



Dear Council of Australian Government First Ministers

16/11/2018

We write again, further to our letter of 4 October 2018, concerning the Closing the Gap Refresh, a joint initiative of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), to seek a formal partnership mechanism between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments in the Closing the Gap Refresh policy. We have only received a response from the Northern Territory Government.

As stated in our original letter, all of us believe it is essential that agreement is reached on the Closing the Gap Refresh policy between Indigenous organisations, on behalf of communities across Australia and Australian governments. What we propose is entirely consistent with the commitment made by COAG to set a new relationship with our communities based on a partnership. If governments alone, continue to make decisions about the Closing the Gap, without an opportunity for us to be at the table, it will not be possible to advocate with any confidence or motivate our communities to support Closing the Gap and to take joint responsibility with governments for achieving the targets.

The evidence is strong that when Indigenous people are included and have a real say in the design and delivery of services that impact on them, the outcomes are far better. We are certain that Indigenous peoples need to be at the centre of the Closing the Gap Refresh policy: the gap won't close without our full involvement and COAG First Ministers, who are responsible for the Closing the Gap framework, cannot expect us to take responsibility and work constructively with them to improve outcomes if we are excluded from the decision making.

We have proposed a reasonable way forward to Australian Governments in our original letter without making it public to give everyone a reasonable opportunity to consider it. However, we understand that it is the intention of Australian Governments to still settle on targets at the forthcoming meeting of COAG on 12 December 2018. We also understand that implementation arrangements are to be left over for COAG to agree in 2019. We make the points that neither ourselves nor anyone else outside government have seen the proposed targets which we think is way short of being partners and transparent and we cannot see how the targets can be agreed without considering at the same time how they are to be achieved.

We assume that Australian Governments will justify agreeing to targets by referring to the consultations earlier this year. Those consultations were demonstrably inadequate. They were conducted at a very superficial level without an opportunity for Indigenous interests to be prepared for the workshops held across Australia. They were based on a discussion paper produced by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in December 2017 and which stated that only one of the seven targets was on track which two months later was contradicted by the former Prime Minister who said that three targets were on track. Critical elements of the original Closing the Gap framework, particularly COAG's National Indigenous Reform Agreement, were not referred to at all in the consultations and the focus was on new targets instead of how we could make sure that this time around they were achieved.

There was no independent report prepared on the outcomes of the consultations and there is no way of telling if what was said in the consultations is reflected in the proposed Refresh policy

including the targets. The consultations started far too late which has left us with 4 targets having expired in June 2018. We do not accept that we have been properly consulted let alone given the opportunity to negotiate a mechanism that allows a proper partnership to be put in place in relation to the design, delivery and monitoring of Closing the Gap.

There is a now a significant opportunity to put this disappointing process back on track and in particular to establish a robust Closing the Gap framework founded on a genuine partnership between Indigenous people and governments. It is open to governments on 12 December 2018, to endorse a partnership approach and establish a mechanism to initiate negotiations between representatives of COAG and Peak organisations with a view to developing a genuine partnership as part of the Closing the Gap Refresh. This would be endorsed by the Peak Organisations across Australia.

Subject to COAG endorsing a partnership approach, we propose a meeting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak bodies to meet with COAG representatives to determine a framework for reaching agreement on a refreshed closing the gap strategy.

We stand ready to do this quickly and would work with COAG on having a partnership framework in place in early 2019 with a revised approach agreed by the middle of the year.

Ms Pat Turner AM, the CEO of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, is our contact for the purpose of responding to this vital matter and we ask that you contact her on 0421804718 or [pat.turner@naccho.org.au](mailto:pat.turner@naccho.org.au).

We look forward to working with you on the Closing the Gap Refresh through an established partnership mechanism.

Yours sincerely,

John Paterson, Chairperson, Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory



David Ross, Director, Central Land Council



Donna Murray, CEO, Indigenous Allied Health Australia



Karl Briscoe, CEO, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association



Antoinette Braybrook, CEO, National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services



Donnella Mills, Chairperson, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation



Jamie Lowe, Chairperson, National Native Title Council



Samuel Bush-Blanasi, Chairperson, Northern Land Council



Professor Steve Larkin, Chairperson, The Healing Foundation



Pat Anderson, Chairperson, The Lowitja Institute



Cheryl Axleby, Chairperson, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services



Jackie Huggins, Chairperson, National Congress of Australia's First Peoples



Janine Mohamed, CEO, Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives

