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CLOSING THE GAP PROGRESS DISAPPOINTING

The 11th annual Closing the Gap statement highlights the urgent need to adopt the recommendations of the Close the Gap (CTG) Campaign to address the unacceptable gap in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

“The AMA is very disappointed that just two of the seven goals are on track. This is one fewer than last year,” AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today.

“Progress against Closing the Gap is not what we all hoped for. While more Indigenous children are entering early education, improvements to life expectancy, infant mortality, and employment rates are not closing.

“After more than a decade, the lack of resourcing and investment in the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continues to see unacceptable gaps across a range of outcomes.

“The lack of sufficient funding to vital Indigenous services and programs is a key reason for this.”

The AMA supports the comments made by Ms Pat Turner, CEO of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) who said: ‘While our people still live very much in third-world conditions in a lot of areas still in Australia ... we have to hold everybody to account’.

“Closing the Gap targets are vital if we are to see demonstrable improvements in the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,” Dr Bartone said.

“The call for a justice target and a target around the removal of Aboriginal children should be considered.

“The AMA welcomes the decision of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to agree a formal partnership with us on Closing the Gap. This is an historic milestone in the relationship between Governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“The AMA knows that outcomes are better when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a say over their lives and matters that affect them.”

The AMA supports the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies that has formed to be signatories to the partnership agreement with COAG, and for them to share as equal partners in the design, implementation and monitoring of closing the gap programs and policies.

Background:

- The mortality rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-4 years is around twice the rate for non-Indigenous children.
- The mortality rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples compared to non-Indigenous Australians is around 1.7 times higher.
- Homelessness rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are around double the rate of non-Indigenous Australians.

Close the Gap Campaign

The AMA is a member of The Close the Gap (CTG) Campaign, which was launched in 2006 as part of a public call to action to address the unacceptable gap in life expectancy and other health indicators between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

The life expectancy gap is widening, in part because of inequitable expenditure on health, housing, and other issues. The proposed policy agenda set out below will, if fully funded and implemented, provide a pathway forward for an incoming government to achieve tangible improvements in life expectancy and other key health indicators. They are:

1. Support the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak bodies to progress a formal partnership with the Council of Australian Governments on Closing the Gap.
2. Ensure more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed in the health workforce to ensure that primary health care and prevention measures are culturally safe, to avoid avoidable hospital admissions and premature deaths.
3. Commit a minimum \$100 million towards a four-year Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services capacity-building program as seed funding to fill the highest priority service gaps, noting that the amount needed, once fully costed, will be significantly higher and is dependent upon the service gap mapping exercise in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan [Implementation Plan] being undertaken.
4. Commit to a ‘Good Housing for Good Health’ strategy to improve home health and safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the ‘Housing for Health’ program to eradicate third world diseases.
5. Address systemic racism in the mainstream health system by establishing an Aboriginal Health Authority to oversee service delivery, professional training and policy and accreditation processes that impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and health care.

The AMA Indigenous Health Report Card 2018 is at <https://ama.com.au/article/2018-ama-report-card-indigenous-health-rebuilding-closing-gap-health-strategy-and-review>

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