



**Coalition
of Peaks**

JANUARY 2020

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS SNAPSHOT

A SUMMARY OF WHAT
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE
AND COMMUNITIES SAID
ABOUT A NEW NATIONAL
AGREEMENT ON CLOSING
THE GAP

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COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

The Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks) has been working with governments to develop a new 10-year National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Coalition of Peaks led engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations in every state and territory to talk about what is needed to improve their lives and to provide input to the new agreement.

Over 2300 people attended nearly 70 face-to-face meetings in capital cities, regional towns and remote communities from September to December 2019, with an online survey at the same time getting nearly 1700 responses.

This report is a snapshot of what was heard during the engagements.

It is important to the Coalition of Peaks to provide this feedback because, during the engagements, many people spoke about being consulted on policies or programs in the past, but they did not know if they had been *heard*.

The Coalition of Peaks is made up of nearly 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies representing community-controlled organisations that deliver important services to our communities.

Find out more about the Coalition of Peaks here:
www.naccho.org.au/programmes/coalition-of-peaks.

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BACKGROUND

In late 2018, governments were going to decide on a new national agreement on Closing the Gap, including new targets, without the formal input and approval of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

At that time, a group of peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies considered that a formal partnership with government was essential if better outcomes were to be achieved by the new national agreement. An urgent response was needed, so they formed the Coalition of Peaks to make their case to the prime minister, premiers and chief ministers, and the president of the Australian Local Government Association.

We were listened to and a formal partnership was agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in December 2018. An historic Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap was then agreed by COAG and the Coalition of Peaks in March 2019.

It is vital that other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations contribute to the next phase of Closing the Gap and this was the key reason for the engagements. The Coalition of Peaks hopes this is the start of a new way of working and will work hard to ensure these engagements will 'open the gate' to shared decision-making on Closing the Gap over the next ten years.

The Coalition of Peaks put forward three priority reforms that we believe will accelerate better life outcomes for our people. Feedback during the engagements indicated strong support for these reforms. This report contains an overview of what was heard.

“ Rather than ‘closing the gap’, governments should ‘open the gate’ to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in making decisions that affect their lives. ”

-Community participant in Broome

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REFORM PRIORITY 1:

FORMAL PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE ON CLOSING THE GAP

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

There was strong support for formal partnerships between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on Closing the Gap to ensure the full involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in shared decision making at national, state and territory, and local or regional levels, embedding our ownership, responsibility and expertise.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people at the face-to-face engagements told us:

- partnerships need to be strong and inclusive to address disparities and empower community-led outcomes
- funding and resources are required to support partnerships with governments
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must choose their own representatives to negotiate with governments
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should feel safe to speak openly and honestly to governments, where young people have a voice and where people and their stories are respected
- decisions about policy and programs should support self-determination, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and lived experiences

More than 90% of the survey respondents told us 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
- choose their own representatives to negotiate with governments
- have independent advice when making decisions with governments on Closing the Gap policies
- have the same data as government to make informed decisions on Closing the Gap policies

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REFORM PRIORITY 2:

GROWING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED SERVICES

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are calling for a greater say in how programs and services are designed and delivered to our people, and there was strong support for building formal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service sectors to deliver Closing the Gap services and programs.

At the engagements, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people told us that community-controlled organisations:

- support self-determination and help make sure we get the support we need
- are better because they provide a holistic and culturally appropriate approach
- need more funding to support capacity building, community development and workforce development, with a focus on mentoring young people
- need a more reliable and consistent funding model designed to suit the types of services required by communities
- need all levels of government to be fully supportive, engaged and committed to their success

Of survey respondents, 92% said it was either extremely important or very important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to deliver services to our communities.

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REFORM PRIORITY 3:

IMPROVING MAINSTREAM SERVICE DELIVERY TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people called for changes to mainstream services, and the institutions that deliver them, to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people told us that mainstream organisations:

- are important but must not replace or undermine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations
- must recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the experts and engage effectively with communities
- should collaborate more with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations on decisions about policy, funding and service delivery
- need more than cultural awareness training to address systemic racism and improve cultural safety
- should appoint Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to identified positions at all levels of seniority and support workforce progression

Of survey respondents, 94% said it was either extremely important or very important for mainstream organisations to improve their services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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DATA

The Coalition of Peaks has now proposed to Australian governments that access to local data should be a fourth reform priority.

The engagements supported the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control of and access to local data to assist people and communities to drive our own development and accelerate outcomes, in addition to the three reform priorities.

Access to data helps us make informed decisions on the development, implementation and evaluation of policies and programs for our communities. It ensures we are equal partners with governments and can make shared decisions on issues that are important to us.

DRAFT TARGETS

Australian governments agreed to new Closing the Gap targets in draft form in December 2018. These draft targets were included in the booklet provided at face-to-face meetings, with a link also included in the survey, which specifically asked if the draft targets were supported.

At the engagements, most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people supported the priority areas (such as health, education, housing, justice, children and families, and economic development) for which targets have been developed. The feedback on the targets themselves, including the wording, outcomes, measures and focus, was often that they needed to be changed, with suggestions offered.

Of survey respondents, 66% supported the draft Closing the Gap targets agreed by COAG.

THANK YOU

Thank you to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country who gave their time and provided valuable insight and expertise throughout the engagements.

Thanks also to Australian governments - our partners - for the support they provided to the Coalition of Peaks in leading the engagements.

The Coalition of Peaks has also released an independent review of the engagements at the same time as this snapshot. The reviewer, a 100% Indigenous-owned, Supply Nation registered, consultancy, concludes that the engagements were open, fair and transparent.

Our next step will be to release a comprehensive report on the engagements in early 2020.

The Coalition of Peaks are now working with Australian governments to negotiate how the outcomes of the engagements are reflected in the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The agreement is expected to be finalised in mid 2020.



**Coalition
of Peaks**