



MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGOED FOR Thursday, 17 March 2022 – 00.01AM AEST

Urgent funding needed to support Indigenous community-led health solutions

The Close the Gap campaign has called for an urgent investment in community-led health services to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country.

The 2022 *Close the Gap Report: Transforming Power – Voices for Generational Change* has 12 recommendations for large scale transformation and systemic reform to avoid further preventable deaths and protect Indigenous health, wellbeing, culture, and Country.

These include the full implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart and 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap plans, investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led data development at the local level and the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research agenda for health and wellbeing, with a particular focus on the impacts of systemic racism in health systems.

The report focuses on self-determination, gender justice and highlights the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities. It calls for a paradigm shift in health and wellbeing policy, to ensure all policies and programs are developed and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Close the Gap Co-Chair June Oscar AO made clear gender equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls was central to supporting strong families and communities to lead healthy lives.

“This year’s report highlights in no uncertain terms what we already know. It’s our organisations that know our people, carry our culture and knowledges, and deliver the services that we need,” said Commissioner Oscar.

“On this Close the Gap Day, we celebrate this incredible work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations who are keeping our peoples safe and supported everyday.

“Our self-determination is fundamental to forming the programs, organisations and structures that will close the gap—anything done without us will never be good enough.

“This Close the Gap report reminds us of the deep expertise carried within our lived experience, our knowledge systems, our culture and how what we know have formed the systems that have kept all our peoples healthy, safe and cared for across millennia.



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“At a time when Australia is grappling with the #MeToo movement, our First Nations women have to be front and centre of reforming discriminatory systems entrenched with racialised sexism that damages and harms all our health and wellbeing.”

CEO of NAATSIHWP and Close the Gap Co-Chair Karl Briscoe said the campaign was again calling on governments to make large-scale systemic reforms to truly empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“Supporting the full implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart is a positive step towards self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities,” said Mr Briscoe.

“Health equality is a basic human right which should be afforded to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“To achieve better outcomes, the need for investing in programs that are developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a prerequisite.”

This year’s report was produced by the Lowitja Institute, Australia’s community-controlled national institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.

The media pack for the 2022 Close the Gap campaign report (including the report) is available to download here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/l6nrhzm2m2odzai/AAAKIMRSY8EvdqcPHaCRFlkya?dl=0>

The 2022 Close the Gap campaign report will be available for the public to read on the Websites of the Lowitja Institute, ANTaR and the Australian Human Rights Commission.

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Background information/note to editors

The Close the Gap campaign is an independent, Indigenous led campaign that calls on political leaders from all levels of government to take action on health and education equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

It is separate to *Closing the Gap*, which is a government strategy. The Close the Gap (CTG) Campaign was launched in 2006 to address the unacceptable gap in life expectancy and other health indicators between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

The Campaign is made up of 55 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non- Indigenous health and advocacy organisations. More than 200,000 Australians have signed a pledge supporting the Campaign.

Media contact

For further information or comment by the Australian Human Rights Commission please contact media@humanrights.gov.au. or 0457 281 897.

EMBARGOED FOR 00.01AM AEST THURSDAY 17 MARCH 2022

About this year's *Close the Gap* report:

The *Close the Gap* report is released every year on National Close the Gap Day. This is the 13th *Close the Gap* report.

This year's report was written by Close the Gap campaign partner, the Lowitja Institute.

The 2022 *Close the Gap* report has **12 recommendations** for large-scale systemic reform necessary to avoid further preventable deaths and protect Indigenous health, wellbeing, culture, and Country.

These recommendations fall under three themes: structural reform, innovation driven by cultural intellect and cultural safety, and empowering communities to improve health and wellbeing through equal access.

The Recommendations are:

1. Fully implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart, including a constitutionally enshrined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament.
2. Fully implement the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031 and other supporting plans, with a commitment to long term (10+ years) needs-based and coordinated cross-sectional funding by federal, state, territory and local governments.
3. Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led data development at the local level and uphold the principles of Data Governance and Sovereignty by following through on commitments to communities and individuals to access place-based data to design community-driven initiatives.
4. Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research agenda for health and wellbeing, with a particular focus on the impacts of systemic racism in health systems. This should include an investment in knowledge translation and research impact.
5. Establish and support empowerment and leadership forums for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples at national, state and territory and local levels, to provide them with the opportunity to engage in decision-making processes for policies, programs and services. These forums should privilege and honour the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young peoples and support strengths-based, place-based social and emotional wellbeing initiatives.

6. Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce development to support the growth of the community-controlled sector and community-led service delivery solutions. This will support and strengthen the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031. Support for community-driven, holistic approaches to health and wellbeing policies, programs and services is essential to increase access to health care by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
7. Develop a comprehensive National Action Plan which outlines the full implementation of recommendations from the landmark *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future* report. This plan should provide a holistic national framework that identifies and addresses the complex needs and intersectional issues that are specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
8. In partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, evaluate and report on the effectiveness of policy and programs for the prevention of violence against women. Results should be incorporated into reporting activity conducted by the Productivity Commission on progress against Close the Gap targets. The development of a new National Plan to Reduce Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and their Children should also be prioritised.
9. Support strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in the development and implementation of community-designed primary prevention strategies addressing violence against women and their children. This should include the establishment of multi-disciplinary primary prevention networks and workforce across all states and territories.
10. Develop a whole-of-government national housing strategy or framework that delivers appropriate housing and strategies to reduce overcrowding, poor housing conditions and severe housing shortages in remote communities. Housing and infrastructure planning should include:
 - a) adaptable strategies to mitigate the unique challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly in remote communities
 - b) embedded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge and conservation and land management practices
 - c) investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research into housing and infrastructure needs, including knowledge translation and research impact
 - d) leadership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the establishment of a national peak body.
11. Invest in IT infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure equal access to the internet, regardless of location for an individual or community. This is essential to ensuring equitable access to health, education and

income support services and programs, and to being able to realise the objectives of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031 to improve access to telehealth, digital health, data collection and other technologies.

12. Achieve true energy and climate justice by effectively responding to the climate emergency and the extreme heat and other weather events resulting from climate change in remote communities. Governments must invest in mitigation, prevention and adaptation planning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls means justice across all aspects of life: in health, social and emotional wellbeing, land and Country, across legal and child protection systems, and in the delivery of services and housing.

It also means the creation of laws and policies that meet the unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The commitment from the Australian Government in the last 12 months to develop a dedicated plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's and children's safety was welcomed. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in the development and implementation of such a plan is essential.

About National Close the Gap Day.

Today (Thursday 17 March 2022) is National Close the Gap Day.

On National Close the Gap Day, supporters of the Campaign traditionally hold their own events across the country to draw attention to the need for urgent funding for healthcare equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's event will be held online via a webinar hosted by Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Human Rights Commission. Attendees can register via this link:

https://reconciliationaustralia.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_ABavtRfIScOOuGJ3cSxrlg

About the Close the Gap campaign:

The Close the Gap campaign is an independent, Indigenous-led campaign that calls on political leaders from all levels of government to take action on health and education equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

It is separate to *Closing the Gap*, which is a government strategy.

The Close the Gap (CTG) Campaign was launched in 2006 to address the unacceptable gap in life expectancy and other health indicators between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

The Campaign includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and non-Indigenous health and advocacy organisations.

The purpose of the Campaign is to advocate for and articulate key priorities to government and other key stakeholders regarding the improvement of health equity and equality of Australia's First Nations peoples. Through a human rights-based and consensus decision making framework the Campaign provides strategic advice related to raising the health and life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to that of the non-Indigenous population within a generation.

The Close the Gap campaign is co-Chaired by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner June Oscar AO and National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners (NAATSIHWP) CEO Karl Briscoe.

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