



Federal Budget 2021: Positive start but First Nations must wait and see for promised Closing the Gap investment

Significant Budget measures announced by the Commonwealth Government provide a foundation for investing in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. As expected, detailed funding relating to Closing the Gap was not announced in the Budget last night, so the full scope of funding commitments remains to be seen.

“I’m pleased to see the funding laid out in this Budget contains promising investments in crucial areas that affect our people,” said Patricia Turner AM, Lead Convener of the Coalition of Peaks.

“We are encouraged to see significant funding in areas of aged care, Indigenous skills and jobs, mental health and women’s safety; but this is very much a ‘wait and see’ budget as the majority of funding directed towards Closing the Gap won’t be announced until later in the year,” she said.

The federal government will announce more specific funding on Closing the Gap after Cabinet considers the Commonwealth’s Jurisdictional Implementation Plan mid-year.

“Our main concern with every Commonwealth Budget is how the funding will trickle down and benefit our people on the ground. Too often, our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, which are responsible for delivering many of the services in our communities, have been left with inadequate funding to service our people. My hope is that our community-controlled organisations are not just left with the crumbs from the Budget table.”

“Given the massive new investments seen in this Budget, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a legitimate expectation that there will be a significant boost in funding in all areas of Closing the Gap -- including implementation of the Priority Reforms in the National Agreement that we believe will accelerate the closing of gaps,” Ms Turner said.

“We look forward to an announcement of funding in the Closing the Gap measures to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the Justice Policy Partnership in particular and all policy and place-based partnerships to be established under the National Agreement”.

“It is also vital that meaningful proportions of the new funding initiatives in the Budget for the broader population that are critical for closing the gaps, such as in childcare and preschool, are allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, particularly community-controlled organisations”.

“This is a commitment made by the Commonwealth in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, but it is still uncertain and risky whether our community-controlled sector will receive the funding it needs to deliver much better services to our people,” Ms Turner said.

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Finally, the Government's new investment into our Family Violence Prevention Legal Services to address the severe problem of family violence is welcomed but more funding is needed to keep our women and children safe.

2021-2022 Federal Budget Highlights

Improving health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

The Government is investing more than \$700 million in this Budget to improve health and ageing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes, better mental health services including culturally appropriate after care and 24/7 crisis support, strengthened primary health care for Indigenous Australians and improved access to quality aged care services.

Safety for women and children

- Funding of \$507 million over 4 years from 21-22 for initiatives to reduce and support victims of Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (FDSV) against women and children (transitional strategy ahead of a new National Plan) including:
 - \$26 million over 4 years to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children who have experienced or experiencing family violence (At least \$17 mil of this to go to Family Violence Prevention Legal Services).
 - Funding of \$80.6 million over 5 years for improved data collection and research capability on FDSV.
 - \$31.6 million over 5 years from 21-22 for a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey on safety and violence.

Strengthening remote communities

- The Government is providing \$99.3 million over four years for face-to-face remote servicing. This will provide people in remote Australia with access to payments and government services. The Budget contains a \$10 million investment to support Indigenous organisations to improve their access to off-grid solar power systems, stockyards, greenhouses, and water security equipment.

Improving food security

- The Government is investing \$5 million to improve food security in remote Indigenous communities.

Aged Care

- Total of \$17.7 billion whole of government response to the Royal Commission over the forward estimates including \$630.2 million over 5 years from 2020-21 to improve access to quality aged care services for consumers in regional, rural, and remote areas including those with Indigenous backgrounds and special needs groups.
- The Government will expand the Indigenous workforce by recruiting staff with aged care skills and qualifications to provide face to face support assisting First Nations people to better navigate and access aged care services.

Cashless Debit Card (CDC)

- The Government will provide funding to support the continuation of the CDC on an ongoing basis including for a Jobs Fund to create job opportunities in sites, long term data collection and

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evaluation and operating CDC and income management concurrently in the NT and Cape York.

COVID 19 Response Package (Health)

- The Government will provide \$879 million for 2 years from 2020-21 to continue the response including
- \$11.2 million to continue to support regional and remote Indigenous communities.

Indigenous Skills and Job Advancement

- The Government will provide \$243 million over 5 years from 2020-21 to improve economic, social and education outcomes including:
 - \$128 million over 3 years for a new Indigenous Skills and Employment Program which will replace existing programs.
 - \$63.5 mil over 4 years from 20-21 to support an additional 2700 places in Indigenous Girls Academies.
 - \$36 million over 4 years from 20-21 to supplement funding for Native Title Prescribed Body Corporates to support recent reforms to the Native Title Act.

Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Innovation and Growth Funding Package

- The Government will provide \$28.1 million over 5 years from 2020-21 (and \$6 mil ongoing) to deliver the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Action Plan, to provide extra funding for the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Program and to support Indigenous Arts centres and fairs.

Mental Health

- The Government will provide \$2 billion over 4 years from 2021-22 for the National Health and Suicide Prevention Plan including a new national agreement and funding includes:
 - \$79 million over 4 years from 21-22 to implement initiatives under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy providing crisis and support services.
 - \$58.8 million over 2 years to fund initiatives to attract, upskill and re-distribute mental health professionals and increase the number of Aboriginal mental health workers.

National strategy to Prevent and respond to Child Sexual Abuse

- The Government will provide \$146 million over 4 years from 2021-22 including:
 - Enhanced support to victims and culturally appropriate approaches for Indigenous people.

New Remote Jobs Program

- The Government will provide \$111 million over 5 years from 2020-21 to provide quality servicing to Community Development Program (CDP) participants who have lost their jobs because of COVID and develop a new Remote Jobs Program pilot in selected regions.
- The new program will replace CDP and be co-designed with Indigenous communities and as part of the measure, the government will also pause certain mutual obligation requirements for CDP job seekers while the new program is being developed.

Ngurra Cultural Precinct – National Resting Place

- The Government will provide \$4.7 million to fund the development of a detailed business case for establishment of this facility which will include a resting place for repatriated ancestral remains.

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Rheumatic Fever and Improving trachoma control (Closing the Gap)

- The Government will provide \$31.1 million over 4 years from 2021-22 to extend its agreements with the NT, Qld, WA, and SA for detection, monitoring and management of these diseases.

Schools and Youth

- \$16.6 million in 2020-21 to assist boarding providers with a high proportion of Indigenous students to remain financially sustainable during the COVID recovery.
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For media enquiries contact Jo Scard on 0457 725 953 or jo@fiftyacres.com or Morgan Smith on 0416 417 666 or morgan@fiftyacres.com

About the Coalition of Peaks

The Coalition of Peaks is a representative body of over 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