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A LONG WAY FROM CLOSING THE GAP

Today's release of the ninth Closing the Gap report is a sobering reminder that we have so much more to do before we achieve true equality for our First Australians.

This day is about celebrating successes but also acknowledging failings. It's a time for truth-telling, for accountability and for striving to do better.

Our collective failings are written across the land: in schools, communities, hospitals and families. Nine years after the framework was agreed, only one of the seven Closing the Gap targets is on track to being met.

While we are pleased that the target to halve the gap in year 12 attainment by 2020 is on track, we are incredibly disappointed that we are not on track to meet other targets covering education, employment, infant mortality and life expectancy.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians pay a heavy price for this collective national failure.

The first peoples live with worse health and education outcomes, fewer employment opportunities, inadequate housing options and the lasting effects of intergenerational trauma.

The flawed design and delivery of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy reminds us that paternalism does not work. We cannot ignore the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or impose solutions instead of working with communities.

We need a new approach – an approach that listens to first Australians, gives them a stronger voice that they control, and recognises that they have the solutions.

We need a new approach that fosters hope that builds on a sense of belonging. An approach built on respect, recognition and resources.

Labor calls on the Government to heed local voices, to empower communities, and to prioritise what works.

The \$500 million in cuts to programs and frontline services has had a very real and damaging impact. Despite a promise that there would be no jobs or services lost, the opposite is true. Cutting funding from local providers doesn't foster independence, it undermines hope.

Labor also repeats its call for national justice targets under the Closing the Gap framework, developed in cooperation with state and territory governments, law enforcement agencies, legal clinics and social services – and guided by community leaders, elders and Aboriginal representative organisations.

And the Government needs to commit to properly funding Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Implementation Plan.

As always, Labor is ready to work with the Government to reset relationships, renew targets and resource effective services.

The same approach will only deliver the same failings. Now is the hour for change.

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