



The Hon. Scott Morrison MP
Prime Minister

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EO&E...

PRIME MINISTER: Good afternoon. I'm joined today by the Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt and the convener, leader, chair of the Coalition of Indigenous Peak Groups, Pat Turner. And I want to come to the important reason that we're gathered together today, to speak about the finalisation of the Closing the Gap Agreements that have been historically reached between the group of Coalition Peaks, the Commonwealth and the states and territories. This is a very significant day, and I know one that both Ken and Pat have been working together on now for some time and I'm so pleased that we've come to this day. I think it's going to have a very meaningful impact on how we progress to ensure that young Indigenous boys and girls can grow up in this country with the same expectations as non-Indigenous boys and girls in this country. That's what we want to see. That's what it's all about. That, as Australians right across the country, we can have the same hopes, the same aspirations, the same goals, ultimately. It's not an easy road and there's still a long road ahead of us to achieve that. But what we're announcing today, I think, will make a very meaningful impact on achieving that journey together.

But before I do that and I know, with the indulgence of both Pat and Ken, I must start by saying that the numbers that we've seen today in Victoria are obviously very concerning and I share the Premier's concern about those. I also support the actions that he's taken on the advice that I've received also about the rate of transmission that is occurring in Victoria and we will be sharing with the Victorian Government any further advice that we have, drawing together the work of the expert medical panel, the AHPPC, who are meeting now, I understand, and any further advice that would come forward from that collective group as to what may assist in Victoria, we will certainly be sharing that with the Premier. And the instance of cases throughout the community, and particularly extending out on the Melbourne metro area into the Geelong region and surrounding areas, is of great concern. And we have now been in this lockdown now for some weeks and we are not getting the results we would hope for and as a result, the further measures that are taken are certainly necessary. They will come at an impact to the economy. We understand that. But, equally, not containing these outbreaks will have that effect also. And so it's important that we continue to work together to get on top of this and to take whatever actions are necessary. The decisions are being driven by the data and by the evidence, as the Premier said, and the actions that are being taken specifically to reduce mobility in the affected outbreak areas are very important and I would just continue to encourage people to comply and work cooperatively with the requests that are being made right across Victoria and elsewhere around the country. The most concerning part of the information released today

was that there were a further 13 deaths. That brings to some 189 deaths now in Australia as a result of COVID-19 and some 105 that have occurred in Victoria. 10 out of those 13 deaths occurred in aged care and I will speak further after I have addressed the issues with Minister Wyatt and Pat Turner on the announcements that we're making today. But there's been a series of further measures that we've been taking there which have been making some progress. Aged care cases, including staff, account for just under about or around about 10 per cent of the total cases announced today. Specifically in aged care, there were 16 cases of residents. The balance, 74 in total, 58 were staff. And staff contracting the virus, my advice is predominantly from community transmission.

So, with that let me turn, with your agreement, to the important reason that we've gathered today, as serious as the pandemic is. The issue of achieving those aspirations for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians together are of great significance to our country, not just now but into the future. It is a national aspiration, a national goal, a national task. The process that we began around about two years ago, when we came together, began with listening as to why we were being unsuccessful in closing the gap. Any good process starts with listening and that's what we did as a Government. We listened carefully. And there were many discussions and there were many very unprecedented discussions, including here, in this very Cabinet room, as I sat early this year in January together with Indigenous leaders from peak groups, with Ken, and that was quite an extraordinary discussion. And it charged us up to keep going with the work that was being done to form the Agreement which we've reached today.

As we have been dealing with the pandemic, there have been two phrases, two concepts, that have come up in almost all the briefings that I've had. They talk about lines of effort and they talk about unity of effort. And as I was reflecting on this Agreement last night, I believe that's what this does. It sets out very clear lines of effort, which has been important. But, more importantly, it sets out the process of having a unity of effort. And when we do those two things together, that's where we make progress. Whether it's attacking a pandemic or attacking the very serious issues of Indigenous disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in this country. And the other thing we did as we listened and we identified these things, and we looked at how we had not been making the progress all of us wanted on closing the gap, we reflected on the fact that Closing the Gap and the initiative taken by Kevin Rudd was an entirely worthy initiative and an initiative deserving of credit. But, innocently, there were elements of how that was done which was misguided. That's not a criticism, that is a learning. A learning of these many years that have passed since then, as we've sought to live up to those worthy aspirations at that time. And one of the mistakes that have been made is, as we've looked at this as a Federal Government, we've decided what the gap is. We didn't look at the gap through the eyes of Indigenous Australians. We told Indigenous Australians what the gap was that we were going to close and somehow thought they should be thankful for that. That was wrong-headed. That wasn't the way to do it. We needed to understand what the gap was, looking through the lens and the eyes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They needed to tell us what the gap was that needed to be closed and that's what this task has been about. It has also been about understanding that this is not the task or role or responsibility of any one organisation, level of government, or nation of peoples across the country. This is the task of us all. And for that to be successful, we need a partnership between all of these groups. Understanding what these lines of effort are to achieve this unity of effort.

And so we set about achieving a partnership and setting out these 16, as I understand, particular areas of activity. Underpinned by four key things we're seeking to do to make them possible. And the first of those is partnership - a partnership of states and territories who have significant roles to play in achieving the outcomes that are set out here in this Agreement. This is not something the Commonwealth can even pretend to think it can do alone. It must be done together with the service delivery and policy arms of

state and territory governments. But also with the delivery agencies of Indigenous organisations, which are on the ground, making a difference. Secondly, it's about building the capabilities of those on-the-ground, community-based organisations in Indigenous communities to deliver those services as best as they possibly can. It is about transforming mainstream government agencies and institutions and how they conceive these challenges and how they go about engaging and delivering their services and broader policies that impact on Indigenous Australians, whether they're directed to them specifically or not. And it's about getting the right data, the right evidence, and the right reporting that creates the transparency to drive the actions we're seeking to get progress from. The data then, as it's set out in each of these 16 areas, is incredibly well-presented in terms of what we need. It sets out the goal and those goals haven't changed drastically. But what it has done is identified the things that make that goal achievable and the signs you need to look for along the way to know you're going to meet that goal and how we're progressing against those key data points. And it gets granular. It says, "We're not just going to look up here, we're going to go down the community level, we're going to go and break this up by different groupings to understand where the real challenges are and where our progress is doing well." As Ken has often said, this process has to acknowledge the gains to drive the confidence that other areas can see achievement. But it's also about separating out where the accountabilities lie to get the action. And then there is the further data that is needed to drive the whole process and there are some serious weaknesses when it comes to the intelligence and information that we need to inform plans to eliminate Indigenous disadvantage in this country as much as we possibly can.

And so I find it a very practical document, Pat and Ken. I commend you on the work that it's done. It's realistic, it's shared, it's evidence-based and led, it's transparent, it's practical, it's ambitious. And from this point, the real work starts. And the plans that are needed from the Federal Government, from the state governments, the plans that need to find their way into budgets. But I tell you where we start - we start with what we have to do, and then we apply the resources to achieve that. This isn't about buckets of money, this is about changing the way we do things and ensuring that we apply the resources most effectively to achieve that. And with that I'll pass you on to Ken, and then to Pat.

THE HON. KEN WYATT MP, MINISTER FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS: Prime Minister, thank you very much. I want to acknowledge the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people, on whose land we are today, their elders past and present. The concept of Closing the Gap was an idea that arose from the Human Rights Commissioner of the day, Tom Calma. Tom put forward a series of propositions and the first signing of a Closing the Gap Agreement was done by a former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. The intentions were honourable. The outcomes were never achieved in the way that we had aspired to reach in the way of improving the lives of Indigenous Australians. And this particular Agreement is historic. Because it goes to the very thing that I said right at the beginning when I first came into this role - that we need to develop approaches to address the issues of inequality and inequity by having Indigenous Australians sitting and jointly designing, planning and developing a direction that is based on how we wrap around people, their life expectancy, their life expectations, and their aspirations from the community level through to the peak organisations. It's been an incredible privilege working with Pat and the 51 peak organisations. When we first started, it was 21. And then it grew. But the more people that were involved, the greater the depth of discussion around what do these targets mean? How will they change the lives of people? And how will we bring governments with us? And that was a critical part of the conversation, as to how do we then take it to the next stage? Because, primarily, it was the Prime Minister who tabled the Closing the Gap Report. There was no requirement for states and territories to do that.

This Agreement through the state and territory cabinet processes has endorsed a new approach. An approach that will involve Aboriginal people as partners in the design of the work of government agencies.

It will involve transforming the way in which government agencies at every level, including local government, work with Indigenous Australians. It also commits, through the cabinet process, ministers in all portfolios to work towards achieving closure in the targets and the gap that is associated with the targets. But I think more importantly is the way in which the spirit of intent for the outcome we've achieved today in this Agreement was reached through the passion and commitment of so many people. I want to acknowledge Pat's leadership. If you work with Indigenous organisations, as she has done, she has certainly brought 51 significant leaders to the table, to agree on the targets that we have within the Agreement, including incarceration rates, including family safety and the safety of women, and expanding those targets to focus in key and critical areas. But I also want to acknowledge every state and territory Aboriginal Affairs Minister, because their officials and the officers from the National Indigenous Agency and the officers who worked with Pat in the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation worked paragraph by paragraph through the Agreement until all parties were satisfied. But the thing that is different this time is the enthusiasm of all to address these targets.

Prime Minister, I want to acknowledge you, because you've done something that no other Prime Minister has done, and that is to put faith in the Indigenous community to develop targets for us all to achieve. But for all of us to take responsibility for, and for all of us to be accountable for. And by all of us focusing on those three tranches, I am extremely optimistic that we will see closures in areas to a greater extent than what we've seen historically in the past. And the amount of goodwill means that the reforms that we seek to achieve will now be done in a way that is very different. It means a person living in Ampilatwatja or living in Balgo WA, or in Arrente country will have avenues in which to influence government policy and direction, and to have a say on those things that impact on them through our peaks, and through the other structures that exist within states and territories. So, I compliment all who are involved. And whilst I have been Minister, I've enjoyed the immense journey of the very meaty debates, but the way in which we have come together to produce a blueprint for improving the lives of our people across this nation, with flow-on effects for all Australians. It is part of the Morrison Government's commitment to having a change of direction that is going to make a difference on the ground with state and territory Premiers and Chief Ministers who, through National Cabinet, have signed up to this Agreement, along with the President of the Australian Local Government Association, so it means that local government equally will be involved in achieving the outcomes.

I'd now like to ask Pat to come forward and make her comments.

PAT TURNER AM: Thank you very much, Minister, and thank you, Prime Minister. Today truly is an historic occasion. This is the first time a National Agreement designed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been developed and negotiated between Australian governments, local government, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. We have come a long way as partners since the partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap came into effect in March last year and I want to thank each government for the spirit in which they have approached the partnership. I particularly want to thank you, Prime Minister, for your leadership in taking the first step in agreeing to establish a formal partnership between the Coalition of Peaks and governments on Closing the Gap. The Prime Minister probably didn't fully realise what he was committing to, and possibly no government did, but maybe that was a good thing at the time. Today we now have a comprehensive set of commitments from governments that places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations at the centre of Closing the Gap. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what is best for our communities, not governments, and this National Agreement means that decisions of Government on Closing the Gap need to be negotiated and agreed with us.

But I have to say, the Prime Minister and Ken will know it hasn't always been easy, and some of our negotiations have been very hard-fought. For the Coalition of Peaks, the National Agreement is not just words. They represent actions that can make a real difference to the lives of our people, our families, and our communities. We have also had the voices of more than 4,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who participated in our engagements on what should be included in the new National Agreement, guiding us in our negotiations. The Coalition of Peaks is confident that the National Agreement, if fully implemented, has the potential to establish a strong policy foundation to give effect to what our people have been saying for a long time is needed to make a difference. The National Agreement may not include everything our people want or need to make lasting change to our lives, but this is a huge step forward. I also want to thank all the members of the Coalition of Peaks. This is the first time our community-controlled leadership have come together in this way to bring our collective experiences and expertise to the task of Closing the Gap, and it has been a real privilege to work with my colleagues in the Peaks.

It is important that we celebrate today's achievements. We are marking a turning point in Indigenous Affairs and the relationship between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and we have all played our parts. But the real hard work starts tomorrow, as we begin the implementation of the National Agreement in full partnership between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and representatives. Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER: Thank you, Pat. Let's take questions on this matter and then we can return to the pandemic issues afterwards.

JOURNALIST: We've heard many moving and passionate speeches by Prime Ministers and Ministers over the last 12 years about this subject and every year moving speeches by Prime Ministers and Ministers lamenting the fact that governments have fallen woefully short of meeting the targets. What commitment can you give that these new targets will actually be met?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, it has the full backing of our entire Government. I said when Ken was appointed as the first Minister for Indigenous Australians, as an Indigenous Australian, that every Minister in my Cabinet is a Minister for Indigenous Australians. Because that's the change, that's the shift that needs to have effect to actually make more progress. I think you're right, Mark, there's never been any lack of passion or commitment or dedication from this podium, no matter who stood behind it. Every Prime Minister that I know has shared this passion and this dedication but also the frustration that goes along with the lack of progress in this area. What I think is different about this process is there has been some humble learnings that has led to its development and its execution. There has been a recognition that in sometimes we have been too ambitious without understanding the detail of what you actually have to do to get there. And what I particularly like about this Agreement is how, as I explained before, it gets very granular about how you get there, and how you know when you're not getting there, and that's very important. This evidence-led process which has an accountability to it, which I think is very important. Now, I'd love to give you a guarantee, like every one of my predecessors would have and endeavoured, tried to, as I am today. But I am tempered by that bitter experience of my predecessors and my own. And so I take comfort in the fact that we've got a partnership now that we haven't had before. It's not because others didn't want it. I think the partnership is the product of the learnings, the humble learnings that have been necessary. So, I do hope, Mark, that we can live up to this. We owe it to everybody Indigenous boy and girl in the country today, and every Indigenous person in the country today.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, and Minister Wyatt, there's been some criticism of the fact that the domestic violence target is not being announced today and it's going to continue to be worked on. Can

you explain why, given what we know about the over-representation of First Nations women as victims of domestic violence, why that is still being worked on and is not being announced today?

PRIME MINISTER: Sure, I'm happy to, and I'll let Ken and Pat speak to that because they've been directly involved in those decisions.

THE HON. KEN WYATT MP, MINISTER FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS: In dealing with this issue we want zero tolerance of any domestic violence, of violence against women. I know that when the working group was going through this, the focus on just physical violence against women was seen as not sufficient. That hasn't lowered our bar for absolute extinction of domestic violence against any woman, and this fits within the Fourth National Plan that our Government has in place as well. But our senior women have asked that we do more work on that and I respect the request that they have made, and we will come back with further work. But the target is still zero tolerance of domestic violence against our women.

Pat?

PAT TURNER AM: Yes, thank you. So we do have some more work to do in our negotiations with all of the governments. It is a national priority and one that we take very seriously, and we hope to have that natted out as we go through in the next few months and we start our work on the implementation plans to get some real nutty figures in there. Let me say on the National Agreement, it's very important that you read it in detail and you understand it because there are funding provisions that are already committed to in the National Agreement and they will come on board as we progress the important work now on the implementation plans and the important work that we have to do to make sure that we have the right people at the right table, at the right time, in the right place.

PRIME MINISTER: I think fundamentally, I mean, what I drew from all of that, was that because that further work is required is a statement of how serious that goal is taken, and the other contributing causes to how we achieve that goal. Not just the physical violence, which is deplorable, whether it is in Indigenous communities or non-Indigenous communities, as we know, and there are separate plans to deal with that issue more broadly in the country. But the many other non-physical ways that abuse occurs and the link between that and physical abuse and to ensure that we're getting that right. So I think it's a statement of just how seriously the Agreement does take it and the partners do take it.

Yes, Chris?

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister through you to Pat, can you tell us because of all the plans we've had in the past, why you think, in simple terms, there is reason to hope this time that young Indigenous children can have the future the Prime Minister hopes?

PAT TURNER AM: Yes. I think it's because we've been at the table and we'll continue to stay at the negotiating table to make sure that governments do change the way they do business with us, that their program and policy responses are informed by our experience and expertise and, as much as possible, that our own organisations, community-controlled organisations, are resourced to do the service delivery. We get much better outcomes when we deliver the services to our people ourselves. We're just as happy, we've always been accountable for what we've done. And we are certainly accountable to our communities the way we work and we're more accountable in terms of the scrutiny placed on our organisations. I'd like that to be all of that red tape to be reduced, of course, to enable us to get on with the job. But I believe because we're involved in all of those decisions from now on, that we will actually

get better results. Now, everyone has got to work in the true spirit of the partnership and, you know, the resources have to be available when they're needed to ensure that the right areas are being but you have to understand that in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, there's been a long history of under-investment by governments and we're dealing with that legacy and we will deal with that legacy. But the issues are so interrelated. Just take the social determinants of health which are impacted by where you're born, how you're born, how you grow and how you live your life. Sir Michael Marmot is the world expert on this and he has spoken many times about this needing to be addressed in Australia. The World Health Organization wants it addressed. We want it addressed. So that will take a coordinated across-government effort and inter-government efforts and we'll be making sure that they do their very best. Because you have to improve where people live, how they live, their opportunities for engagement in the workforce in a real way to have jobs. We create more jobs if our organisations do the service delivery and are funded properly. We employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our organisations and we want that to happen because we want our people off of welfare dependency.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, is it fair to ask Indigenous organisations to close a gap that governments over the past 10 years have been unable to narrow in key areas, despite all the resources at their disposal? And how will these community-led organisations be funded to reach these important targets?

PRIME MINISTER: I think what Pat just outlined was a very good summary of the conclusions that have been drawn by this process. There have been significant resources directed to these tasks over many years but the way those resources have been applied have not always got the results. I've seen some of the most extraordinary responses and outcomes from some of the most modest elements of funding to community-based organisations and Clontarf is one that I often talked to you, I have a personal association with it, so I have a massive, declared bias, but how I've seen that change the lives of young Indigenous boys and men has just been extraordinary. That hasn't been the result of massive investments by governments. It's been the result of an extraordinary program and local community leadership and participation. So Pat's point is, and I agree with it, is that this process actually seeks to empower and better resource and support local-led delivery of services. This is where the Coalition of the Peaks comes into it. This is why we're talking to the Coalition of Peaks because they're the Indigenous organisations that deliver services in the communities. You don't get any more closer to the ground than that. Now that just, in the first instance, involves ensuring the balance of how funding is delivered and the channels through which funding is delivered is done properly and that's why Pat rightly says that the hard work starts tomorrow because that is one of the key areas that we're looking to adjust, and Ken and Pat will have a bit more to say about that in the near future. But you're right to note it as a key issue we've had to learn. That's why I hope this process then drives. And not just by the Commonwealth Government, by the way. What this process has recognised is it's fine for a Prime Minister to stand at a dispatch box once every year and talk about what the gaps are and how they're failing, but the Commonwealth is one part in a much bigger team of governments that actually deliver services to Indigenous people and fund those services.

JOURNALIST: Ms Turner, Just in achieving these goals, how important is it to make progress on tangential issues like remaining vigilant against things like institutionalised racism, and pursuing matters like constitutional recognition, Voices to Parliament, and so forth.

PAT TURNER AM: All those processes in relation to the Voice to Parliament, constitutional recognition, are complementary and should continue and will continue and the Minister, of course, is overseeing that. In relation to why we will get a tangible difference now is because our voices have been heard and will continue to be heard, but our influence, our expertise, our experience and our know-how, and the

relationships that we have at the community level. So my day job is CEO of NACCHO, which is 143 Aboriginal community-controlled health services around Australia. We stepped in very early this year in our preparations for COVID-19. January we started and we worked in full partnership with every level of government, from the shires through to the state governments, and the Federal Government of course, and we were able to keep our communities pretty safe. Less than one per cent of our population, Australia wide, or out of the COVID numbers today, have tested positive. Overall, we had 59 cases confirmed. There's been a further 45 in Victoria as of 28th of July, and three, that I know of, in Western Sydney. Fortunately, we've had no deaths. Now, the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector has played a critical role in working in full partnership with governments to ensure that our people are protected and are safe and thank God we've had no deaths. And I want to say to all Victorians today, our hearts go out to you and we are with you every step of the way. To those who have lost family members in recent weeks to COVID, you know, please accept our deepest condolences. We don't want any more people in Australia to suffer the consequences of this dreadful virus, and every Australian must pull their weight to keep our people safe.

PRIME MINISTER: Well said, Pat. One of the most significant achievements Australia has had during the COVID pandemic is the extraordinary result in Indigenous communities, amongst Indigenous peoples. It was, I've got to say, around the National Cabinet table, together with our elderly, our highest concern as to how the pandemic might affect Australia, particularly in remote communities. Whether it is in the Northern Territory, Northern Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia, it doesn't matter where it was and the way the services have worked together to get that outcome, Pat, I think is extraordinary. It's good working with people who know how to get things done.

Yes? Time for a couple more.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, you speak about the implementation plans you're going to get from the states and territories and the historic work you're going to be doing with community-controlled organisations. If we fast-forward a year or two and you are seeing failures, what reassurance can you give that the onus of responsibility for that is still going to be with the Commonwealth?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, it is going to be with everyone who signed up to this Agreement. That's the Commonwealth, that's the states and territories, that's the Coalition of Peaks. That's the whole point of this. That this is about accountability for what we each do and recognising the role we have to play. See, when we entered into this, I learnt and understood that if you want to make progress here, then you've got to get everybody to go together and this is the advice that Pat gave us, this is the learnings that Ken brought to the table. And so that's what we're doing. We're bringing people together, and applying ourselves in a unified effort to these lines of effort, defined by the voices of Indigenous people, coming back through the Coalition of Peaks. So, look, I hope in two years the story is better. But I can tell you what, if it is not, there'll be an accountability chain, there will be a set of data that will tell us why and there should be an ability that enables us to acknowledge that and make changes.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, given how entrenched some of these intergenerational issues are, specifically around incarceration rates, are you confident, given the over-representation of young people, in particular, in detention young Indigenous people, that these targets, these benefits, will reach to that generation now, or will this take almost a whole generation for them, for their children, say, to not to be facing those same rates?

PRIME MINISTER: There are gains to be made now, but Ken, you may want to comment on this as well. But there are gains that can be made now but there is an honesty in this Agreement which understands that other gains are generational. And I have been hearing that for generations too. That's a key issue of disappointment that generations have come and gone and the generational changes haven't been made. That's not to fail to acknowledge, though, the generational achievements that have been put in place. Of course, there have been some, and many, but our hope is higher.

THE HON. KEN WYATT MP, MINISTER FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS: Just adding to that, in the discussions I've had with states and territories, the understanding of the intergenerational impact is now very conscious in the minds of state and territory systems. WA, for example, has repealed its legislation in respect to being incarcerated for fine defaults. That's a major shift because you're releasing, and it's predominantly women, you're releasing mothers back to their families. That example is important. I know a couple of other jurisdictions are looking at issues as well. But what we have to focus on is setting the foundation in the first 15 years of life so that children are successful and will not end up in the pathways that take them into conflict with systems that see them incarcerated. We also are looking at what are the programs we need to put in place for people coming out of imprisonment that will allow them to take opportunities. I want to acknowledge one of your organisations, Pat, in Kalgoorlie, the Aboriginal community-controlled Health Service now recruits people who've come out of jail. They look at the issue of recency of a crime but they also look at the way in which they can skill young people or people who've come out, and what they've said to me is that their workforce is completely loyal, they've been given a great opportunity and they're continuing to professionally develop into other leadership roles in the organisation. So we'll be looking at those elements as well as part of the implementation plans, but listening to Aboriginal families and communities on the ground as well. This is all part of the historic reform. It is now doing things with our people, not to them.

PRIME MINISTER: Just two more because then we have to move on. Here and here. You can ask the other the one later, Kath if you like.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, three weeks ago in Victoria when they went into lockdown, there was something like 680 cases, today there is more...

PRIME MINISTER: Hang on, we're talking about Indigenous issues.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, Pat mentioned that some of these negotiations had been pretty hard-fought. What were some of the sticking points, and Pat, can I ask of you, what are the areas you would like to see further action beyond what's been announced today?

PAT TURNER AM: Well, there are the key priority areas that are identified in the Agreement. Let me say that this Agreement has, probably, the most transparency, the most monitoring and the most accountable mechanisms that have ever been included in an agreement, and this is the first time that there has been an agreement with the former COAG, now National Cabinet, and Local Government Association with an outside party. First time ever. And I'm glad it's First Nations people that have got that. But you will see, here, that every year, every level has to account for what it's done and we will be reviewing continuously and we have national targets. Even the priority reforms have targets that have to be reported upon. Targets are just a measure of how well they are doing, governments are doing, and the level of ambition that they've been prepared to commit to. The priority reforms, as I said, are the game changers here. They will change the way government works with our people and governments, you know, we've made it very clear, we want parity across the board and that's what we'll be aiming for.

PRIME MINISTER: We'll go here, then we'll go to Kath. Then we have to draw that part of the press conference to a close. Then I'll move to the pandemic.

JOURNALIST: I have a question on Victoria as well.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, it can wait. Katharine.

JOURNALIST: One on this and then the pandemic question, if I can, Prime Minister.

PRIME MINISTER: We'll come back to the pandemic one.

JOURNALIST: No worries, just...

PRIME MINISTER: We'll have to deal with those later.

JOURNALIST: A closing the gap question.

PRIME MINISTER: Please.

JOURNALIST: You've all during this press conference narrated a highly successful process of co-design in terms of policy. Obviously there's been bumps and difficulties and all that sort of stuff, but you've got there. That's the principle at the heart of the voice, that Indigenous people be involved in government decision-making. So, doesn't the success of this project that you've all embarked upon make the case to accelerate the voice?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, there's never been a view from the Government that has in any way sought to not engage, and not listen, and not have Indigenous voices as part of the way we're making decisions, and I think that's what we've demonstrated. You know me, Katharine, I'm a very practical person about these issues. And I think what we're practically demonstrating is that model is already working, it is already occurring, and I will continue to operate in that way. And that's the process that, you know, Ken is also tracking down on the other matters that you've referred to.

MINISTER WYATT: Katharine, just very quickly, the work is continuing. The three groups are reaching a point at which they are considering models for Government to consider. The Coalition of Peaks is a very distinct group that will lead in many fronts in the closing the gap, but this is about giving all Indigenous people across this nation a chance to exercise their views on issues that impact directly on them at the community level as well.

PRIME MINISTER: So Pat, if I could say thank you.

PAT TURNER AM: Thank you very much, Prime Minister. And thank you, Minister. Thank you.

PRIME MINISTER: Ken, thank you. Thanks very much. And as they go, I particularly want to acknowledge Tony Abbott. He has had an enormous impact on my understanding and appreciation of these issues when I worked with Tony many years ago, when we were in opposition, actually, and then in Government as

Prime Minister. And I just want to acknowledge the impact that he has had in how we've been approaching these issues here today.

Let me turn to the issues of Victoria. I've already made a statement in relation to supporting the initiatives that the Victorian Premier has announced today and what were a very alarming level of figures that were revealed today. There has been somewhat of a sore tooth in terms of what we've seen in those numbers but, certainly, while some days have been lower, at that, elevated levels, that is a real cause for concern. Within those numbers, when you look at the broader trend that is occurring since the lockdown, I'm advised that we're still seeing around about, give or take, about 50 cases per day with no known source and that is the primary cause for concern. I mean, in New South Wales there are no known cases, with no known source, cases with no known source I should say. So that is actually at the heart of the concern about where this goes from here. That's why that tracing, and testing, that why the door-knocking that has been expanded with what the ADF are doing, and it is a very good program. ADF has also been enabled to increase their ability to participate in the actual conduct of the testing and they've been given accreditation to do that. So that's boosted those testing capabilities in a lot of those large centres and that's very welcome.

So as it has moved into other communities, that is obviously of great concern and we can't rule out further restrictions or limitations to stem this outbreak. We'll be sharing our views again, with the Victorian Government about that, based on what the AHPPC is considering today and the advice that we're receiving directly. But I want to make it very clear that we support the moves taken because they've been very evidence-based by the Victorian Premier today.

Specifically in relation to aged care, just a couple of quick updates there, the situation in Epping Gardens I wouldn't say at this point is fully stable but there's been significant progress from yesterday. There's been further transfers from those facilities. There has been a significant change in the management of those facilities. Working together with the local health authorities there to ensure the workforce needs are being met, and the ADF have continued to play a role. As I said yesterday, it was our goal yesterday, through Services Australia, and the other communications mechanisms, to reach out, proactively, to every single family contact of those who were involved in that facility. I was advised last night and this morning, again, by the Minister that that - that attempt to contact every single one of those contacts was done yesterday. The work that is being done on communications is a combination of the facilities, themselves, where they can stand up that ability to make those regular contacts with the family, contacts of residents, they are doing that. If they have a problem in the ability to achieve that, then Minister Colbeck is working with them to put Services Australia teams in to make those calls and to ensure families can be kept in contact. So that is welcome.

A focus of the Victorian aged care response centre now is not only getting that further PPE out across Victoria and the facilities, and they were again packing those last night and getting them distributed, but it is also to be enforcing the training and enforcing the use of that PPE equipment in aged care facilities. There's been far too much anecdotal evidence that we've been receiving of PPE, despite the training, despite the PPE being there, not being used the way it should. And in discussions with the Minister, again this morning, we agreed, and that will be communicated through to centres, that failure to comply with those requirements of using PPE will lead to marking down on people's accreditation. That will occur. And so they need to ensure they follow those practices. They need to do that to ensure the protection, obviously, of their residents, but also to protect the staff at these facilities. I want staff to feel very confident going to work each day in aged care facilities. The PPE is there. The training has been there. And we are confirming that again with visits by teams to bring and refresh that training, wherever it is needed,

and we're focusing obviously on those facilities that are in the areas of highest outbreaks and at greater risk, and where there are already cases.

But I can confirm to you to again that it is only a small number of facilities that I would still say were in the acute stage of the critical list that we have of just over a dozen centres. Stabilisation in many of those other centres has been established. But we are keeping on them on a close watching brief. And so it is really is now about ensuring that even where we haven't quite a number of facilities, where there are cases, our advice is that they are being managed well within those facilities. But the AUSMAT teams, the first of those arrived today. Teams of South Australian nurses arrived the night before last. There is also the opportunity potentially to bring in some nurses from Western Australia - that was identified last night. So the resourcing of the staff needs is being worked on very well by the Aged Care Response Centre, and the integration of the work being done by the local hospitals, the public health unit of Victoria, together with the aged care regulators has stood up quite strongly in the last few days. Their task is to make sure that we don't see any further repeat of some of the more critical scenes that we've seen in places like Epping Gardens or St Basil's or facilities that have been in that category.

Happy to take questions.

JOURNALIST: The Treasury Secretary this morning has indicated that the deteriorating virus situation in Victoria and also the tougher border restriction in Queensland are likely to weigh on the economic outcomes more than the Budget envisaged last week?

PRIME MINISTER: True.

JOURNALIST: Does that concern you? Is there anything more you need to do to counteract that economic downturn?

PRIME MINISTER: It doesn't surprise me, and we actually flagged that would be the case from these very podiums when we made that point. These economic numbers quickly outdate, based on the way that the pandemic impacts on the country. The Victorian wave is certainly having that impact. Decisions that are taken by other states can also impact that result as well. That's why we've been so cautious not rushing to longer-term scenarios. We'll put forward the four-year estimates in the normal way in the Budget, but as the Treasury Secretary, I think, demonstrated this morning, those estimates over a longer-term would have been quickly overtaken by the events that we've had. So it is a constant challenge and they are constantly re-working those numbers. But the supports we have, are designed to move with those circumstances. So if there, will certainly be more businesses in Victoria, as the Secretary, I think, indicated today, who will be relying on JobKeeper post-September than would have been anticipated otherwise. And you, it may well be the case. Decisions about borders in Queensland could lead to that outcome as well. I think that's a little too early to say at this point. Those changes could be made just as easily in a week or so, and that could be reversed, and that economic impact, hopefully, therefore would be avoided.

Yeah Phil, and then Katharine, and then I'll come back over that way.

JOURNALIST: Premier Andrews mentioned again today one of the problems is sick people still going to work in Victoria. How serious are you about post pandemic leave? Are you thinking something economy-wide like the unions are asking for or is your focus more sector-specific where it's evidence-based?

PRIME MINISTER: Well I'm not going to be drawn on those questions at this point because we're still working those discussions through as part of the process that the Minister for Industrial Relations is engaged in. So I think it is best that those discussions are held there. We're conscious of the issues and we're seriously pursuing them.

Katharine?

JOURNALIST: PM you flagged a second ago that there may be more restrictions after the AH... the acronym I always get wrong...

PRIME MINISTER: The medical expert panel, I think I find this is the, I find a little easier to say.

JOURNALIST: Thank you, sorry, there might be more restrictions, do you mean just in Victoria or do you mean more broadly? And also another if I may, Richard Colbeck yesterday afternoon sent a signal that the Commonwealth was looking at perhaps some additional support for people who want or need to withdraw their elderly residents from nursing homes in Victoria, there might be some support to bring them home. There wasn't a lot of detail. Can you expand on what might be?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I can't say any more than he said yesterday and I'd refer you to him as to how he's progressing with that. No, the AHPPC, which Professor Kelly is bringing it together today, is really focused on the Victorian situation. No, I don't anticipate there being a need based on the advice I have for other restrictions elsewhere in the country. I'm, while - I spoke to Premier Berejiklian this morning, to Gladys, and she is, rightly, constantly anxious but that's exactly where, I think, we should all be when it comes to those who are responsible for managing these situations. But the outbreaks are very well chronicled and the sources of those in New South Wales all defined. And so, I think that still gives us reason for, I think, encouragement in New South Wales. But not reason for complacency. I've never seen Gladys have a complacent day in her life. So I'm sure she's going to continue to apply that usual level of focus.

Just one at a time.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, Ken Wyatt said this morning, that WA, the closed borders has meant we have had not had outbreaks of coronavirus which we have seen in other states like Victoria and New South Wales. Do you agree with that? Are there other WA Ministers who also do see the merit of this closed border or as that seemed to suggest this morning?

PRIME MINISTER: Let me be very clear what I would like to achieve in Western Australia. I would like to achieve a cooperative situation in Western Australia. My primary concern for Western Australians is the health and wellbeing of Australians living in Western Australia, and that's why we have put in place all the measures that we have. The constitution doesn't provide for unilateral decisions to close borders without there being a proper basis for those decisions. That is our understanding, that is my understanding of it. And so I am very keen to work with the Western Australian Premier to ensure that the, all the appropriate protections are in place for Western Australia. I mean I think the argument that was being had, is that there is a border between Western Australia and South Australia and the incidence of cases in South Australia is lower than it is in Western Australia and so I just think when these decisions are made, there needs to be the clear, transparent process of medical evidence to support those decisions and they should be done in concert. In the New South Wales - Victorian border, I engaged with the New South Wales Premier, the Victorian Premier, we agreed that was the right response and then we not only did that but then we worked together to ensure we were putting in place cooperatively, the arrangements of how the

border was going to be managed and what the medical advice was that led us to that decision and then we supported those arrangements through the application of ADF resources, particularly in border towns, to work through any issues that followed. That is the process that I think should work in a Federation and I'm very happy and would love to engage with Premier McGowan along those lines and the Attorney General and the Minister for Finance, both very senior Western Australians in my Government, are seeking to do that even as we speak.

JOURNALIST: [inaudible] the border with New South Wales and Victoria, that would be OK, it's just this indiscriminate border closure, that is the main clincher here for the Federal Government?

PRIME MINISTER: There is a constitutional issue here that goes well beyond the current circumstances. And I believe we can get an arrangement in place for Western Australia which completely addresses all of the Premier's public health concerns. And that can involve restrictions, it can involve restrictions on movements between states and from particular places and outbreak areas and resources to support that. At the very same time, it is the Commonwealth government that in response to the request from the West Australian Premier, is providing ADF resources to bolster their hotel quarantine. The biggest risk to Western Australia is the hotel quarantine, as we have seen in Victoria, and we are working hand in glove with the Premier there and look I enjoy a very good relationship with Mark McGowan. I have no truck with the, what has led to this case in terms of that process. But the fact is, there is a case that's going on. I warned the Premiers that this was likely to occur. I fear that it will result, based on the advice I have from the Attorney General, that it could leave Western Australia in a weaker position, so I would like to work with the Premier to ensure we leave Western Australians in a stronger position. That is what I want for Western Australians.

Yep? Here, and then I'll keep coming around, then I'll come over here.

JOURNALIST: [Inaudible] coronavirus in Australia since this pandemic started, particularly in Victoria where the number of active cases have exploded by about around about 9,000 in 3 weeks since the lockdown. What's not going right there to suppress the virus?

PRIME MINISTER: Look, I would suggest to you a different way to look at this. The reason that we're having problems is because there is a coronavirus and sometimes I think we lose sight of this. The coronavirus finds its way into the nooks and crannies of our community and once it gets there, it takes hold. I mean, this is not unique to Australia. I was on a call last night, again, with Bibi Netanyahu. They have 1,900 cases a day. And there's around, and the number of cases in Austria has doubled to 100 a day and there are many countries now experiencing further waves, Australia is with this Victorian wave. I have highlighted, I think, on so many occasions now, that the way we get on top of it, is ensuring that our testing and our tracing and our outbreak containment works effectively. Now, on some days, the virus wins. On other days, we beat it. But I think we've got to be careful not to slip into some idea that there is some golden immunity that Australia has in relation to this virus. This virus will be around for some time and we will direct every effort and every resource we have to stop its impact across our community and where there are lessons that need to be learned, they are getting learned. Where there is information that needs to be shared, then it is being shared. And where there are responsibilities and accountabilities that are needed, they are being addressed. But I don't want to give Australians, and I would urge in the reporting, that we don't create some false impression that somehow Australia has got a golden ticket in this. We don't. And I can tell you, speaking to many of these other leaders, I was talking to the Irish Prime Minister this morning, every country is dealing with this the best they can. That is what we're doing in Australia and I can tell you, we're doing better than most and many.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, on Queensland, you've been pretty strong in your praise about the way New South Wales has handled this. Do you think the Premier's decision to shut off millions of Sydneysiders from being able to enter is sensible or is it an overreaction?

PRIME MINISTER: Look, I will leave others to commentate on this. All I say is the decisions, when it comes to these matters, should be based on the best possible medical advice and I note the decisions that were taken today by the Victorian Premier were on that basis and I'm aware of that advice and I'm aware of that evidence that supports those decisions and I think whatever decisions premiers are taking, they have to explain them and they have to outline to the public about what the medical evidence is to support those decisions. So I think that's the standard that all political leaders should be held to, I am happy to be, and I am sure other premiers are when you put those questions to them.

JOURNALIST: Prime Minister, overnight there was a very tense stand-off at Epping Gardens and you have just talked about some of the issues there. Health workers were allegedly blocked from separating residents who had tested positive to COVID-19 from others, and federal intervention was requested. How angry are you with that operator and why were families left in the dark? You say communication has improved but just this week a man was called 11 hours after his mother had died to be informed that she was dead by being told that her body was deteriorating unrefrigerated in her room.

PRIME MINISTER: These are the distressing situations that I was referring to earlier in the week and they are incredibly distressing. They are the product of a very severe crisis that occurred in a number of these centres and we have been fairly upfront about that and the reasons as to how that took place and why there has been the need to transfer many patients, as they become patients, into hospitals, both private and public, and we have had great cooperation in recent days to ensure that has been taking place so there have been some significant failings in those areas and that's what the team has been working to address and to ensure that we don't get a repeat of that, when there are outbreaks. Remembering that when you get an outbreak in the community, that does affect workforce, whether it is an aged care facility or in any other type of workplace. And one of the challenges, to go to one of the earlier questions, that we are facing in Victoria at the moment is we are still seeing too much transmission in workplaces. People, if you have got those symptoms, do not go to work. The Premier's been very clear about that in his impassioned pleas and I support them. But equally it is true, the restrictions that are put in place about going into people's homes and things like that more broadly, people can let their guard down in those environments and that is where the virus can find its way. So when it gets into a facility, it can have a significant impact. And that's what the processes we have put in place over the course of the last week and even before that, but particularly over the last few days, are designed to ensure that the sort of very distressing things that have occurred don't occur again.

Chris?

JOURNALIST: I am just wondering how you envisage that the economy recovers, given that the uncertainty of this virus means we're making assumptions on a recovery which we just can't make. I mean, how can you ever really, as a state premier, open the border again, if you know that a virus case might get across?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, the goal of the suppression strategy is zero community transmission. That is the goal. And in seven states and territories, we're pretty much at that goal, with a few notable but very small exceptions. I am quite confident that the measures that are in place in New South Wales and also in

Queensland will address those cases that we have been reading about in these last 24-48 hours. In Victoria, the challenge is far greater. But all you can do, Chris, is do what we are doing and that is keep people in jobs, provide businesses with the support they need which either buys them time or buys them new opportunities. And I have referred to those on many occasions about the incredible innovation we have seen from businesses. The types of supports we put in place in Australia for businesses, employees, and welfare support is commensurate and in a very similar vein to pretty much all the other leaders I talk to. Many of them look at what we have done and they are replicating it. What we have done replicates some of the things they have done. There has been an enormous amount of collaboration and we are all dealing with the same problems and the uncertainty is one of those problems. So what you do is you just keep people in jobs, you look for every opportunity to build a COVID safe economy every opportunity you can to do that. And you put every other effort you can into finding a vaccine and making sure that when that vaccine is found, there is a global commitment that as soon as it is found it is shared and that is a critical issue I have been raising in many of my calls recently with other leaders and that has been well supported. Whoever finds it, wherever they are, I think there is a global responsibility to share that far and wide.

JOURNALIST: About \$12 billion more has or is expected to be taken out of superannuation by the end of the year. Are you concerned that effectively that money is being taken for purposes that it is not intended for? That you will potentially have situations where people are less able to support themselves later on in life when they are in retirement? And what is the Government doing to step in and ensure that that money is not being inappropriately used?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, it's not my money. It's not the Government's money. It is their money. The intent for which it is used is decided by the person whose money it is. The Government doesn't give people lectures about how they should spend their money, that is not the sort of Government we are. It is their money and if they believe they need it because they are facing hardship, because the rules are there to only be making this available in cases of that hardship, just as there has always been rules to support people to access their superannuation because of a particular hardship. That is not a new concept. It is a much bigger concept now given the hardship that people are facing. But the overwhelming majority of cases that my advice is that people are using it actually to restructure their own personal balance sheets. They are putting it against their debts and they are putting it against to support their mortgages and that strikes me as a very good opportunity for them to reduce their risk, to increase their financial resilience with their own resources and in many respects, you will find that by taking those decisions, they may be, I would argue, potentially much more financially advantageous decisions they are making by redeploying their own resources to those uses right now and put them even in a stronger position in the future. So no, I don't have those concerns, but I think it is very important to note, we are not a Government that tells people how they should spend their own money. Superannuation doesn't belong to the superannuation fund managers. It belongs to the superannuation fund members. It is their money and there are legitimate and I think very appropriate rules to enable people in this time of hardship to access their own money, to do with it what they believe is best for them. I will back them as to how they spend their money every day of the week. Thank you very much.

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