



# CLOSING THE GAP REFRESH

A joint initiative of the Council of Australian Governments

## CLOSING THE GAP

### THE NEXT PHASE

# PUBLIC DISCUSSION PAPER





## What is Closing the Gap?

In his *Social Justice Report 2005*, former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma AO urged Australian governments to commit to achieving equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in health and life expectancy within 25 years.

Non-government agencies responded to Calma's appeal by launching a Close the Gap campaign in 2007. In December of that year, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) pledged to close key gaps in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

In November 2008, Australian Governments committed to specific targets for reducing inequalities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy, mortality, education and employment. A seventh target to close the gap in school attendance was added in 2014.

**Table 1. Progress has been made on the Closing the Gap targets, but only one is on track**

Target	Progress	Status
Close the gap in life expectancy by 2031	Between 2005-07 and 2010-12, there was a small reduction in the gap in life expectancy at birth of 0.8 years for males and 0.1 years for females. Mortality decreased by 15 per cent from 1998 to 2015, but no significant change since the 2006 target baseline	Target is not on track
Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five by 2018	Child mortality decreased by 33 per cent from 1998 to 2015, but no significant change since the 2008 target baseline	Target is not on track
95 per cent of all Indigenous four year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025	Early childhood education – 87 per cent enrolment in 2015	Revised target
Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance by 2018	School attendance has not improved from Semester 1 2014 to 2016	Target is not on track
Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018	NAPLAN – Improvements in Years 3 and 5 reading and Years 5 and 9 numeracy from 2008 to 2016, but only Year 9 numeracy is on track	Target is not on track
Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 or equivalent attainment by 2020	Year 12 or equivalent attainment up from 45.4 per cent to 61.5 per cent from 2008 to 2014-15	Target is on track
Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018	Employment has not improved from 2008 to 2014-15	Target is not on track
Many areas are not measured: economic, social, and environment		

For more information see Attachment A.



## Why refresh Closing the Gap?

Improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples is a key priority for our nation. It is a shared responsibility between all levels of government and importantly, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Indigenous Australians deserve to have the same opportunities and life outcomes as all Australians.

The Prime Minister's 2017 Closing the Gap annual report to parliament showed improved outcomes for Indigenous Peoples in several areas: reading and numeracy for Indigenous children, Year 12 or equivalent attainment, and reduced infant mortality and smoking rates.

However, as we approach the tenth anniversary of Closing the Gap only one of the seven national targets is on track and four will expire in 2018.

Australian governments acknowledge they need to work differently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. To that end, Australian governments have committed to work in genuine partnership with Indigenous leaders, organisations and communities, to identify the priorities that will inform how governments can better design and deliver programs and services, to close the gap.

Governments want to hear from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples about jobs, economic development, health, quality of life, wellness and participation to inform a new way forward. Following these important conversations, COAG has agreed to work together, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, to refresh the Closing the Gap agenda.

**Question:** How can governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and businesses work more effectively together? What is needed to change the relationship between government and community?





## A strengths-based approach

While continuing to recognise the gaps in key indicators and the need to do better, it is important to highlight the many achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. We also need to honour and celebrate the richness and diversity of the world's oldest living culture, and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to prosper.

Prosperity is about moving beyond wellbeing to flourishing and thriving. It refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples having the economic

empowerment to be the decision-makers over issues that impact their lives, and to seize opportunities for themselves, their families and communities.

Prosperity can be structured around four key parts – Individual, Community, Economic and Environment. These are underpinned by a recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are integral for thriving communities. Further information about prosperity is available at

[closingthegaprefresh.pmc.gov.au/about](https://closingthegaprefresh.pmc.gov.au/about)

**Question:** How could the Closing the Gap targets better measure what is working and what is not?

**Question:** What indicators should governments focus on to best support the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples? Should governments focus on indicators such as prosperity, wellbeing or other areas?

**Question:** Should Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture be incorporated in the Closing the Gap framework? How?

## We want your views

Australian governments are proposing:

1. Discussing the principles of the refresh and priority areas;
2. Working together to propose target areas; and
3. Reaching agreement on the final targets and the actions governments will prioritise.

Governments want to build on what has been achieved to date and on recent national conversations about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' priorities. Governments will talk with and hear from a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and stakeholders through engagements at the national, state and local level. Individuals from across the country will also be able to contribute through the Closing the Gap Refresh website at [closingthegaprefresh.pmc.gov.au](https://closingthegaprefresh.pmc.gov.au)

These conversations will allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across the country to have a say in the next steps in the Closing the Gap agenda.

In relation to the determination of final targets or commitments, this may build on the existing targets or

establish a new framework. It will include consideration of what evidence is required to demonstrate what works. The aim is to provide useful data for communities and organisations to guide and track progress into the future. The new targets or commitments will be SMART targets – meaning they are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time bound. Finalising specific targets or commitments will create a clear set of priorities all Australian governments and Indigenous communities can work towards together.

All governments have agreed that to give effect to our commitment to Closing the Gap there must be local, regional and national targets that will focus on the things that are important to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

This process will also involve the development of action plans that clearly set out the actions governments will take to meet the targets or commitments. These will be based on the best available evidence about what works and reflect feedback on the programs that have worked and those that have not. It will include holistic consideration of how change in one area often requires action in other areas.



## Principles of the refresh and priority areas

To help us set priorities, we want to hear from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples about what is important. The agenda must be relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at the local, regional and national levels. It must capture our broadest vision for the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and provide a sound basis for determining priorities, developing policy and tracking success or failure over time.

Under the current Closing the Gap agenda there are three targets that continue beyond 2018: early childhood, year 12 attainment and life expectancy. The other four targets expire in 2018. The refreshed agenda could also be expanded to capture targets or commitments about other things that are identified as being important. Alternatively, there could be only a few targets, as at present, to focus national coordinated effort.

COAG has committed to more accurately measure progress and increase accountability by setting national as well as state and territory targets.

**Question:** What do you think are the key targets or commitments that should be measured in a refreshed Closing the Gap agenda?

You can find more information, download resources and have your say at [closingthegaprefresh.pmc.gov.au](http://closingthegaprefresh.pmc.gov.au)





## Attachment A – What the data tells us

- **Life expectancy:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mortality rates have declined by 15 per cent between 1998 and 2015. Life expectancy increased for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women between 2005-07 and 2010-12, and the life expectancy gap for both reduced slightly (0.8 years for males and 0.1 years for females).

- **Child mortality:**

Between 1998 and 2015, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mortality rate declined significantly (by 33 per cent). There was also a significant narrowing (31 per cent) of the child mortality gap. Despite this improvement the 2015 Indigenous child mortality rate (the latest data) was not on track – however, the target remains achievable.

- **Early childhood education:**

In 2015, 87 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Australia were enrolled in early childhood education in the year before full time school, compared to the target benchmark of 95 per cent. In 2015, WA, SA and ACT were over the target, with 100 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled, and Vic. and Tas. were very close to the target (94 per cent).

- **School attendance:**

In Semester 1, 2016, the overall attendance rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students nationally was 83.4 per cent, compared with 93.1 per cent for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

- **Literacy and numeracy:**

There have been some significant improvements in Years 3 and 5 reading and Years 5 and 9 numeracy. Although the gap remains, the numbers required to reach the target are within reach. For example, if an additional 440 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 3 children throughout Australia had achieved national minimum standards in reading, and 800 for numeracy, the target would have been reached for Year 3 in 2016.

- **Year 12 attainment:**

Between 2008 and 2014-15 rates of Year 12 or equivalent attainment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 20 to 24 year olds increased from 45.4 per cent to 61.5 per cent. The gap in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates narrowed by 14.7 percentage points over this period. The target to halve this gap by 2020 is on track.

- **Employment:**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment rates are considerably higher now than they were in the early 1990s. In 2014-15 the employment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples was around 48.4 per cent. While this target is not on track, for bachelor degree and above there is effectively no employment gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

