While community control is important, it's also important to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mainstream services too. (survey response)

I am not sure that mainstream services should be transferred to community control. Both mainstream and community control can both exist together to provide the much-needed services. There can be situations where some community members may choose not to access a community-controlled service – so providing choice enables people to self-determine the service that best suits them. (survey response)

People need to have a choice of services – just because a person is Aboriginal doesn't mean they should only get a service from community-controlled organisations. (survey response)

PRIORITY 2: QUESTION 4

What can governments do to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations grow and be strong? (open-ended responses)

Participants across the meetings and survey identified a number of ways in which governments could support the growth and strength of community-controlled organisations. These included the provision of funding, committing to self-determination, simplifying and supporting access to community-controlled services, capacity building, facilitating collaboration between community-controlled organisations, and more transparency, accountability and data. Each of these is described in further detail below.

Funding support

Funding was a key issue raised by most participants when asked how governments could support community-controlled organisations to grow and be strong. Most participants described the need for greater consistency and sustainability of funding and longer term funding agreements to ensure that organisations and services had enough time to form relationships in the community, understand the needs of people in the community and adapt to ensure those needs were being met effectively.

Others highlighted the need for more flexible funding or different funding models that better suited the types of services provided by community-controlled organisations to ensure that funding models were not driving service design and provision. Many participants also described the need for more funding to be allocated to these organisations, including funding for capacity building, operations and infrastructure.

> *ACCOs need a different funding model that recognises our higher costs compared to mainstream. This higher cost is because the way we work with people is different to mainstream – we are holistic, wrap-around, flexible and many of the services we provide fall outside mainstream service delivery and are therefore not funded (e.g. meal allowances). There is no consideration of the other wrap-around work that ACCOs do (compared with CLCs). (NFVPLSF)*

> *Operational funding: our program budgets must be topped up to fund operations. (Geraldton, WA)*

> *We need guaranteed funding no matter who is in government – 20-year agreements, rather than 1, 3 or 5 years. We need time to grow and develop our initiatives and track outcomes. (Melbourne, Vic)*

> *Provide long-term funding for programs (5+ years) that includes time to build relationships and trust in communities, recognise that results may take decades for incremental change. (survey response)*

> *Give us access to buildings and infrastructure in community to deliver our services from. (Adelaide, SA)*

> *The funding model needs to change to fit the service delivery model. But it's more than that, actually. The funding needs to change to suit the organisation's business, not just the service. (NSW CAPO)*

> *Enhance funding for ACCOs, including making it recurrent and flexible – funding requirements can't often be put in a neat package, so there needs to be flexible funding. (Bendigo, Vic)*

> *Directly fund community-controlled organisations to provide services. (survey response)*

As community-controlled services were viewed as the most effective way to deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, many participants suggested that community-controlled organisations should be given priority for funding relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. For example, many participants suggested where a community-controlled service was able to deliver a service effectively, they should receive funding over a mainstream organisation offering the same service. Others suggested that funding dedicated to this purpose should go to community-controlled organisations only.

> *Stop funding non-Aboriginal services when there are competent Aboriginal organisations. (Coffs Harbour, NSW)*

> *Make ATSICCHOs the default or preferred provider for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health funding, and not require an open tendering process. (QAIHC)*

> *Funding should go to Aboriginal organisations; if not, then only in partnership [invited by Aboriginal organisation]. Procurement processes have been poor when they moved to open national tenders. That means that it is open to anyone now who wants to deliver*

services and means they compete with local Aboriginal organisations. (Julalikari Board, NT)

If Aboriginal-specific service, then only the Aboriginal sector should be able to apply for the funding. (Ceduna, SA)

ACCOs must have the funding – not mainstream services. (NFVPLSF)

Many participants also described challenges with the current application process that could be addressed to support community-controlled organisations. Some participants described the need for more support to navigate the tender process and develop funding submissions to support community-controlled organisations in applying for funding. Others highlighted issues with the competitive process, reporting that increased competition for funding between community-controlled organisations was detrimental to collaboration between these organisations.

Government-funded training for these services to write submissions and break down the barriers to access funding. Government should partner with organisations to develop submissions. (Ipswich, Qld)

The collective vision has also been lost and replaced with competition for funding. (Mount Isa, Qld)

Government needs to remove competition between organisations for funding – organisations are less keen to collaborate if they think their funding will be taken away. (Mount Isa, Qld)

The current funding framework encourages and fosters competitiveness within the community-controlled sector, limiting organisations' willingness to partner and work together. (Ipswich, Qld)

Ongoing support to understand or manage the reporting requirements of funding agreements, or a reduction in reporting requirements, were also suggestions for support from governments made by a number of participants.

Community-controlled organisations need expert assistance to comply with reporting requirements that are attached to funding agreements. (Ipswich, Qld)

Committing to self-determination

Most participants reported that, while practical support from governments was required to support the community-controlled sectors, this support should be underpinned by a policy commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Many participants reported that this meant valuing the culture, processes and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as respecting the diversity of communities and their needs. Suggestions included:

Prioritising and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander local knowledge. (ACT)

Support[ing] our culture and the way we do business. (survey response)

Government understand[ing] and respect[ing] the diversity of Aboriginal cultures. (NSW CAPO)

It was also suggested that, in practice, this would include both governments and community-controlled organisations engaging meaningfully with communities, listening to their needs, and then supporting solutions to be developed to suit local needs. A few participants also suggested that governments should work in partnership with community-controlled organisations.

Community-controlled organisations need to find out what the community requires by asking them, and then working with them to develop these services. (Ipswich, Qld)

There is a big difference between the needs of city and country, and policy needs to take account of this. (Mount Isa, Qld)

It's around not just getting in there, coming in and doing your business. It's about relationship building and understanding what's important to us. We need to have that interpersonal connection. You need to have a culturally and socially appropriate service delivery. You need to take time to do that. (NSW AECG)

Ask the organisations – work with them to determine priorities and support them to achieve these. They, through their membership and community control, know their communities and clients and needs better than anyone. (survey response)

Many participants also described the need for greater involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of,

and decision making around, funding models and the allocation and distribution of funding.

Community-controlled organisations work with government to inform grants and funding processes. (Mount Isa, Qld)

Aboriginal organisations should be leading development of, and making decisions about, funding allocations. (Melbourne, Vic)

It would be better if Aboriginal people were driving the decisions about which programs to fund: we know what factors are important to disburse the funding rather than a per capita basis. (Broome, WA)

A view was expressed that government are not funding enough services on the ground in regional areas. It was suggested that there could be an independent Aboriginal reviewer function in each region, that reviewed funding allocations for that region. (meeting report, ACHWA Katanning, WA)

Establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body to control and distribute Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funding. (QAIHC)

Government should transfer control of resources and decision-making power to ACCOs. (Melbourne, Vic)

Simplifying and supporting access to community-controlled services

Participants also highlighted that community-controlled services could be strengthened by simplifying and supporting access to these organisations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. This included reducing unnecessary duplication of services, developing services where current gaps were identified and improving access to existing services.

Providing 'one-stop shops' for Aboriginal people to access services was raised in more than one consultation and was well supported. This was seen as a successful strategy that should be rolled out to more communities, both for better service provision and to employ more Aboriginal people. (meeting report, NSW CAPO)

We need to reduce the amount of bureaucracy required to access services, e.g. reducing the need to visit the GP multiple times to get referrals for allied health services. (Rockhampton, Qld)

Increase accessibility (e.g. geographic or transport access). (meeting report, IAHA)

We need to identify the areas that don't have ACCOs or ACCHOs, but that do have an Indigenous population that aren't being supported. Government should help identify where all ACCOs are and where there are services missing, then fund and resource the gaps. (Melbourne, Vic)

Building capacity

Many participants reported that governments could support community-controlled organisations by helping them to build capacity. This included building the capacity of communities to develop and deliver services, governance training and supporting community-controlled organisations to find and train staff. Retention of staff was also a key issue raised by several participants who suggested that this could be improved through long-term investment in staff and funding to ensure wages that were equal to those in mainstream services. Long-term planning, including succession planning, was also considered important by several participants.

[There is a] need to address workforce shortages, noting regional areas struggle to attract some expert workers. (Bendigo, Vic)

In order to grow the sector, we need to be able to make ACCOs the place people want to work by ensuring employees will be supported, trained and well paid. (Melbourne, Vic)

[Building community capacity] so that Aboriginal people had the skills needed to deliver the services needed locally. (NSW CAPO)

Support young leaders through governance training was identified, along with mentoring to respect cultural protocols as they come through the workforce. (meeting report, FNMA, Thursday Island, Qld)

Governance training is required in community, so that organisations won't be lost over time. (Darwin, NT)

Fund and grow the capacity of Aboriginal organisations to develop and deliver disability services with Aboriginal disability models, not just a 'prop up' response. (meeting report, FPDN)

Communication, collaboration and coordination among community-controlled organisations

Participants also highlighted the importance of community-controlled organisations being supported by governments to collaborate and work together to improve services and outcomes. The sharing of knowledge, information and learnings among community-controlled organisations was identified as important by several participants. This would require a shift in the system from a competitive approach to one that promoted communication and collaboration.

> *Enhanced community-level collaboration between organisations, connecting new organisations with organisations that are already established. (Ipswich, Qld)*

> *Knowledge sharing between ACCOs is important, can help us replicate what works. (Bendigo, Vic)*

> *Attendees suggested a key way to build ACCO sectors is to shift from an adversarial system through competitive tenders, such as restricted-funding tenders, and promote greater interconnectivity for service users through service mapping and increased referrals between ACCOs. (meeting report, ACHWA Perth, WA)*

> *Support communities of one region or community to undertake exchange visits to other regions or communities to see first-hand projects or services in operation. Enable the sharing of knowledge across jurisdictions and within jurisdictions about programs or projects that are working. (SNAICC)*

More transparency, accountability and data

A number of participants described the need for greater transparency and accountability for both governments and community-controlled organisations. This included transparency around funding and how money was being spent, transparency in reporting and reporting back to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Several people considered access to and collection of relevant data to be an important part of the process of monitoring and reporting and suggested that the government could support community-controlled organisations to build capabilities in this area.

> *Transparency is really important as well. So we want government to be transparent, but I also think that we as a collective need to be transparent. Our own organisations need to be transparent as part of that process. (NSW AECG)*

> *Report back to Aboriginal people and be accountable for their actions. Aboriginal organisations are always reporting on KPIs and it is time government reports back to Aboriginal organisations. There should be more transparency and sharing of reports back to the community. (APO NT)*

> *Accountability [is needed] to ensure that everyone is walking the talk – there is a focus on action and everyone is following through. (Ipswich, Qld)*

> *Providing local organisations with the data to make informed decisions and to acknowledge the stories that go with that data would be very helpful. (Port Hedland, WA)*

> *Support capacity development surrounding the monitoring and evaluation framework. The stronger the data is to prove ACCHOs work, the more chance of securing sustainable funding. (survey response)*

PRIORITY 2: QUESTION 5

Do you think there should be an agreed target for this priority action built into the new National Agreement?

Overall, the vast majority of participants from the face-to-face discussions and the survey were supportive of a target for this priority action to build and support the formal community-controlled sector to deliver services for closing the gap.

> *Yes, but also require accountability. (ACT)*

> *Yes, but needs to be set by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (Adelaide, SA)*

> *Members also cautioned that the development of targets should have enough flexibility to reflect geographic and regional variances. (meeting report, FNMA)*

Feedback from online survey

Results from the survey indicated that 92.17% of respondents agreed that action in this area should be measured and made public. However, some participants also cautioned that these targets and measures should be chosen by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and include localised goals specific to different communities, and that there should be accountability for meeting these targets.

Priority 2, Question 5 survey response: Do you agree that action in this area should be measured and made public?

(Answered = 766, Skipped = 908)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	73.63	564
Very important	18.54	142
Somewhat important	6.27	48
Not so important	0.78	6
Not at all important	0.78	6
Total	**100.00**	**766**
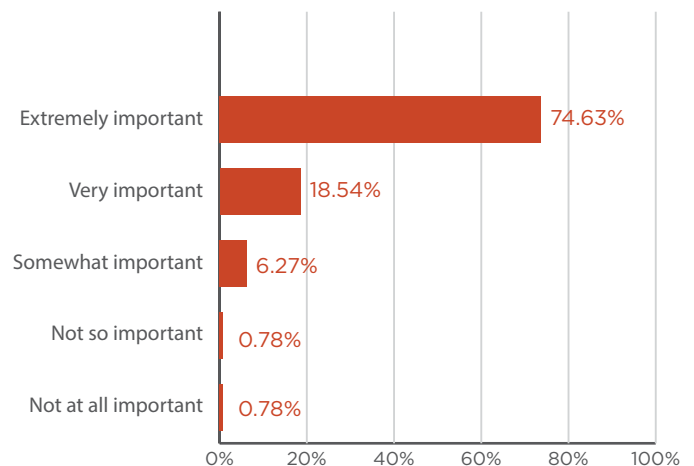
PRIORITY 2: QUESTION 6

If yes, what do you think we should measure that would show action is being taken in this area? (open-ended responses)

Although not all of the face-to-face meetings had time for discussions on specific targets or measures in building the community-controlled sector, a number of suggestions were provided. Several participants suggested targets and measures relating to growth and capacity building of community-controlled sectors and organisations, including measures such as the number of community-controlled organisations, workforce size and skills, and training opportunities and uptake.

The number of ACCHOs was put forward as a possible target for measuring this reform area. (meeting report, Lowitja Institute)

Number of people employed long term. (meeting report, APO NT)

Targets should aim to reduce governments delivering services and increased funding and service delivery to or by Aboriginal organisations and an increase in the total number of local Aboriginal people employed. (APO NT)

[We need] targets to measure change through Closing the Gap and to measure the growing number of local Aboriginal organisations delivering the services. (Julalikari Board, NT)

Measures could include the number of Indigenous traineeships, the number of courses completed for professional staff development and the number of Aboriginal staff being promoted. (Tennant Creek, NT)

A way we could measure progress in this reform priority area may be the transition of contracts or services back to ACCOs and away from the larger, multinational service provision agencies. It's stated that there are 173 organisations in Port Hedland that provide a service. To measure progress in this reform priority area, it's suggested that a thorough analysis is conducted on this data to ensure there is no duplication and overlapping of services, with the most appropriate ACCO delivering the service. (Port Hedland, WA)

Many survey respondents suggested measuring engagement with the services and overall client satisfaction with the service they received. All survey respondents wholly advocated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access Aboriginal-run services.

[We need to know] how many Indigenous people are attending a service, what other services they were referred to from that service, what positive pathways have been developed to increase engagement, how effective is the service at addressing the needs of the community and what is the community feedback. (survey response)

Hearing and receiving feedback from the community-controlled sector on the factors they perceive to be crucial to success was also noted from many survey responses:

We need an autonomy measure, whereby community-controlled organisations are able to report on their sense as to whether they are in a position to influence decisions, including resource allocation. (survey response)

Other participants suggested measures relating to funding and availability of long-term funding arrangements.

Increasing the absolute level of expenditure of Aboriginal organisations [is important]. (APO NT)

A key target would be to measure the increased use and funding of ACCOs to deliver Aboriginal services and programs. (Broome, WA)

Increase in the percentage of services under each Closing the Gap priority area funded and delivered through community-controlled organisations. Have dedicated funding streams under the Closing the Gap framework that are specifically and solely available to community-controlled organisations. (survey response)

Measuring accountability with relation to funding to non-Indigenous organisations was also considered by many respondents of the survey.

Ensure that any funding given to non-Indigenous orgs is scrutinised by a special Indigenous committee that oversees the effectiveness of input vs output in terms of benefit for communities. (survey response)

Government funding commitments should be measured and monitored, and government(s) must be held accountable for failures on their part. Funding should not be dictated on short-term, political cycles. (survey response)

Participants also suggested a number of targets and measures relating to access to community-controlled services and culturally

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appropriate services, as well as outcomes relating to use of these services in areas relevant to Closing the Gap.

> *A target around cultural service delivery (not just health, justice and education). (Ipswich, Qld)*

> *Improve health and wellbeing, improved outcomes; i.e. improved access to other health services. (NACCHO)*

> *Progress against social determinants of health and social and emotional wellbeing. Improvement in service delivery [and] quality of services. Individual behaviour changes. Effectiveness of a model of care. (QAIHC)*

> *Actual changes to the economic sustainability of remote Aboriginal communities, actual changes to quality of life. (survey response)*

Assessing the experience of the users of the service, as well as measuring the impact of the service on their social and emotional wellbeing, was suggested to be of paramount importance when evaluating the efficacy of the services. Higher levels of satisfaction and wellbeing were attributed to improving outcomes across a range of sectors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as providing a successful framework for community-controlled organisations to work from, as elaborated below.

> *Create a health and wellbeing measuring tool that identifies health and wellbeing from an Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander perspective. (survey response)*

> *We need to measure the growth with people – are they more confident, empowered, have the information to make informed decisions? (survey response)*

> *Environmental, social and cultural outcomes using an Indigenous to Indigenous strengths-based approach. (survey response)*

> *Longitudinal measurements [are needed], such as measuring social and emotional wellbeing, prosperity, joy, connection, inclusion and employment outcomes. (survey response)*

Longer term measures were suggested as a means of demonstrating and quantifying the holistic effects of targeted action in this area. These measures spanned a number of sectors affecting socioeconomic status and overall quality of life.

> *Measure the health outcomes (reduction in severe health conditions such as chronic illnesses), education outcomes such as Aboriginal children completing schooling from kindergarten to high school and moving onto attend universities. (survey response)*

> *Long-term measures could include 1. poverty; 2. food; 3. health; 4. education; 5. gender equality; 6. water; 7. energy; 8. economy; 9. infrastructure; 10. inequality; 11. sustainable production. (survey response)*

PRIORITY 2: QUESTION 7

Is there anything else that you would like to say about community control or this priority action? (open-ended responses)

Often participants restated the importance of community-controlled organisations and strengthening and supporting these services to close the gap. A few participants noted the 'need for a strong definition on what an Aboriginal community organisation is' (Julalikari Board, NT). Other participants made comments about how mainstream and community-controlled organisations needed to work together and the current relationships between these types of services. This relationship between community-controlled and mainstream services is discussed in more detail in the following section on Priority Reform 3.

> Bringing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations together with mainstream organisations to build community partnerships and governance [is important]. (Ipswich, Qld)

> Consider supporting employment partnerships between ACCOs and mainstream organisations – this can benefit both organisations to develop greater knowledges. (Bendigo, Vic)

In addition to strengthening and supporting community-controlled organisations, many respondents discussed the strong need to identify and promote genuine partnerships and initiatives with non-Indigenous bodies. The need for fairness, transparency and leadership in all organisations and government was also mentioned by a number of participants.

We need to have a strong voice through our land councils directly to all ministers and legislation that needs to make ministers accountable to listen and implement recommendations by Indigenous leaders for change through real consultation processes. (survey response)

Need Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and experts to work together with a common goal to improve outcomes and wellbeing and future for Australia's first people. Aboriginal knowledge and systems have been peer reviewed over tens of thousands of years, why can't people listen when Aboriginal people with good intentions say they know what's best for Aboriginal people. (survey response)

There should be genuine supports in place throughout all levels of government to capacity build and mentor organisations. This will be supported with genuine engagement by governments and cultural competency of the public service. (survey response)

Leadership needs to be genuine and not for personal gain … workforce investment, racism and bias is still a critical issue, other than the politics we make for ourselves AND contribute to. (survey response)

Organisations need to ensure that nepotism is at an all-time low, that there is transparency and fairness within these organisations. (survey response)

There needs to be strong governance structures to ensure community-controlled organisations are actively involving, listening and respecting communities voices and perspectives (survey response).

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Priority Reform 3:

Ensuring mainstream government agencies and institutions that deliver services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertake systemic and structural transformation to contribute to Closing the Gap.

3

The third priority reform proposed to be included in the National Agreement is a commitment by governments that mainstream organisations delivering services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do more than they have been to Closing the Gap, and are held publicly accountable for their actions.

Mainstream organisations include hospitals, police, universities, courts, prisons and government agencies like Services Australia, which delivers income support and Medicare to all Australians. Despite receiving substantial funding to deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, they need to do much more to improve their life outcomes.

Measures supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that lead to long-term change are needed if this is to happen. They include putting more effort into tackling systemic racism and promoting cultural safety, transferring power and resources to communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people play a key role in decision making in these organisations.

There was widespread support for Priority Reform Three being included in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

PRIORITY 3: QUESTION 1

Is Priority Reform 3 important to be to be included in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

Engagement type: Coalition of Peak member organisations with their own membership

The members of the Coalition of Peaks organisations supported the inclusion of Priority Reform 3, to support transformation of mainstream services. However, many also responded that it was important that it did not reduce the focus on growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors.

The following key points emerged from discussions by 450 participants at the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) Annual Conference about Priority Reform 3.

- Institutionalised racism within the mainstream health sector needs to be addressed.
- Cultural awareness training and cultural mentoring should be mandatory.
- Employ Aboriginal people in mainstream services at all levels, including senior roles.
- Funding should be redirected from mainstream services to Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations (ACCHOs) who deliver health care more effectively.
- Service design needs to be community led.
- Genuine collaboration and respect for ACCHOs is lacking.
- Mainstream services need to be held to account for the funding they receive to deliver services to Aboriginal people.

The First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) is one organisation concerned that Priority Reform 3 does not reduce the focus on the need to grow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community sectors. That said, it

is very alert to the need for the reform of mainstream services that have an important impact on their constituents. It is very concerned about negative and inappropriate interactions between Aboriginal and Torres Strait people with disabilities and institutions like the police and prisons.

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) members want to build much stronger relationships with mainstream organisations at the local level. These organisations need to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media services much more in their projects to provide context to local initiatives for their audiences.

The Lowitja Institute considered this to be a vital reform and indicated a need for an autonomous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body to monitor and improve the accountability of the mainstream. It was suggested in the New South Wales engagements that it should be clearly stated in Priority Reform 3 that improving mainstream service delivery is to be done with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

New South Wales participants also agreed that successful achievement of Priority Reform 3 would require:

- more accountability about where funding was spent, and the results achieved

- more Aboriginal people employed in mainstream organisations, including through more identified positions, more senior positions and Aboriginal people on boards

- better partnerships between mainstream organisations and Aboriginal organisations and communities

- more funding and better funding allocation processes that removed duplication, was aligned to regional and community needs and delivered proven outcomes

- non-Aboriginal people who worked with Aboriginal communities to undertake cultural competency and safety training.

Direct feedback included:

We need more accountability of where the funding goes. Too much funding is being allocated elsewhere than communities. (Lismore, NSW)

We need to create identified positions in organisations so we can represent Aboriginal people in government and other organisations. (Menindee, NSW)

Aboriginal and mainstream services need to work in unison with each other, not against each other. (Condobolin, NSW)

Contractual obligations for mainstream providers could include working with

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other service providers, reporting on the collective impact of the local service system and co-design and delivery with Aboriginal people. (Mount Druitt, NSW)

Police aren't connected to Indigenous people. When police are undergoing their training, there should be Aboriginal cultural study courses to assist new recruits in understanding our culture and heritage. (Condobolin, NSW)

Engagement type: Representatives of communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in each state and territory

There is no doubt that Priority Reform 3 was supported in the face-to-face meetings across Australia led by the Coalition of Peaks with representatives of communities and their organisations.

All agreed in the Northern Territory that Priority Reform 3 was critical and that mainstream organisations should be required to have structured agreements, stronger than MOUs, with Aboriginal organisations and to also adopt the Partnership Principles of Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT). The APO NT Partnership Principles are designed to guide the development of a partnership-centred approach for non-Aboriginal organisations engaging in the delivery of services or development initiatives in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

Support across Queensland was also unanimous. At the Ipswich engagement, led by Pat Turner, the lead convenor of the Coalition of Peaks, participants indicated that while Priority Reform 3 is important, investment in the Aboriginal community-controlled sector needed to take priority over mainstream service delivery.

Participants at the Townsville meeting agreed that:

Government needs to stop funding organisations that are supposed to be delivering services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that are not culturally appropriate. People will get referred from an Indigenous organisation to a non-Indigenous organisation because they deliver the service, but when referred Indigenous people aren't comfortable with those services because they're not culturally appropriate, so they come back to the Aboriginal service (but they aren't funded to provide the service). (meeting report, Townsville, Qld)

At the New South Wales jurisdictional meeting, important feedback included that mainstream organisations often treat delivering services to Aboriginal communities as an add-on that needs extra funding if it is to be done. Instead, mainstream servicing of Aboriginal communities needs to be treated as core business and funded in the same way as everything else on an ongoing basis.

There was significant support in South Australia. Feedback from all engagements included the importance of governments and mainstream organisations forging much better relationships with communities and their organisations.

In Victoria, addressing systemic and structural racism and embedding cultural safety were seen as key issues to be addressed through Priority Reform 3. There was acceptance in the ACT that mainstream services are still required for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and that much needed to be done for them to be delivering appropriate services. The key concept discussed was to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed in the services and represented at all levels.

In Tasmania, participants emphasised the need for community members and their organisations to be consulted as a matter of course when developing, designing and implementing new services, and for their feedback to be listened to and acted on.

In Western Australia, participants in all engagements considered it important to improve the accountability of mainstream organisations for the services they provide to Aboriginal people. Suggestions ranged from the inclusion of key performance indicators in funding agreements through to the state's auditor-general including service delivery to Aboriginal people in its audits of mainstream agencies' performance.

Engagement type: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and subject matter experts

Participants reported:

We need to work with mainstream services while also building up our services.

Mainstream organisations need to be able to understand trauma as trauma underlies every issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Funding for mental health that is not exclusively focused on suicide is needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Mainstream services are delivering mental health services that are not focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Feedback from online survey

In response to the key question for Priority Reform 3, over 83% said it was extremely important for mainstream services to improve their service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Another 10% said it was important while 4% thought it somewhat important. This is further evidence that there is widespread support across Australia for Priority Reform 3.

Priority 3, Question 1 survey response: How important is it for mainstream services to improve their services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

(Answered = 717, Skipped = 957)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	83.68	600
Very important	10.32	74
Somewhat important	4.32	31
Not so important	0.70	5
Not at all important	0.98	7
Total	**100.00**	**717**

Extremely important 83.68%
Very important 10.32%
Somewhat important 4.32%
Not so important 0.70%
Not at all important 0.98%
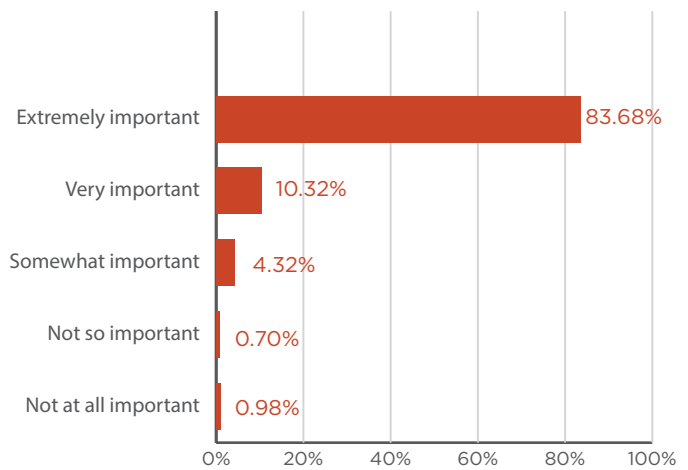
Perth community engagement

PRIORITY 3: QUESTION 2

What are some of the things that mainstream services and governments can do to work better with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? (open-ended responses)

Participants from the face-to-face meetings and from the survey identified several ways in which mainstream organisations and government bodies can work better with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across a range of sectors. These responses fell into three major themes: collaboration, cultural competency and accountability.

Collaboration

The key point arising from this theme was that, to work better with Aboriginal people, mainstream services and governments need to co-design services with Aboriginal communities and their organisations ('build with us, not for us') and to increase the number of Aboriginal people, including community members, employed by them in designing and delivering those services. This type of collaboration was viewed as not only strengthening ties with Aboriginal communities but also helping to build their capacity through employment and training.

> *Working in partnership with Aboriginal communities might mean working with ACCHOs and also working in ways that complement or plug into existing community plans and aspirations. (meeting report, Redfern, NSW)*

> *Partnership with Aboriginal organisations is crucial and must be able to show evidence of consultation or attempts to consult with Aboriginal communities on programs and services. (meeting report, APO NT)*

> *Employment of local community members and train them and contribute to community development. (meeting report, Ipswich, Qld)*

> *We need Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in senior management positions within organisations; people at the lower level need professional development and support. There should be an option to have a quota for employees and board members included in Reconciliation Action Plans. (meeting report, Townsville, Qld)*

> *Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait*

> *Islander people are in positions of influence, including on boards. (meeting report, Mount Isa, Qld)*

> *Governments need to finance bringing community together to talk about what our needs are. We have lost our mandate, where we were and where we are going; we as community need to be supported to come together to have those community conversations. (meeting report, Port Lincoln, SA)*

> *We should be closing the gap together. If we don't have Aboriginal people at all tiers of government, we are never going to close the gap. (Port Augusta, SA)*

> *Community organisations to be part of KPI monitoring of non-Aboriginal organisations to build their cultural capacity to deliver services to Aboriginal people. (meeting report, Perth, WA)*

> *Formal agreements, statements and plans, especially those that were co-developed or endorsed both by government and Aboriginal & Torres Strait communities must be adequately resourced and implemented. This is imperative to rebuild trust and to demonstrate commitment to making the changes that are long overdue, to meaningfully work towards closing the gap. (survey response, NSW)*

Genuine partnership with community, local leaders and community organisations was identified as the key ingredient to ensuring lasting collaboration. Participants discussed that, for engagement to be considered effective, it must transcend one-off consultations.

> *Mainstream organisations can provide proof of partnership with Aboriginal people and organisations on paper; however, what needs to be done [is]:*
> - *to form genuine partnerships with local grassroots organisations such as community-controlled organisations and NGOs in order to take effective collaborative action on issues in community.*
> - *There needs to be genuine partnerships with local service providers.*
> - *A community watchdog which holds organisations to account to delivering services.*
> - *Ensure that engagement is effective and not just a 'tick box'. (meeting report, Mount Isa, Qld)*

This is further supported by statements from other meetings around the country:

Frequent face-to-face engagement with the local community, conducting needs analyses with the local community [and] ensuring they are equipped with the data to be able to have the conversations are key processes that need to be in place. (meeting report, Port Hedland, WA)

Engage in a way that is most effective to the target population, which in almost all cases is face to face. (meeting report, Port Augusta, SA)

Use a strengths-based approach to work with Aboriginal people [and] meet regularly to build and strengthen relationships, not just when there are challenges. (meeting report, Adelaide, SA)

To be effective, mainstream organisations need to spend time understanding what is happening in our communities and need to recognise and understand the skills that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold. As one member said, 'We are our own professionals. We are the doctors. We are the lawyers in our country. (meeting report, FNMA)

Cultural competency

Participants in the face-to-face meetings and the survey were unanimous in vocalising the importance of cultural competency within mainstream organisations and government services. All participants considered it should be mandatory and many showed an understanding that competency was more than awareness and extended to applying cross-cultural skills and knowledge.

Some suggestions were to include performance indicators around behaviour and attitude change in mainstream organisations, with penalties for non-compliance. In particular, the majority of participants, including survey respondents, thought a basic lack of understanding around the issues and complexities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face in mainstream organisations has contributed to an entrenched disparity in life outcomes. Discussion points are summarised below.

The starting point with all mainstream services has to be cultural awareness and training. It should be a requirement, and then refreshed on a regular basis. (Mount Isa, Qld)

Cultural competency:
- *Mandatory localised Aboriginal cultural awareness training*
- *Cultural mentorship in place for staff and training for non-Indigenous staff with training delivered by local Indigenous entities or persons*
- *Re-educate staff in their belief and perspectives about Aboriginal people (racist, ill-informed views). (meeting report, NACCHO)*

[there is a] strong need for culturally proficient service delivery, which should be independently audited for compliance and negate conflict of interest. (meeting report, ACT)

It was indicated that providing interpreting services was quite symbolic of how serious agencies were about providing culturally sensitive services. (meeting report, Port Hedland, WA)

Mainstream organisations like hospitals have a civil responsibility to provide a culturally appropriate response to anyone that walks in the door, even Aboriginal people, and that shouldn't come at the expense of Aboriginal community-controlled [organisations]. (Melbourne, Vic)

Participate in compulsory cultural awareness training, including specific on-country experiences, led by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This should also include trauma-informed training. (survey response, NSW)

Some suggestions went to Aboriginal organisations and communities being engaged by mainstream organisations to assist in becoming culturally competent.

Feedback from online survey

The need for cultural competency was strongly linked to responding to racism in mainstream organisations. Survey respondents were asked what things would stop them from using a mainstream service. Apart from geographic factors, the lack of cultural safety was identified as a key barrier. In fact, all respondents listed lack of cultural competency and the continued prevalence of racism as being deterrents to using mainstream services. This ranged from institutionalised racism to negative attitudes displayed by staff, racist behaviour and racial profiling.

The following responses indicate how many participants felt about the distinct lack of

cultural understanding, lack of empathy and racism currently occurring in mainstream organisations.

> *Institutional racism can sometimes be hidden – attitudes, behaviour, body language and waiting times. (survey response, NSW)*

> *Sometimes I worry that if I disclose what's going on in family and community, it will reinforce the idea that Aboriginal families all have problems. (survey response, Vic)*

> *I work with a mainstream organisation as the Aboriginal program officer. I am continually arguing that the 'mainstream' processes and procedures do not work for Aboriginal people yet I am consistently 'encouraged' to work with Aboriginal people to navigate the mainstream system rather than finding a way to adapt the system to better accommodate Aboriginal people. My experience is that in working with my community I have more success by going out to the community rather than trying to bring the community to the 'mainstream' services and facilities. Mainstream services don't get this subtle difference. (survey response, Tas)*

> *I've experienced forms of racism and/ or racial discrimination or disrespect in a mainstream service provider. Experiences of not feeling welcome, comfortable or respected, which is damaging to the worker–patient relationship and a lack of trust is formed. (survey response, ACT)*

> *Poor customer service or personal interaction. If I feel like I'm being viewed as a number, I will be less inclined to return to a service, even at the risk of health deterioration. (survey response, NSW)*

> *Mainstream services lack the cultural authenticity that ACCO's possess. They might have a nice Aboriginal artwork in their office but there is a clear ignorance. They often possess superficial knowledge about Aboriginal people that is more about reinforcing stereotypes than understanding and engaging with our community. (survey response, SA)*

> *Being made to feel invisible is isolating and [makes people feel] vulnerable as a community member attending a mainstream service provider. (survey response, Qld)*

> *In my experience, Aboriginal people I know will not use mainstream because of racism, discrimination, lack of cultural safety. They are retraumatised because many services do not understand trauma-informed care or the true history of why Aboriginal people are where they are now. (survey response, WA)*

> *The experience of systemic racism is overwhelmingly common for Aboriginal people and affects their physical, social and emotional wellbeing through the stress and other negative emotions it creates, or through the direct experience of racially motivated violence, or through increased use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. (survey response, NT)*

> *I work in remote health and communication and understanding from city-based hospitals is appalling, people really have no idea what life is like for Aboriginal people living in community. (survey response, NT)*

Accountability

Participants across all meetings reiterated the importance for mainstream organisations to be held accountable for the services they provide to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including to communities. Ensuring accountability was identified as one of the ways in which mainstream organisations could provide more effective services and work better with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

> *Important for organisations to be transparent and accountable regarding data so people can see the quality of services being delivered to communities and that information should be accessible by the local community too. It's about being able to report back to communities about what is being achieved. (meeting report, Redfern, NSW)*

> *Mainstream organisations should provide feedback of all evaluation of program or service and show that action is being taken on recommendations. (meeting report, APO NT)*

> *Government must understand and value qualitative reporting of Aboriginal programs; telling the story is as important as representing outcomes by numbers. (meeting report, Broome, WA)*

> *Enhanced accountability and evidence-based framework to close the gap and to measure the impact are required. Closing the gap requires the further building of the evidence base to inform policy and practice, particularly in urban settings where the majority of Australia's Indigenous population live. (survey response, Qld)*

PRIORITY 3: QUESTION 3

How can Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and community-controlled organisations be involved in the development, design and implementation of mainstream services? (open-ended responses)

Survey respondents and engagement participants were unanimous in highlighting the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement and leadership in the development, design and implementation of mainstream services across all sectors.

Participants in the face-to-face meetings across the country stressed the importance of employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of mainstream organisations as a way to achieve this. Having representation at the various levels was identified as key to ensuring voices would be heard in all major decision making. Respondents from face-to-face meetings across multiple jurisdictions stressed further that employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should not just fill a 'quota' for identified positions but they should be actively sought for their expertise.

> *Mainstream services should make sure that employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is out of choice and not just for identified positions. These organisations can influence and improve service delivery by having more Aboriginal people working in them. (meeting report, Redfern, NSW)*

Representation across all levels, from an executive level to the grassroots level, was noted as enhancing cultural competency across mainstream organisations while simultaneously empowering and supporting the community and staff.

> *Not compartmentalising Aboriginal people into the Aboriginal service areas but with them across the board [is needed]. Working in partnership with Aboriginal communities might mean working with ACCHOs and working in ways that complement or plug into existing community plans and aspirations. (meeting report, Redfern, NSW)*

> *Our First Nations people need to be on boards and definitely must be consulted for new projects. (meeting report, NACCHO)*

In addition to the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mainstream organisations, another key focus area highlighted was the use of reference and community groups for the purpose of advising and weighing in on key decision-making processes.

Meeting participants responded that a set of community-defined standards for cultural competency of services was paramount. This ultimately would involve the voices of the local Elders and key community members leading the way and ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in the development, design and implementation of mainstream services.

> *From a Noongar perspective, Aboriginal community representatives must be engaged at all levels of agency projects, including at the strategic level, the implementation level and at the ground level. Furthermore, Aboriginal people will coach non-Aboriginal people along the way about how mainstream organisations can become better informed about Aboriginal communities. Mainstream services need to be accountable to ACCO services. (Katanning, WA)*

> *Set up a reference group for Elders in the system to have a lot more say in every decision made for their local community. Giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people autonomy and oversight over decision making in their organisations is essential. (meeting report, Ipswich, Qld)*

> *Utilise the local Aboriginal experts and empower them to be involved in evidence-based policy and as a key partner in co-designing policy by providing contextualisation. (meeting report, APO NT)*

> *Genuine collaboration with other local organisations to get better outcomes and including incentives in funding to do this. Services with these skills should take a leadership role, leading others. (meeting report, Mount Isa, Qld)*

> *Engage elders and have forums in local areas and have feedback to what community wants and take it back to the table. (meeting report, Ceduna, SA)*

PRIORITY 3: QUESTION 4

How can mainstream services be accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for the services they deliver? (open-ended responses)

Participants described a range of considerations and potential measures. Of the responses, the three most recurring themes from which accountability could be measured against were: funding, data and reporting and cultural competency.

Funding

Funding provided to mainstream organisations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs was a particularly contentious issue that raised many discussion points.

Meeting participants outlined the need for an independent auditing body to play a role to analyse and assess the government on Aboriginal-specific funding to mainstream organisations by assessing the service effectiveness across funding cycles. There was also the suggestion to apply potential funding penalties if certain mainstream services did not meet the contracted KPIs. Many participants agreed that penalties would hold mainstream organisations accountable to ensuring high service quality and measurable outcomes over a long period of time and not just at the 'end of a funding agreement'. Further, many respondents voiced the need for transparency with funding allocations, so mainstream organisations can also be held accountable for how much of the funding is spent on the Aboriginal-specific service delivery.

> [We] need a national body to monitor and hold the government and other organisations accountable. This might involve penalties such as removing funding from government departments and giving it to Aboriginal organisations when governments don't meet targets. Need transparency around funding and what has been achieved against Closing the Gap targets. (meeting report, NACCHO)

> Mainstream organisations must show how they will employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and people through procurement and tie this kind of requirement into funding agreements for mainstream organisations to ensure that they are accountable to the services which they provide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (meeting report, Mount Isa, Qld)

> Departments can amend their delegates' policies to ensure local managers are able to make funding decisions closer to where the work is done rather than remotely out of Canberra or the capital cities. (meeting report, SNAICC)

Data and reporting

There was a broad consensus across all the meetings that data transparency and reporting was critical to holding mainstream organisations accountable for service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many voices agreed that there should be public reporting requirements on targets and outcomes, 'who' is being given the Closing the Gap funding and the KPIs being measured.

> Report on outcomes, ensure there are compliance mechanisms within services. (meeting report, Ipswich, Qld)

> Funding agreements should have reporting on outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culturally appropriate service delivery, for example, the Queensland Indigenous Procurement Policy requires reporting on progress to increase the capability and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. (meeting report, Mount Isa, Qld)

> [There needs to be] regular feedback reporting, clarity as to why they did or didn't follow through with actions and consequences for not meeting targets. (meeting report, Adelaide, SA)

> Accountability can be built through better coordination of mainstream and community-controlled services in the Kimberley to improve service delivery. This can be supported through government data-sharing with mainstream and ACCO providers to inform design of overarching governance structures in organisations. Aboriginal stakeholders emphasised that there must be existing plans for existing mainstream service providers and transition plans to build capacity of ACCO sector(s). (meeting report, Broome, WA)

> Tell us who the agencies are with Closing the Gap funding and what their KPIs are, then we can hold them accountable; this information is not shared with ACCOs. (meeting report, Adelaide, SA)

In addition to reporting on targets and outcomes, transparency in the user experience of mainstream organisations from staff to clients was also noted as important to

ensuring mainstream organisations remain accountable to providing a high-quality and culturally safe service.

> There was agreement that governments and mainstream service providers can work better with Aboriginal people through great accountability of mainstream services to report on and evaluate Aboriginal service user experiences and include Aboriginal staff employment rates in contract KPIs. (meeting report, Perth, WA)

> Feedback forms in hospitals facilitated by an Aboriginal Liaison Officer [should be implemented]. (meeting report, NACCHO)

> It was suggested that communities should be able to mark service providers on their performance as a means of accountability. (meeting report, FNMA)

Cultural competency

Many of the meeting participants strongly felt that ensuring cultural competency was one of the primary ways for mainstream organisations to maintain accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The importance of government and mainstream organisations understanding the issues affecting Aboriginal communities was emphasised, so these bodies could understand and recognise if their processes were insensitive or causing trauma and thus implement means of mitigating or preventing this.

> Setting the policy to ensure culturally appropriate and responsive services are met and have local Aboriginal reference groups engaged in audit of accountability of mainstream services. (meeting report, Port Augusta, SA)

Mainstream organisations and institutions should demonstrate that they are culturally safe, before they receive funding to deliver services to Aboriginal people. (meeting report, Melbourne, Vic)

Culturally competent services provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with greater choice of which services they can receive and reduces pressure on community-controlled organisations. (meeting report, Ipswich, Qld)

Adopting cultural competencies within the service, including communication skills and understanding of culture; recognition of institutional racism; Indigenous staffing; accreditation requirements. (meeting report, NACCHO)

PRIORITY 3: QUESTION 5

Do you think there should be an agreed target for Priority Reform 3 built into the new National Agreement?

The majority of participants agreed that there should be a target relating to Priority Reform 3, to ensure mainstream services improve their performance and be accountable for it, built into the new National Agreement.

Feedback from online survey

Of those who participated in the survey, 92.02% of people agreed that action relating to Priority Reform 3 should be measured and made public (including 74.02% who strongly agreed with this statement and 18.00% who agreed with this statement). Some participants did note that it was important for the targets to be relevant and appropriate to each region, which may require different targets, depending on community needs.

Priority 3, Question 5 survey response: Do you agree that action in this area should be measured and made public?

(Answered = 689, Skipped = 985)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	74.02	510
Very important	18.00	124
Somewhat important	6.97	48
Not so important	0.29	2
Not at all important	0.73	5
Total	**100.01**	**689**
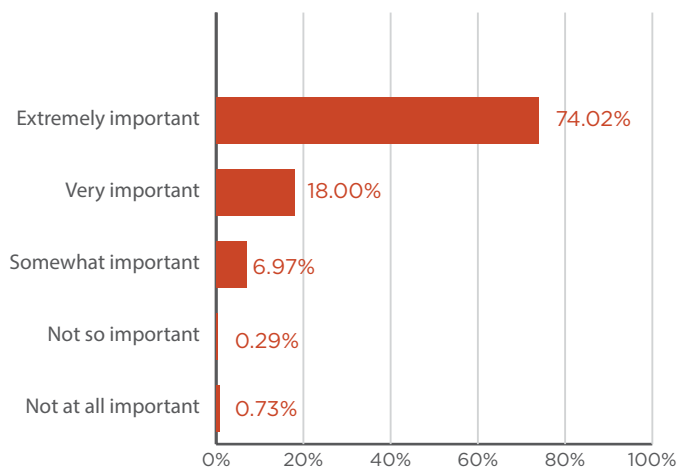
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation youth community engagement

PRIORITY 3: QUESTION 6

What do you think we should measure that would show progress is being made against a target for this priority action? (open-ended responses)

While not all of the face-to-face meetings included discussion on targets and measures, several participants from the meetings and survey respondents provided suggestions for potential measures and targets relating to Priority Reform 3.

Many of these suggestions included targets or measures relating to greater engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of relevant policies, service design and service delivery. In particular, a number of participants suggested measures relating to the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mainstream services and partnerships between mainstream services and community-controlled organisations.

> … frequency and duration of consultation with Aboriginal communities regarding the development, design and implementation of services [should be recorded]. (survey response, NSW)

> Governments and organisations [should] set targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment at all levels of the organisation or department. (survey response, Vic)

> Employment policy for sectors – [there should be] accountability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. (meeting report, Ipswich, Qld)

> [We should measure the] number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff; number of organisations having a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP); number of organisations having a formal mechanism for input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (survey response, Qld)

Other suggestions related to the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engaging with mainstream services and measurement of cultural appropriateness or indicators of improvements to the appropriateness of mainstream services or organisations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This often included measurement of the cultural competence of staff; increases in positive, culturally safe interactions between service staff and Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people; increases in culturally safe outcomes; and reductions in experiences of racism.

One possible measure might be the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander users of a mainstream service who are satisfied with the service as provided. A secondary measure might be the percentage of mainstream services rated 'unsatisfactory' under the previous measure but still receiving public funding to provide that service. (meeting report, Tas)

An increase in the percentage of mainstream organisations that have a Reconciliation Action Plan, a cultural safety framework, and that are partnered with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. (survey response, NT)

Mainstream organisations and government(s) MUST measure of impact in relation to eradication of racism: reduction in number of Aboriginal people who discharge themselves against medical advice. Funding must be pegged on delivery of culturally safe outcomes for Aboriginal people. Measuring and reporting on cases, incidences and action on racism in the mainstream services. (survey response, Vic)

Reduction of racism in mainstream services. (survey response, NSW)

Cultural competence should be demonstrated annually just as professional competence is an essential prerequisite for continuing to practise a profession, so is cultural competence for engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (survey response, Vic)

Certified cultural competency training by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or requiring sign-off by a certified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body. (meeting report, Ipswich, Qld)

All staff have participated in cultural competency training (annually); partnerships and working in collaboration. (survey response, Vic)

… the existence of cross-cultural skills training and orientation … (survey response, NT)

Does the service or organisation provide cultural supervision to all staff, including non-Aboriginal staff? Does the organisation look to increasing their cultural competency, and if so, how will they do this? (survey response, WA)

Several participants also suggested that improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people could be a target or measure for assessing improvements to mainstream services, with a number of people also suggesting specific outcomes, often relating to health and education.

… outcomes for ATSI clients. (survey response, NT)

Measure success in education. (survey response, Qld)

OUTCOMES. Client feedback. Degree to which ATSI people are satisfied and comfortable with the service, and degree to which the service actually achieves their objectives and improves ATSI wellbeing. (survey response, WA)

Impact of services on the health of communities. Any gaps identified. (survey response, Qld)

Number of Aboriginal children in care by region, number of kids in care with a kinship plan, number of Aboriginal people with a mental health plan. (meeting report, Adelaide, SA)

Health promotion services, locations and outputs and patient outcomes. Emergency department 'Did not attend' number and improvements that can be made. Aboriginal liaison officer or nurse in the waiting room to manage patient waiting and flow … (survey response, ACT)

Some participants also noted the importance of accountability for reaching any targets set and emphasised the importance of making these results available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A few participants also suggested methods by which the results of measures and evaluation could be provided to communities, such as social media, flyers, documentaries and reports that are made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Once aims and objectives have been identified for each agenda item then the metrics should be designed in such a way as to be realistic and achievable. Progress should be recorded and made available to the wider audience. If mistakes are made, then they should be admitted and measured. It is no good denying mistakes, but they should be seen in a positive light as being lessons learned. (survey response, NSW)

Several participants highlighted the need for a range of measures to be used, including

qualitative and quantitative data, selected in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. It was thought that these measures should support assessment of whether targets and important outcomes were met, identify potential issues and opportunities for improvement, and also highlight success stories.

A few participants also suggested that targets, measures and data needed to be developed to suit different communities and regions to ensure that their differing needs were understood and addressed as effectively as possible.

> *... they should enable systemic and structural transformation through measures that communicate progress against targets in a regionally based way. (meeting report, Broome, WA)*

> *Aboriginal community profiles so we know early when we are not on track to reach the respective regional targets. (meeting report, Adelaide, SA)*

Ongoing qualitative and quantitative evaluation. (survey response, NT)

Both the qualitative and the quantitative stories. (survey response, WA)

Measure the outcomes, measure the improvements, but also listen to the people – qualitative data gives us a story, what the people want, need. Don't just use quantitative data, listen to what people say, focus groups, individuals, family, etc. (survey response, WA)

Developing a number of evaluation tools, including self-evaluation, community evaluation and client evaluation, and align with funding outcomes and we might see some difference – community evaluation should include a variety of sources. (survey response, Qld)

Port Hedland Community engagement

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PRIORITY 3: QUESTION 7

Is there anything else you would like to say about mainstream service provision, including how it can be improved, or for Priority Reform 3? (open-ended responses)

In response to this question, many participants reiterated the importance of action and change at all levels of government, mainstream services and service staff to support the delivery of culturally appropriate services, support self-determination and not assimilation, and ensure that interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities were culturally appropriate and free from discrimination.

Several participants again suggested this should involve employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all levels of organisations and government and engaging meaningfully with communities to guide the way forward and support an increase in cultural awareness and competence.

There needs to be systematic change at the state level, where community frameworks are to be community and culturally driven by Aboriginal people and not translated by non-Aboriginal people. There needs to be representation at all levels of government and partnerships that coach and inform government on ways to do business with Aboriginal people. (meeting report, Katanning, WA)

Need more representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, for example, [with] only one Aboriginal mental health worker at the local mental health service, there is a five-week wait list, when people need culturally sensitive suicide prevention counselling immediately. (meeting report, Ipswich, Qld)

It is critically important that all levels of government really support effective ways to involve communities in designing and providing the services which will benefit them most. People on the ground must be able to feel trusted, supported, and listened to. (survey response, Qld)

Bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into development, design and implementation stages of mainstream services. (survey response, Qld)

Cultural awareness and contemporary inequity training for staff – ongoing. To review, name and neutralise systemic racism. (survey response, ACT)

Other responses reiterated the importance of issues discussed in previous questions, including:

- Community-controlled services and the need for sufficient funding to support community-controlled services to provide effective, culturally appropriate services

- Data, monitoring and reporting

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation youth community engagement

Central Land Council community engagement

Better reporting mechanisms to provide transparency with outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (survey response, NSW)

We need access to data about our region so we can see what is happening for our mob and to help us identify where we are not achieving the targets or KPIs; where to put effort to closing the gap. (meeting report, Port Augusta, SA)

- Accountability for actions, service improvements and any targets set relating to Priority Reform 3

There needs to be accountability and public reporting. All staff need to be responsible and accountable. (survey response, ACT)

Have tangible actions for people who display discriminatory behaviours that this is unacceptable. (survey response, NSW)

- Training and education about history and culture, particularly within mainstream services, to support a better understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture

As an absolute minimum mainstream service providers should undertake cultural awareness training which includes some information about Australia's true history and the impacts of colonisation. (survey response, NT)

Cultural awareness training should be more than a tick-the-box exercise – it should have participants research history and important dates and events so the participant can acknowledge and understand our traumatic past and its reflection on our day-to-day lives today. (survey response, Vic)

- Mainstream services working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, and community-controlled organisations to support self-determination and ensure effective, culturally appropriate service delivery.

Work with the ACCHSs to ensure the delivery of care that is provided is culturally safe and work in partnership with the ACCHSs. (survey response, NSW)

Development of real partnerships with Indigenous people to ensure that design of policy and program evaluation reflects family, local and community aspirations, needs and interests, is regionally and locally focused and provides for shared decision making. (survey response)

Priority Reform 4:

Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to locally relevant data and information on Closing the Gap

4

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people told the Coalition of Peaks throughout the engagements that communities need access to the same data and information as governments in order to support shared decision making and partnerships with governments. This is also considered in the section on Priority Reform 1 in this report.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also told the Coalition of Peaks throughout the engagements that the need for data and information goes beyond supporting partnerships with government. Access to data and information is necessary for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) to drive their own development by making evidence-based decisions on services for their communities, to measure the effectiveness of mainstream organisations operating in their region and to tell the story of their data by setting it in the right context.

The engagements made clear that access to data and information, and being able to use it to support achieving better outcomes, underpins the achievement of the other priority reforms and needs to be recognised and pursued as a separate priority reform. As a result, the Coalition of Peaks put to governments a fourth priority reform to be included in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Telling the story of data and information

Participants said that data and information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is powerful and belongs to the community from which it is drawn.

> *Data should belong to Aboriginal people, as it represented Aboriginal people's stories. (meeting report, AHCWA)*

> *We need to be cultural custodians of our data. (Cairns, Qld)*

> *Data is power, the people that have that information get to control what the narrative is that is shared to the public and media. Community should be in control of that, but government must be willing to cede some of that power. If they really care about self-determination, then they need to show it. (Melbourne, Vic)*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities understand the context of the data and are best placed to tell the story of their data. This is particularly important given the primacy of data in closing the gap.

> *When communities can generate and use their own data, they are better placed to understand and interpret the results. (Broome, WA)*

> *We are concerned that our data is being used out of context; we need ownership and control of our data. (Geraldton, WA)*

> *When data is provided on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it needs to be set in its context. (Rockhampton, QLD)*

Type of data and information

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations were clear about what type of data is required to be most useful.

- Data and information need to be owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, especially when it is being used to make decisions about their lives.

  Data sovereignty – our ability to collect, share and interpret our own data for the benefit of our communities. (Redfern, NSW)

  Data sovereignty is critical to genuine partnership. Success should be measured by Aboriginal points of view. (Melbourne, Vic)

  Ownership of data that affects us is necessary to make these reforms work. (Redfern, NSW)

- Data and information need to be local.

At the moment, most data is only available at the national and/or state or territory level and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations cannot obtain a comprehensive picture of what is happening in their communities. This is particularly an issue in some states with large and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

  Local community needs access to local-level data on targets, to know where the issues are. (Rockhampton, Qld)

  Local solutions for local problems – community leads so they can participate and be informed. Not one size fits all. (Perth, WA)

  Regions need to know how they're doing compared to neighbouring regions and urban areas. (Rockhampton, Qld)

  Local solutions to local problems, developed and managed by local Aboriginal or Torres Strait people, are the only way that things will change. (survey response)

- Data and information need to be accessible.

Participants described issues accessing data, from simply not having any access to the required data through to inconsistencies in the way the data is collected and stored.

  We do not have access to data and statistics on information relating to our people and communities … We need the government to be more open, transparent and accountable. We cannot improve the lives of our people if we do not have all the relevant information to provide advice and make informed decisions. (Yulara, NT)

  Data collection is difficult due to different ways and systems used to collect data; we need universal style of data collection to really know what's going on. (Adelaide, SA)

Data needs to be used for strategic planning but we can't get access to the data sets. The systems don't often reflect data in the way it has to be reported. (Port Augusta, SA)

- Data should measure what is important to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

The type of data currently collected is determined by what governments collect and is not informed by what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities want to measure.

  [The reform should] focus on data governance, and particular the need to collect data that aligns to the aspirations of communities. (SNAICC)

  Currently the kinds of data that are sent back to communities is at the discretion of delegates … This means that the data that is made available is variable from region to region and organisation to organisation and department to department. In addition, it may mean that differing programs may offer different levels of data access from the same department or organisation … Governments need to ask Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities what they want to know. (survey response)

- Data should measure specific activities.

Many people suggested specific activities or areas where data would be the most helpful. Having data relating to community-controlled organisations, including the number and size, the funding received, the range of services provided and how much is spent on activities compared with administration is an important area identified by participants during the engagements.

Other people said data on education is lacking.

  We do not have information to advise us on how well our children are going at school. We need to have access to the data that tells us the attendance rates, how many people are working in our school, the number of Aboriginal workers and the numbers of students completing primary and secondary schooling.

During the engagement meetings in the Northern Territory, APO NT was told:

  We need to have access to the data that tells us the attendance rates, how many people are working in our school, the number of Aboriginal workers and the numbers of students completing primary and secondary schooling. (Darwin, NT)

Data supporting priority reforms

Participants made it clear that data is essential to successfully implementing the priority reforms, including Priority Reform 2, which is about building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service sectors to deliver Closing the Gap services.

Participants identified the different ways that data would help build and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

> *Telling stories of change will be essential to Closing the Gap. The importance of monitoring and evaluation should be agreed and built in from the beginning to ensure that the data is telling the right story. [With the right data] over time you would observe changes to the number and size of community-controlled organisations, range of services provided in community-controlled organisations, capacity building, succession planning and changes in government procurement. (survey response, Empowered Communities)*

Other participants also identified why data is necessary for community-controlled organisations.

Data to identify community priorities and/ or service delivery

Data is needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to know what is and is not working in their communities and to determine priorities. This is needed to drive development and achieve change.

> *We need access to data about our region so we can see what is happening for our mob and to help us identify where we are not achieving the targets or KPIs; where to put effort to closing the gap. (Port Augusta, SA)*

> *Data that relates to regional and local areas is so important in order to determine critical areas for investment. (survey response)*

> *We should be setting regional priorities; how do we want regional funding to be spent? We need a regional voice; if cash is coming in, where do we want that money spent? We need a systemic approach to demonstrating outcomes. Regions should be involved in setting targets; we want the data that the government is measuring our services against. (Geraldton, WA)*

Data for program development, funding applications and advocacy

Data is necessary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to know what is working in their communities, to demonstrate the outcomes they are achieving and to advocate for funding and support. This is crucial for many community-controlled organisations that do not have secure and reliable funding.

> *Data provides an evidence base to support getting programs back, or new programs. (Rockhampton, Qld)*

> *We need evidence to show that we're achieving outcomes, to help convince governments to fund programs. (Mount Isa, Qld)*

> *The stronger the data is to prove [Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations, ACCHOs] work, the more chance of securing sustainable funding. (survey response)*

> *One of the things we also need is an ability to demonstrate outcomes and good practice. For example, we've got private prisons [that] can demonstrate a reduction in recidivism because they've been really well funded to be able to demonstrate that. (Redfern, NSW)*

Data capability and capacity building

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations will need support to use, collect and manage data.

> *It is not as simple as being provided the data, but it needs to come with information and sharing of how the data is aggregated, interrogated and used to inform decision making. For example, handing over CDP [Community Development Program] data for NPY Empowered Communities seemed to be a great idea, but it would have been enhanced if the community knew how government officials used the data and for what purpose. (survey response)*

> *Data should be provided in ways that take into account people's level of digital literacy. (Rockhampton, Qld)*

> *Develop monitoring, collection and sharing of data and data literacy for [ACCOs]. (Cairns, Qld)*

Service delivery by mainstream organisations

Participants also made it clear that data is essential to successfully implement Priority Reform 3, which is about ensuring mainstream agencies and institutions that deliver services and programs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people undertake systemic and structural transformation to contribute to closing the gap.

Participants identified the different ways that data would help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations measure the effectiveness of mainstream organisations and agencies operating in their region. The aim of this would be to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in different regions, possibly by improving the mainstream service, by identifying areas where partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations would be appropriate or by identifying services that could be transferred from mainstream organisations to a community-controlled organisation.

Access to data would provide a way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to keep mainstream organisations and institutions in their region accountable.

> While it is great that governments are trying to figure out ways to help close the gap, it is imperative that there is equal access to all processes and information, especially data. We always need to be accountable to government – I think we need someone to ensure that the government is being open and honest by disclosing any information that may affect Aboriginal health and wellbeing. (survey response)

> Local community needs to know where the money is going – accountability trail. (Rockhampton, Qld)

> Tell us who the agencies are with Closing the Gap funding and what their [KPIs] are, then we can hold them accountable; this information is not shared with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. (Adelaide, SA)

> [The provider of any service] must be accountable to the communities or people to whom the activities are directed. That is accountability and reporting should be to the population served, just as it is to the funders or government. (survey response)

> [Mainstream organisations could be improved by] establishing an accountability architecture for mainstream programs that is commensurate with performance reporting requirements of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations' (survey response)

Participants suggested that data was also needed to improve mainstream services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

> There needs to be an emphasis on the evidence base of what works for delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (SNAICC)

> Mainstream agencies should 'ensure access to data. (NFVPLS)

> [Mainstream organisations could be improved through] more involvement and information disseminated to community. (survey response)

Mainstream organisations and agencies play a significant role in closing the gap and need to do more to tackle systemic racism and promote cultural safety.

> Data and reporting must be a reporting requirement on its own in Closing the Gap and mainstream organisations should report on Closing the Gap targets in all funding agreements, (Tennant Creek, NT)

Closing the Gap targets

The foundation of the Closing the Gap strategy in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) was the identification of and commitment to targets to reduce disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and associated building blocks or areas for action. Ultimately, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to seven targets, starting with closing the gap in life expectancy by 2031. Four of these targets expired in 2018.

The process of refreshing the Closing the Gap strategy that began at the end of 2017 included consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about updating the targets. At its December 2018 meeting, COAG agreed to revised Closing the Gap targets in draft form for further consultation. Fifteen targets were proposed in response to priority areas ranging from health, education, economic development and housing to justice, land and waters.

It was subsequently agreed by the Coalition of Peaks and Australian governments, including the Australian Local Government Association, that updated targets would be included in the National Agreement and that the engagements should also seek feedback on COAG's draft targets.

These were included as an appendix to the discussion booklet, A new way of working, issued in September 2019, which also asked specific questions, starting with whether the targets were supported. The online survey asked similar questions.

While all of the engagements included a discussion about the priority reforms, it was not always possible for meetings to have a detailed discussion about the targets, with the main focus of the discussion on the priority reforms as the primary vehicle for change. Moreover, responses to the questions about targets varied significantly and to a greater extent than what was seen in the responses to the priority reforms.

Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people supported the priority areas for which targets were developed in the lead-up to COAG's meeting in December 2018. However, the feedback on the targets themselves, including the wording, outcomes, measures and focus, was often that they needed to be changed, with suggestions offered. Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also supported national targets that all governments were responsible for achieving.

While it is envisaged that the National Agreement, like NIRA, will include targets, COAG has proposed a change with respect to responsibility for the targets. In particular, it announced at its meeting on 12 December 2018 that different levels of government would have lead responsibility for specific targets. The lead jurisdiction is the level of government responsible for monitoring reports against progress and initiating further action if that target is not on track, including through relevant government bodies.

Accordingly, against each of the targets agreed to in draft form by COAG, the lead government will be identified, either Commonwealth or state or territory. For example, COAG proposes that its existing target to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031 is led by the Commonwealth, while its new target to increase the proportion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population living in housing that is not overcrowded to 82% by 2028 is state or territory led. Participants in the engagements were also asked whether this was supported.

TARGETS: QUESTION 1

Do you support the refreshed targets already agreed to in draft form by COAG?

Engagement type: Coalition of Peak member organisations with their own membership

While there was no unqualified support stated for the COAG draft targets in the meeting reports from peak organisations, their members, in a few instances, indicated they were not opposed to them or at least some of the targets had merit. A bigger group did not express a view one way or another, while others were critical of COAG's draft targets.

First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) reported that:

> In general, participants in the online meeting did not have strong objections to the draft targets but some felt they should include local municipalities in the implementation and accountability. It was noted that none of the targets drafted by the COAG relate to culture, language and communication and that this is a vital addition required (meeting report, FNMA)

The Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (QIFVLS) considered that some of the targets had merit but they and proposed indicators needed more work.

The members of six other peak organisations did not say whether they support the COAG draft targets or not. However, some comments were provided, such as those of members of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation(NACCHO) at its national conference, who responded that an overall strategy was needed to achieve targets, that the scope and number of targets needed to be narrowed, that the targets must be set by Aboriginal people and policies and programs

related to the targets must be Aboriginal-led. Peaks like SNAICC – National Voice for our Children – reviewed and proposed changes to draft targets that were relevant to their role.

The feedback from members of the New South Wales Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) was more critical of COAG's draft targets. The overarching response was that:

- they put too much responsibility on the individual and not enough on government and communities

- they were not sufficiently aspirational and frequently came from the perspective of a deficit model

- many targets were unrealistic unless they were supported by sufficient funding appropriately targeted.

Some of the peak bodies did not support COAG's draft targets at all. The Lowitja Institute commented that:

> There was no support for the Closing the Gap targets as put forward in the draft form by COAG. They (participants) noted that many of the previous targets (i.e. education) had been assimilatory and not focused on cultural strength and wellbeing through elements such as Indigenous languages and ways of learning and felt that the targets being proposed were again in line with this same thinking or approach. (meeting report, Lowitja Institute)

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) was also not supportive of the draft targets, saying in its record of meeting that:

> NATSILS does not agree with the December COAG targets; these are not ambitious enough. (meeting report, NATSILS)

Engagement type: Representatives of communities and their organisations in each state and territory

No definite position emerged from the jurisdictional engagements with communities and their organisations. The Northern Territory meetings focused on the priority reforms, with participants not confirming whether they supported the COAG draft targets or not. However, the report from Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) expresses the following view:

> All targets must be relevant and appropriate to the region in which the service is delivered. They must be measurable and based on evidence – with

> a mix of qualitative and quantitative data – not nuanced (meeting report, APO NT)

Likewise, meeting reports from the Queensland engagements do not indicate explicitly that participants supported the COAG draft targets or not. They did discuss the priority areas for which targets were developed for COAG, which can be assumed to have been supported as no objections were raised. They gave many suggestions about how individual targets that responded to those priority areas could be improved. The importance of community involvement and leadership was a theme across all the engagements in Queensland, which also came out in the discussion on the targets.

The response of participants in the New South Wales engagements were similar to those in Queensland. No firm position was expressed on COAG's draft targets, but the meeting report suggests that participants agreed with the priority areas for the development of targets. There were criticisms of some of the COAG targets, such as the proposed housing target, while there was support for a land and water target to be developed. As in Queensland, participants proposed that targets should be considered at the local level and aligned to the aspirations of families and communities.

The South Australian engagements were not able to discuss COAG's draft targets.

Participants in the Victorian engagements, however, made a number of criticisms, including that the targets were not ambitious enough, that that they weren't as meaningful or hard hitting as the previous ones, that they continued to be about Aboriginal people and not about the outside influences that have an impact on their lives and didn't address systemic racism or the government's role in achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Participants in Tasmania did not express opposition to the COAG draft targets, but they did query what would constitute meaningful indicators for some of the proposed targets, suggesting that the targets may be too superficial. They also proposed that it would be useful to have targets that can help to tell the 'story behind the story' of any improved outcomes.

Participants in the Australian Capital Territory, like those in the Northern Territory, were more interested in discussing the priority reforms rather than the COAG targets. The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body's (ACT ATSIEB) report states:

There was agreement to the broad areas of data focus, especially the inclusion of areas such as justice, out-of-home care, culture and land, [which] were important. Most participants had not formed a view yet on the measures provided (meeting report, ACT ATSIEB)

The response to the COAG draft targets in the Western Australian engagements was mixed. Participants in Port Hedland and Katanning were mostly negative about them. For example, the record of meeting for Port Hedland states that:

There was significant feedback that the current draft Closing the Gap targets are not measuring the right things and are not appropriate for the current Closing the Gap initiative. Targets also need to take account of historical and current trauma experienced by Aboriginal people. Targets also need to take account of historical and current trauma experienced by Aboriginal people. (meeting report, Port Hedland, WA)

Broome and Geraldton participants agreed that regional targets were needed, while Kalgoorlie participants expressed the view that:

The statistics on current Closing the Gap targets need to be known before new ones are determined, and in general terms there needs to be more positive measures of Aboriginal achievement to empower mums and dads to support their children. (meeting report, Kalgoorlie, WA)

Engagement type: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and subject matter experts

Participants didn't say whether they agreed with COAG's draft targets or not. Instead the discussion focused on the merits of individual targets, particularly concerns about the education and health targets, and the need for additional targets, such as in the area of governance. Useful insights included that care needs to be taken in using targets as they are about numbers rather than sustainability.

Feedback from online survey

A total of 29.6% of survey respondents strongly agreed with COAG's draft targets, while another 35.7% agreed. This means that just over 65% of respondents agreed, which is a significant majority, but overall support from participants in the engagements was much less than it was for the priority reforms.

More than 25% of respondents who agreed to the draft targets also suggested changes. Within this cohort, most wanted to expand the health targets to also include mental health and suicide. Many also suggested including new targets for the preservation of culture and languages.

Targets, Question 1 survey response: Do you support the refreshed targets already agreed to in draft form by COAG?

(Answer = 585, Skipped = 1089)

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
Extremely important	29.57	173
Very important	35.73	209
Somewhat important	25.64	150
Not so important	5.81	34
Not at all important	3.25	19
Total	**100.00**	**585**
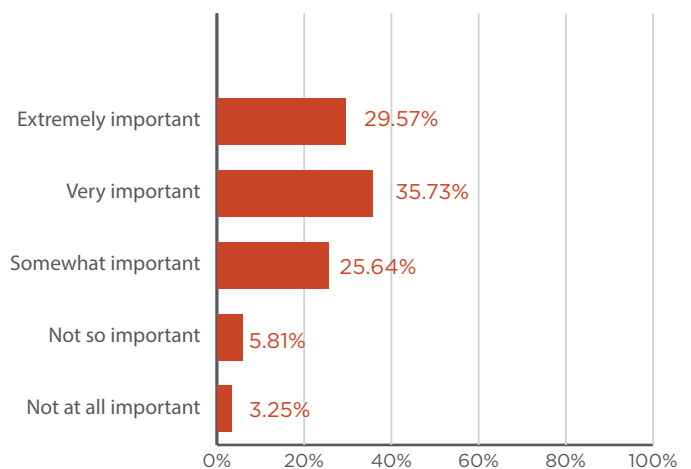
TARGETS: QUESTION 2

Are there any draft targets you really support and any targets you really do not agree with? (open-ended responses)

Not many responses provided clear-cut support for any specific targets. Instead, almost all participants suggested changes to the targets or disagreed with them.

Some of the changes suggested were common to all of the draft targets. For example, many participants suggested that the targets needed to be stronger and set more ambitious goals. Conversely, other participants suggested that it was important the targets were realistic, with concern that some of the targets may be difficult to achieve in the given timeframe. Many participants also expressed concern that the current targets were deficit-focused and suggested that strengths-based targets should be developed across the priority areas instead.

> *Don't agree with low level targets – raise them. If we are failing at this level, we are going backwards. Target level for Justice (incarceration rate 5%) [is] too low. (meeting report, Katanning, WA)*

> *How can we achieve 65% of our children in employment, education and training if they're not finishing school, or 40% of them are in prisons? These targets are not realistic or reasonable. (NSW CAPO, Redfern)*

> *Strengths-based approaches and the need to avoid deficit discourse was also raised. (meeting report, IAHA)*

Development of targets that were specific to the needs and strengths of different regions or could be modified to suit the needs of different communities was also a suggestion made by several participants.

Other suggested changes focused on aspects of specific targets, with many different suggestions made. However, one issue raised by most participants who discussed the targets was that they did not support the use of the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) as a target or indicator of outcomes relating to education.

> *NAPLAN isn't appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids; uncertain whether it is needed. (meeting report, Mount Isa, Qld)*

> *NAPLAN does not adequately measure learning outcomes for Aboriginal children due to underlying factors, but rather a culturally appropriate assessment tool for Aboriginal children must be developed by the education sector. (meeting report, Perth, WA)*

> *NAPLAN – it's too restrictive; trying to fit Indigenous people into forced structures which aren't working. (NSWAECG meeting report, Sydney NSW)*

> *Communities and those that speak traditional languages as a first language are disadvantaged in NAPLAN. Interpreters should be provided, or extra time to complete the NAPLAN tests should be considered. (NSW CAPO, Muswellbrook)*

Another example of a suggested change to the targets mentioned by many participants was broadening the focus of the draft health targets. Many participants believed that these were too limited in focus and should consider more holistic targets and include mental health or social and emotional wellbeing. The following is from the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSW AECG).

> *Acknowledging that life expectancy is probably in there because it's a proxy for a lot of things. It's a proxy measure rather than a measure in itself. So, the two targets: one, is a proxy in terms of life expectancy, and then you've got another proxy in terms of making sure they start well, and looking at a healthy birth weight of babies. So there's two ends of the spectrum, but it's missing everything in the middle. (meeting report, NSW AECG)*

Some participants reported that they wanted more information and data before supporting or not supporting the draft targets or suggesting new targets. For example, a number of participants indicated that detailed information about the current situation and trends in outcomes could support the development of more specific, realistic targets. Some participants also wanted further clarification around the definitions of some of the terms used and how they would be measured (e.g. 'appropriate housing').

> *What is the base data they're using (compared to what?). (meeting report, Townsville, Qld)*

> *Again, it's a lack of a lot of information in terms of housing. How you would measure some of the desired outcomes is the hard question more than anything else. What does it mean by 'appropriate*

housing'? What is overcrowding to one is not overcrowding to other. (meeting report, NSW AECGI)

Meeting participants also described a number of factors they believed needed to be considered to support achievement of these targets. Many participants described the need for appropriate funding to be provided to support progress towards the targets and for culturally appropriate data to be collected to monitor progress. They emphasised the need for reporting and accountability in the instances where targets were not met. Many participants also commented on the interrelatedness of the issues discussed and the importance of addressing these holistically and with consideration of how these issues are related.

> We will only be able to achieve these targets if the investment is put in. (meeting report, Ipswich, Qld)

> Many targets were unrealistic unless they were supported by sufficient funding, appropriately targeted. (meeting report, NSW CAPO)

> We need data at a local level and to be able to determine what success and wellbeing looks like for ourselves. Needs to be how and what we want measured not filtered by others. (meeting report, ACT)

> Even though we had Closing the Gap reports every year, there was no accountability for the failure to meet targets, and no change was made to the system within the 10 years. (meeting report, Rockhampton, Qld)

> There needs to be penalties for not meeting targets. (meeting report, Morwell, Vic)

> The participants in our forums also recognised that the issues being described through these targets are interrelated, just as the research cited in this report shows. They recognised that life expectancy outcomes are impacted by homelessness and other factors; poor health leads to poor educational outcomes; poor-quality housing is linked to poor health; living with disabilities is linked to poverty; and loss of culture and heritage with all of these poor life outcomes. With this knowledge, participants stressed the need to look at these issues from a holistic perspective. (meeting report, NSW CAPO)

Feedback from online survey

Similar to meeting participants, survey respondents varied over which targets they did or did not support. When asked which targets they supported, some indicated they supported all of the targets while others identified specific targets. Some respondents also highlighted areas and targets they believed were particularly important to improving outcomes in additional areas, such as housing, education and health.

> All the statements are relevant but if am to prioritise then I would really support Families and Education, as it is these areas where core values are established and lead to success in the other areas." (survey response, NSW)

> Housing. There is insufficient housing (leading to crowding), and existing housing is poorly maintained by the government owners. (survey response, Qld)

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' land, water and cultural rights [should be] realised. Land and culture is key to ensuring strong, thriving people. (survey response, SA)

Other respondents indicated they were supportive of having a target in a particular priority area, but they thought the target needed to be changed (e.g. made more ambitious, more holistic or more clearly defined and measurable), or made suggestions for additional targets (suggestions for additional targets are described in further detail under Question 4 below).

> All of them are equally important as the other as they all flow on from one to the next. You can't fix one or two. All need to be done in unison, (survey response, WA)

> Strongly support the inclusion of justice targets; however, the current draft targets are not ambitious enough. (survey response, NSW)

> Housing. And I think that the target needs to be more ambitious! (survey response, NT)

> All of them but they are too macro, need a set of better defined targets so we can see gains in specific areas. (survey response, SA)

> Justice, including youth justice, but I think this target should be higher, I also support education. (survey response, NSW)

> Education – but not sure if they are just measuring bits of a child's education and

*development – they don't seem to be very
holistic. (survey response, Tas)*

*They are all good in principle but need to
be more specific, with tied actions, funding
and accountability. (survey response, Qld)*

Responses to the question about which
targets participants did not support also
varied, with some reporting that there were
no targets they really did not agree with,
some indicating they had not yet reviewed
the targets or needed further information
and others describing one or more targets
they believe should be changed. Many of the
issues raised about the draft targets and the
changes suggested are noted in the meeting
participant responses, including making the
targets more ambitious, concerns about
keeping targets realistic and achievable,
suggestions for alternative or additional
targets and measures (discussed further in
Question 4 below), and emphasising that
action taken to achieve the targets must be
culturally appropriate.

*All these are important. (survey response,
NSW)*

*It's hard to say when you don't know
what the current data is – how much of an
improvement is it? (survey response, Vic)*

*The economic development targets are
not ambitious enough. An Indigenous
unemployment rate of 40% is still terrible.
(survey response, NSW)*

*47% having completed Cert III or above
seems unrealistic. (survey response, WA)*

Similar to the meetings, a number of survey
participants also described NAPLAN as
an unsuitable measure of educational
achievement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander people.

*NAPLAN is not a great testing of overall
capacity and the testing style significantly
disadvantages Aboriginal people, especially
if English is not their native language.
(survey response, Tas)*

*I don't agree with using NAPLAN as the
benchmark for reading and numeracy. It
also doesn't emphasise the importance of
cultural education or being able to speak
your own language. (survey response, Vic)*

A few respondents reported that they did not
support any of the targets.

*No because ATSI have never been consulted
prior. (survey response, NSW)*

TARGETS: QUESTION 3

Do you support some targets being led by the Commonwealth and some being state led?

The majority of participants in the
engagements who discussed this topic
supported the idea of the targets being led
by the Commonwealth, assisted by the state
governments, or all governments taking
responsibility together. There was much less
support for the idea of the Commonwealth
taking lead responsibility for some targets
and the states and territories taking the lead
for others. It was suggested in a much smaller
number of responses that certain targets may
need to be led by the states and territories,
depending on the needs of that population,
but the most frequent response was that the
targets needed to be national with leadership
at a Commonwealth level.

*There must be a shared commitment –
governments need to stop thinking about
this in political cycles. (meeting report,
NACCHO)*

*Some areas: however, federal leadership
is crucial. Biggest social issues need to
be led federally. For example, family
violence, justice, disability, child removal,
just as health currently is. (meeting report,
NFVPLSF)*

*Need to look at how local governments, e.g.
Townsville City Council, as well as state and
Commonwealth governments can assist to
meet the targets and have accountability at
all levels. (meeting report, Townsville, Qld)*

*Yes, supported both levels of government
to achieve their specific targets. State-led
targets should be 'and' not 'or'. All levels of
government have to adopt targets, not just
Commonwealth lead, e.g. local and state,
federal. (meeting report, Townsville, Qld)*

*Targets to be led by Commonwealth,
state and local governments with push for
Aboriginal voice and decision making from
community." (meeting report, Ceduna, SA)*

*There should be a common ownership
of targets, and a commonality of
accountability for targets. (meeting report,
Tas)*

*All layers of government should be
accountable – there shouldn't be a split
between Commonwealth and state or
territory responsibility. (meeting report,
Bendigo, Vic)*

There was general consensus that state and Commonwealth governments need to have a coordinated response to target achievement in order to enforce accountabilities. (meeting report, Broome, WA)

While headline national targets are acknowledged as being important, the importance of having particular targets for particular regions, to more effectively address local needs. (meeting report, Hedland WA)

Accountability for targets needs to be a COAG-led, whole-of-government process. (meeting report, Perth, WA)

Commonwealth targets set picture of whole nation, where the goals are held accountable at national level but not at the state. Targets should be led by both Commonwealth and states so that there is combined accountability. As geography and population demographics can impact significantly on achieving targets, we recommend setting up regionally or geographically relevant targets:

- *national targets*
- *state targets*
- *urban targets*
- *regional targets*
- *rural or remote targets. (meeting report, QAIHC)*

Feedback from the face-to-face engagements across New South Wales indicated a strong preference for national targets:

Participants did not support the way targets are currently labelled "Commonwealth led" and "State led". Instead they wanted to see services being provided seamlessly, where they are needed. (meeting report, NSW CAPO)

Feedback from online survey

This was further supported by the respondents from the survey, where just over 83% of participants preferred that all governments be responsible for the targets. On the other hand, only 14% supported the idea of certain targets being Commonwealth-led and others being led by state and territory governments.

Targets, Question 3 survey response: Who should be responsible for Closing the Gap targets?

(Answered = 604, Skipped = 1070)
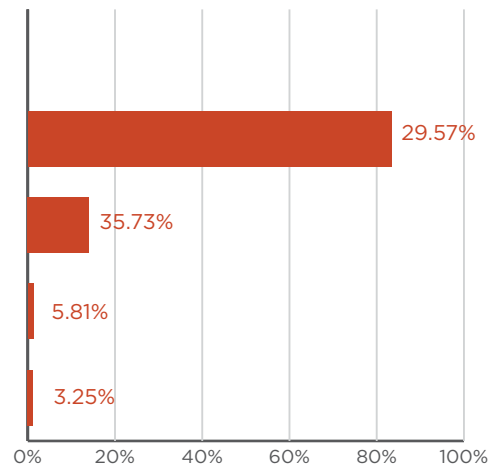
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSE	
	Percentage	Number
All governments should be responsible	83.44	504
The Commonwealth government should be responsible for some targets and State/Territory governments should be responsible for others	14.07	185
Just the Commonwealth government should be responsible	1.32	8
Just the State and territory governments should be responsible	1.16	7
Total	**99.99**	**604**

TARGETS: QUESTION 4

Are there any other targets you think should be included? (open-ended responses)

Participants in the engagements and survey respondents identified a number of alternative or additional targets they believed should be included as part of the Closing the Gap targets. These included suggestions for additional targets relating to the priority areas currently proposed by COAG (e.g. justice, families, children and youth, and economic development), as well as targets in new priority areas they identified as important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

For example, several participants highlighted youth as a key priority area to address and suggested that targets specifically relating to youth should be developed for all the priority areas or that youth should be included as its own priority area.

Disability was similarly identified by several participants as needing its own priority area that could have a specific target, with others suggesting indicators for disability should be included across all priority areas.

> *Create a new outcome statement for youth with targets across all areas. (meeting report, NSW CAPO)*

> *Disability needs to be across all targets: health, education, justice, children, economic development etc. Unless there is a disability indicator in all targets there will be up to half of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [population] potentially excluded. (meeting report, FPDN)*

> *There must be both a standalone target for disability and incorporation of disability into existing targets. (survey response, NSW)*

Many participants also discussed the need for a target relating to culture and language, identifying connection to culture as a critical factor underlying improvement in many other areas.

> *Culture needs to be embedded across every action, every priority (meeting report, Cairns Qld)*

> *There needs to be a target relating to the protection of cultural practices, items, places and such like. (meeting report, Tas)*

> *… a new outcome area is required in the Closing the Gap agenda around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) culture, for example: 'ATSI people achieve*

> *empowerment and self-determination grounded in a human rights based agenda'; and measure: 'ATSI people should be able to maintain or reconnect to their culture, and where dislocation access to healing services or programs'. (meeting report, Perth, WA)*

> *It was noted that none of the targets drafted by the COAG relate to culture, language and communication and that this is a vital addition required (meeting report, FNMA).*

A number of additional targets and potential priority areas for targets were also identified. These included (but were not limited to):

- Mental health

> *I think mental health-related targets should be specifically included as a high priority, due to the statistics that have been made public in 2019 around Aboriginal mental health and wellbeing and suicide rates, as well as the impact of intergenerational trauma on Aboriginal families and communities. (survey response, NSW)*

- Early childhood

> *Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and controlled early childhood centres, as well as fully funded to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with uniforms, food, etc. (meeting report, Townsville, Qld)*

- Wellbeing, social and emotional wellbeing

> *Youth need better access to mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. (survey response, WA)*

- Suicide prevention

> *Suicide rates, that is not a target and is very important to address. (survey response, NSW)*

- Transport

> *Transport – we need to be able to get to appointments in our community. (meeting report, Bathurst, NSW)*

> *A lot of the issues that we do see with our mob [are related to] the lack of transport. The biggest thing in this community is the transport issue – there is no public transport network here. (meeting report, Wagga Wagga, NSW CAPO)*

Some participants also mentioned the development of specific services as potential targets for consideration, including culturally appropriate services considered to be important in their local areas. Others discussed services that could be developed to respond

to the targets and support positive progress in the identified outcome areas, highlighting the need for employment and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development and operation of these services.

> Policy, programs etc. related to targets must be Aboriginal-led. (meeting report, NACCHO)

> Need homelessness services appropriate for men to take children, and families to take children. (meeting report, Mount Isa, Qld)

> Currently, there are not enough programs to prevent kids getting swept into the justice system. (meeting report, Ipswich, Qld)

> Better early years culturally appropriate support provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to women caring for babies. (meeting report, Townsville, Qld)

A number of participants also suggested that there should be region-specific targets, or targets that could be adapted to suit the individual strengths and requirements of different communities.

> Local regions need to have their own region-specific targets, informed by an advisory body that identifies what local needs are, and then what local targets should be. (meeting report, Katanning, WA)

> The importance of making sure that local communities are setting their own targets that's informed by their own data, their own experiences, their own circumstances, rather than being oriented to some sort of high-level one that might not properly capture what's happening on the ground. (meeting report, NSW AECG)

Many participants also believed that targets relating to each of the priority reforms should be developed. Specific suggestions for these targets are discussed in greater detail within the earlier sections for each priority reform area.

> We also think it is important to have targets on the priority areas for action and we want to reach progress in these areas too. (meeting report, NSW AECGI)

> To employ Indigenous staff, involving them fully in program design, delivery and evaluation, and providing adequate training, where necessary, to build capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. (survey response, NT)

Ipswich community engagement

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TARGETS: QUESTION 5

Is there anything you would like to add about the Closing the Gap targets? (open-ended responses)

There was a wide variety of responses to this question in the meetings. Many suggested additional targets that they considered were not fully captured by the current targets, as well as further means of how these targets could be achieved. Examples are given below.

Greatest focus should be on children and young people. (meeting report, ACT)

To stop the cycle, there needs to be parenting programs within school. Need culturally appropriate parenting programs, controlled and run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Focus on rehabilitation as opposed to punishment. (meeting report, Townsville, Qld)

Some participants raised concern that about the voices, needs and priorities of Aboriginal people in remote areas not being heard in the Closing the Gap process. (meeting report, Kalgoorlie, WA)

The targets should showcase the good things we do. The targets also need to be sensitive to each region. (meeting report, AHCWA)

A new National Agreement on Closing the Gap must include a standalone family violence target. (meeting report, NFVPLSF)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors as community representatives should take a key role on developing the sector related targets based on evidence. This is important to make sectors accountable towards their people. (meeting report, QAIHC)

There was also a wide variety of responses to this question in the online survey, with respondents proposing a wide range of targets and suggesting measures to make the targets more achievable and applicable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. No specific targets were highlighted as being more important than others. Several examples of responses are given below.

The Closing the Gap strategy would need to be accompanied by an all-encompassing education campaign that goes from kindergarten right through to universities and workplaces to teach an honest version of Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous history, what we can learn from each other, and how to move forward without being asked to 'get over it'. (survey response)

Fund good research into social determinants of health. (survey response)

Economic development includes having the resources (land) that is viable and available, to create the opportunities needed to empower our local mob. (survey response)

The Closing the Gap targets must acknowledge the ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The overarching right to self-determination, and free, prior and informed consent must be explicitly addressed and included as part of the Closing the Gap framework and targets. (survey response)

Housing needs to be affordable and available to people in remote areas. There should be more support around learning about culture and land. This is vital for people to take ownership and understand the basics of life as Aboriginal people in general. (survey response)

Decolonisation efforts across all of government, sectors, organisations and services need to be strengthened, and a genuine willingness and commitment to change demonstrated. Significant to achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians will be long-term sustainable funding and Indigenous leadership. (survey response)

I think the targets are very generalised and as long as we are gaining meaningful change and not just trying to hit statistical targets, that will be integral. Understanding individuals' perceived outcomes and ensuring an outcomes-based approach is fundamental. (survey response)

Condobolin community engagement

Other feedback from the engagements

The principle purpose of the engagements and online survey was to gather feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives on key areas proposed to be included in a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap, particularly the priority reforms and revised targets. However, participants in the engagements and survey respondents provided feedback on other issues that were related to improving life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait people.

The Coalition of Peaks agreed with Australian governments, including local government, to also include that feedback in this report. This enables the Coalition of Peaks to show faith as to what was heard and to ensure all governments are aware of the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as expressed in the series of engagements.

Structure of the Coalition of Peaks

Engagement type: Coalition of Peaks member organisations with their own membership

The structure and operations of the Coalition of Peaks was discussed by members of some organisations and came up in several meetings of representatives of communities and organisations.

The Queensland Indigenous Family Violence Legal Service (QIFVLS) wanted a process to be put in place that would unite the individual Queensland peak bodies into a coalition like that operating in other jurisdictions. In fact, this was also expressed by representatives of communities and organisations in most of the meetings across the state, such as in Cairns and Townsville, including the possibility of forming regional groups to facilitate shared decision making.

Some members of First Nations Media Australia (FNMA) did not clearly understand the structure of the Coalition of Peaks and its meeting report advised that there was a lack of clarity about which peak bodies are included and visibility around what they are doing.

The New South Wales Coalition of Peaks (NSW CAPO) reported that members wanted to be sure that neither NSW CAPO nor the Coalition of Peaks had exclusive memberships that excluded genuine community-controlled organisations. It also reported that they wanted to be sure that their voices would continue to be heard after the engagements were over. In that regard, the idea of building local coalitions of Aboriginal peak organisations, to mirror the state and national structure, was raised in several meetings as a way of building better collaboration and providing communication channels to the peak bodies and to governments.

Government engagement with communities

Engagement type: Representatives of communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in each state and territory

Concerns about how governments engage with communities were raised. In the meeting in Ceduna, South Australia, participants indicated that too often other organisations have a meeting with government organisations about their community and make decisions without talking to them.

At the meeting in Morwell, Victoria, participants said governments should meet with communities authentically to build trust and relationships.

The Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) reported that participants across the Northern Territory wanted governments to improve the way they consult communities. There should be a set timeframe, and over more than one day, that includes an initial meeting followed by another a week later to allow time in between to discuss the issues and consult with families and communities to reach an informed view. Public servants need to have agreed guidelines and checklists developed to guide them. In the Western Australian engagements, such as in Kalgoorlie, participants raised concern about the voices and needs of Aboriginal people in remote areas not being heard properly in the Closing the Gap process.

Another issue raised in Queensland, particularly at the meetings on Thursday Island and in Cairns, was the need for effective inclusion of Torres Strait Islander people, especially those living in the Torres Strait, in the Coalition of Peaks and the National Agreement to reflect their different culture and history.

Owning decisions to achieve better outcomes

Engagement type: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and subject matter experts

Participants discussed a core belief that underpins the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap, is shared by the Coalition of Peaks and that they think should apply in all dealings between Australian governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That belief is that, when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make decisions about the policies, programs and services that impact them, it results in better outcomes.

It was also agreed in that meeting in Canberra that that there is strong evidence to support this belief and that it is not only important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia but is well documented and important for Indigenous peoples across the world.

Participants considered some of the challenges in implementing this belief, including how difficult it can be for leaders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to remain united in the face of cultural differences, political pressures and the power imbalance with governments. However, participants considered that it is very important to focus on ways to resolve the inevitable conflicts that arise and to consider strategies to manage them, including building structures to enable leaders to reach decisions as a group and maintaining support for leaders even if they are not able to always achieve what is hoped for.

Participants also recognised the need to have arrangements for shared decision making formalised and to ensure accountability so that governments do what they say they will do. In that respect, a senior representative of the National Indigenous Australians Agency at the meeting indicated that governments are still learning about the new way of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people that is being sought by the Coalition of Peaks and others but it is recognised that change is required. Further, the senior representative indicated that, while there is no legislation underpinning the Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap that commenced in March 2019, it is still signed by the prime minister, premiers and chief ministers, which is very important.

Other business

The final question in the survey was:

Is there anything more you want to add that needs to be considered in the finalisation of the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap? (Say as much as you like, there is no word limit.) (answered: 260 skipped: 1414)

Most respondents were positive in their answers, including supporting the work of the Coalition of Peaks in negotiating a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap. There was also considerable support for the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations in service delivery, particularly for health. Recognising, protecting and incorporating the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people fully into Closing the Gap processes was also a priority for many respondents.

The need for consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on Closing the Gap and to be properly heard was also raised. Incorporating the entities of traditional owner groups in program development was also needed, according to a respondent, because they are the peak knowledge holders of culture.

Some new feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations included the following:

> *Business growth either through social enterprise or individual enterprise can lead to the realisation of self-determination goals of our communities – this should be included in the Closing the Gap discourse. (Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network, survey response)*

> *From a remote Indigenous media organisation's perspective, what needs to be considered is ensuring that all sponsorship messages or community service announcements regarding remote Indigenous communities are broadcast through the proper platforms for best results for all Indigenous Australians. TEABBA would encourage COAG to take the opportunity to give some interviews about Closing the Gap for the communities to hear what is happening. (Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association, survey response).*

Finally, several respondents discussed the need for sovereignty to be recognised and for a treaty, or the inclusion of a Voice in the Australian Constitution.

Developments after the engagements

The response to the engagements was greater than expected and generated a significant amount of data and information. The Coalition of Peaks advised government partners that it would take some time to undertake a thorough analysis, with that analysis to be conducted and a final report to be published by mid-2020.

The Coalition of Peaks recognised the importance of providing early feedback on the key outcomes to participants of the engagements. With the support of governments, on 16 January 2020, the Coalition of Peaks released a community engagement snapshot, a high-level summary of what was heard during the engagements. The snapshot was made public and provided directly back to as many engagement participants as possible, as well as to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and large Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Key points made in the engagement snapshot included that some 4000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had participated in the engagements and that face-to-face meetings showed overwhelming support for the reform priorities developed by the Coalition of Peaks, validated by the online survey findings of more than 90 per cent support for all of the priority reform areas.

At the same time, the Coalition of Peaks released the independent review of the engagements carried out by an Indigenous-owned consultancy, Two Point Co. Two Point Co is a Supply Nation-registered organisation that specialises in capturing a genuine Indigenous voice to inform policy and program design. Two Point Co analysed the engagement materials, including the completed participation evaluation sheets, most of which, it says, were positive.

Two Point Co concludes that the 'campaign to mobilise the community to participate in the engagements was effective' and that the 'engagements were open, fair and transparent'. It also made some comments about how the Coalition of Peaks and Australian governments can strengthen the way we engage to ensure a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice is built into the work on Closing the Gap over the next ten years. (The snapshot and the review are available at www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au.)

The Partnership Working Group (PWG) has been progressively provided with draft sections analysing and presenting the responses of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to the priority reforms and COAG's draft Closing the Gap targets. This has allowed the Coalition of Peaks to seek to have the responses properly considered in developing the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Coalition of Peaks and Australian governments have agreed that the outcomes of the engagements and the draft National Agreement will be reviewed together by the Joint Council. The intention is for the Joint Council to undertake a deliberative process to ensure the draft National Agreement fully reflects the views and voices of the engagements. Where common views from the engagements are not able to be included in the draft National Agreement, this will be noted as something for the Joint Council to come back to over the life of the National Agreement.

Importantly, it is also proposed that the National Agreement includes formal mechanisms for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations to have an ongoing voice on its implementation.

The Coalition of Peaks is committed to providing information about their work and commitments made by Australian governments on Closing the Gap to help build awareness and increase accountability. The Coalition of Peaks launched a new website and social media links on 27 May 2020:

Website: www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au

Facebook: www.facebook.com/CoalitionofPeaks

Instagram: www.instagram.com/coalition_peaks

Twitter: twitter.com/coalition_peaks

The National Agreement is expected to be made public and signed by all Australian governments, including the Australian Local Government Association, and the Coalition of Peaks before the end of July 2020.

Coalition
of Peaks