



Joint Council agrees to accelerate collective efforts to reduce over-incarceration of Indigenous peoples as first annual Partnership Health Check acknowledges successes and challenges of historic partnership

The Joint Council on Closing the Gap met today and acknowledged the **30th anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody** and agreed that joined up work between all governments in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives is critical to reducing the rate at which Indigenous people are incarcerated, and thereby reduce deaths in custody. Given the urgency and enduring nature of this issue Joint Council agreed to the high priority of accelerating the critical work to establish a **Policy Partnership on Justice** with the aim of reducing **youth and adult incarceration**.

“It’s vital that governments, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, are taking urgent and decisive steps to address the overincarceration of our peoples,” said Patricia Turner AM, Lead Convener of the Coalition of Peaks.

“For the first time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives will be at the table with Ministers, Attorneys’-General, government officials, corrections, policing, housing and health under a formal shared decision making arrangement.”

The Joint Council agreed in principle to publication of the Partnership Health Check Report, Joint Council Response, Risk Register, and revised Joint Council Terms of Reference on the Closing the Gap website, once feedback from jurisdictions has been finalised.

The first independent **Partnership Health Check** report assessed the challenges and successes of the new working partnership between the Coalition of Peaks and Australian governments.

The historic Partnership Agreement came into effect in 2019, creating an unprecedented formal partnership between Australian governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled representatives. The Partnership Agreement ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled representatives have a seat at the table where decisions are being made that impact their communities. It’s a new way of working for all Parties and the Health Check provides an annual review of how the Partnership is going.

“The Partnership we have formed with governments is unprecedented and it will take some time to get it right,” said Ms Turner.

“Governments aren’t used to working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives as equal partners so there is a lot of growth and learning taking place on both sides,” Ms Turner continued.

The Health Check found that the Partnership has been successful in its first major task to come together to negotiate a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which came into effect last July.

“The success of our Partnership is evident in the influence we had in reshaping the Closing the Gap policy through the new National Agreement and the Priority Reforms that came from our community engagements, but we still have work to do in strengthening our partnership based on shared decision-making moving forward.”

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“We are encouraged to see that governments are committed to working with us despite the learning curves and challenges we face,” Ms Turner said.

The Joint Council’s response to the Partnership Health Check puts in place actions to strengthen shared decision-making between the Coalition of Peaks and governments; clarifies the roles and responsibilities of all Parties; and ensures strong governance processes are in place to deliver on the National Agreement.

The Joint Council endorsed updates to the **Strategic Plan for funding the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector** from the \$77.2 million joint funding pool. The Joint Council endorsed new investment priorities in both the health and disability sectors to deliver services to support Closing the Gap. These investment priorities will:

Health community-controlled sector

- Increase the capacity of the sector to provide comprehensive services, particularly in regional and remote areas, and having regard to the impact of the pandemic; in particular, targeted investment in the ICT (computers, software, and digital clinical equipment) of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Organisations in order to enable and expand telehealth services.
- Support the sector’s engagement in and implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031, including specific consideration of clinical and non-clinical workforce areas of high demand and need in regional, rural and remote areas (such as drug and alcohol, mental health and aged care, nursing, midwifery, and antenatal and child and maternal health) and supporting emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders.

Disability community-controlled sector

- Build the capacity of the national peak body and other peaks to influence policy and build the sector at a national and jurisdictional level, including to engage across sectors particularly in health, early childhood, and housing, to respond to the needs of First Nations people with disabilities.
- Build the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to deliver a full range of culturally responsive disability support services that achieve much greater social and economic participation of First Nations people with disabilities.
- Grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disability workforce and improve training and professional development for workers.
- Support the capacity of the national peak body and other peaks to engage with governments to develop a dedicated, reliable, and secure national funding model for Aboriginal community-controlled disability services to ensure Aboriginal people with disability are supported to participate in daily life.

In line with ongoing engagement commitments of the National Agreement, the Joint Council also released its **Joint Communications Strategy** which will be used to support engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to build their awareness of the National Agreement and to assist them to talk to governments about how its commitments apply to communities and organisations across the country.

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Governments will include actions to operationalise the Strategy in their Jurisdictional Implementation Plans. The Strategy includes a commitment to develop a **new logo for Closing the Gap**.

The updated [Strategic Plan](#), the [Joint Communications Strategy](#) and the [meeting communiqué](#) are available on the Closing the Gap and Coalition of Peaks websites at <https://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/> and <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>

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For media enquiries contact

- Jo Scard on 0457 725 953 or jo@fiftyacres.com
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About the Joint Council –

The Joint Council is made up of 12 members of the Coalition of Peaks, elected by its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members; a Minister chosen by each government, and a representative of the Australian Local Government Association nominated by its President. Its role is to support national leadership, coordination and cooperation on Closing the Gap and provide advice to First Ministers, the President of the Australian Local Government Association, and the Coalition of Peaks as signatories to the Partnership and National Agreements on Closing the Gap.

About the Coalition of Peaks –

The Coalition of Peaks is a representative body of around fifty Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak organisations and members. The Coalition of Peaks came together on their own as an act of self-determination to be formal partners with Australian governments on Closing the Gap. Members are either national, state or territory-wide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak bodies including certain independent statutory authorities. Their governing boards are elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and/or organisations. For more information on the Coalition of Peaks and to sign up for our mailing list, go to: www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au