



**CLOSING THE GAP** REFRESH

# SPECIAL GATHERING STATEMENT

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**Closing the Gap Refresh  
Building pathways for future prosperity**

February 2018



## Purpose and Background

This year is the tenth anniversary of Closing the Gap, a national agenda that created targets to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the areas of health, education and employment. The Prime Minister has acknowledged that six of the seven targets for Closing the Gap are not on track, including the four targets due to expire in 2018. Ahead of the tenth anniversary, COAG have agreed to refresh the Closing the Gap agenda, working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A Special Gathering of prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders has occurred to coincide with the first Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting of 2018. Participants have come from across Australia, bringing a range of backgrounds and expertise to the event.

Forty-five participants (up to six from each jurisdiction) were selected by State and Territory governments. The remaining 19 were selected by the Commonwealth. Of these, 10 attendees (one from each state/territory and two from the Commonwealth) will attend the COAG meeting to provide the advice of the gathering directly to First Ministers.

Participants were asked to come together to provide advice on future policy priorities, and how all governments can be held to account for driving change. This will focus the next phase of community consultation and provide COAG with an early exposure to issues that delegates consider important.

## Statement

The Special Gathering agreed the next phase of the Closing the Gap agenda must be guided by the principles of empowerment and self-determination as articulated in the [2008 Close the Gap Statement of Intent](#). We demand from government a community led, strength based strategy that enables us to move beyond surviving to thriving.

The best progress over the last ten years has been in areas where the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has led the design and implementation of programs from the beginning.

We call on Governments to partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to understand how to enact these principles in the implementation of initiatives to improve outcomes.

The Gathering noted there has been no clear statement of who is accountable for the Closing the Gap targets. We call on governments, in partnership with us, to clarify accountabilities between levels of government, communities and the private and non-government sectors. We offer all governments accountability mechanisms to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have a meaningful role in monitoring progress (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led Senate Estimates-style processes). This accountability must be informed by accessible and meaningful data reported by all governments.

## Priorities

The Gathering agreed that existing targets should be retained and critically reviewed, and that the following areas are of highest importance for setting additional future targets as part of this refresh:

- Families, children and youth
- Housing



- Justice, including youth justice
- Health
- Economic development
- Culture and language
- Education
- Healing
- Eliminating racism and systemic discrimination

We call on governments to negotiate specific targets in these areas with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and our representative bodies.

We recognise this is challenging. We remain committed to the process, and we call on all governments to remain committed with us.

Failure to address these key issues will cause distress and not enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to realise the same outcomes and benefits enjoyed by other Australians.