



# Koori Mail

*The Voice of Indigenous Australia*



## **FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE TAKING THE WHEEL AND DRIVING CHANGE ON CLOSING THE GAP**

The New National Agreement on Closing the Gap, agreed between all governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peaks, puts First Nations people in the driving seat for the change we all want to see in our communities.

For the first time, First Nations people will share decision-making with governments on Closing the Gap. The National Agreement makes this a reality, not just for the Coalition of Peaks, but for all First Nations people that want to have a say on how things should be working in their communities.

The National Agreement is centred on four Priority Reforms that have been designed to change the way governments work with our people.

**Priority Reform One** commits governments to new formal partnership arrangements with First Nations people so that our communities can negotiate and agree with governments what needs to be done on big policy issues that are important to us and where they are needed across the country.

The National Agreement makes clear that for First Nations people to properly share in decision making with governments, we need to choose our own representatives, not governments.

We also need funding so that we have our own policy advice and don't have to rely on what governments say. The way we work with governments needs to be set out in writing to set how decisions will be made together, how progress will be measured and how governments will be held accountable.

The Coalition of Peaks believe that the only way to improve the life outcomes of our people is if we can share in decisions that impact on our lives. We have worked hard to make sure that this is a reality under the National Agreement for all those that want to be involved.

**Priority Reform Two** commits governments to strengthening First Nations community-controlled sector to deliver services and programs to help close the gap. Our organisations deliver better services for our people as we know what we need. We also employ more First Nations people.

Community-controlled organisations are vital to protecting our culture and identity as we deliver services in a way that draws strength from and protects our culture and what is important to us. We know that mainstream organisations, no matter how good they might be, cannot protect our culture and people in the same way.

New plans will be developed to build and strengthen the sectors that are important to our communities. This should bring more funding to community-controlled organisations, better support and understanding from governments, and more jobs for First Nations people in their communities.

We know however, that not all services can be delivered by community-controlled organisations. That is why **Priority Reform Three** is targeted at getting government mainstream institutions and organisations to do better for our people. The National Agreement commits governments to progressively address racism in places like hospitals, universities and the police and set up partnerships within those institutions with First Nations people to hold them to account. We want to make sure that First Nations people are treated fairly and without racism when they go to a hospital, are in school or need other services.

Lastly, **Priority Reform Four** is a commitment from governments to share data and information with First Nations communities and organisations so that we can make more informed decisions about the directions we want to take with our lives. The Indigenous Data Network, governments and the Coalition of Peaks will work with agreed communities to set up better ways for them to access and use data about Closing the Gap.

If the Priority Reforms are implemented in full by governments, in partnership with First Nations people, and backed by proper funding we should see changes over time to the lives and experiences of our people.

Importantly, the National Agreement sets up ways in which all First Nations people can have a say about how the Priority Reforms are working for them. We wanted to make sure that First Nations people, not governments, get to decide if something is working for our communities.

New accountability measures mean that governments will report annually on what they are doing on the Priority Reforms so that we can judge for ourselves how they are working. A First Nations Assembly on Closing the Gap will be held every three years as part of a First Nations led review of the National Agreement.

The National Agreement also includes 16 national socio-economic targets in areas including education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, safety, housing, land and waters, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. The targets bring focus to new areas important to the lives of First Nations people and will help to monitor progress in improving their life outcomes.

The negotiations on the National Agreement with governments were hard fought. We have also had the voices of the more than 4,000 First Nations people who participated in our engagements guiding us. It does not include everything that the Coalition of Peaks wanted, nor everything First Nations people have said is needed to improve their lives. But

governments have been pushed in their commitments because we stood up and were prepared to sit at the negotiating table.

We will keep pushing and will hold Governments to account. The only acceptable outcome is First Nations people achieving the same life outcomes as other Australians, whilst maintaining our distinct and strong cultures.

The Coalition of Peaks have drawn strength from the many First Nations leaders that have come before us. We are made up of over fifty First Nations community-controlled member organisations. We have worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for decades on matters that are important to our people.

Each Coalition of Peaks member organisation has its own vast membership that it is accountable to and is in contact with regularly to represent their interests. All of our leaders, who have been sitting at the negotiating table with governments, have either been elected to the boards of our organisations by members of the communities they serve or have been appointed by Boards as CEOs of their organisations.

The Coalition of Peaks look forward to sharing the National Agreement with all First Nations people. We are at a turning point in our working relationship with governments and there is room for the voices of all First Nations people to be heard.

To learn more about the Coalition of Peaks and to read the National Agreement when it is made public check out our website [www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au](http://www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au) and follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

*Pat Turner AM, is the lead convener of the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peaks and the CEO of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation. First and foremost, she is an Aboriginal woman, the daughter of an Arrente man and a Gurdanji woman.*



**Coalition  
of Peaks**

[www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au](http://www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au)