

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS REFORM AGREEMENT (CLOSING THE GAP)

Council of
Australian
Governments

An agreement between

- n the Commonwealth of Australia and
- n the States and Territories, being:
 - t the State of New South Wales;
 - t the State of Victoria;
 - t the State of Queensland;
 - t the State of Western Australia;
 - t the State of South Australia;
 - t the State of Tasmania;
 - t the Australian Capital Territory; and
 - t the Northern Territory of Australia

This Agreement implements intergovernmental reforms to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

Box 1: Building Blocks

Improving outcomes for Indigenous people requires adoption of a multi-faceted approach that sees effort directed across a range of Building Blocks. An improvement in the area of one building block is heavily reliant on improvements made on the other Building Blocks.

Early Childhood

For an equal start in life, Indigenous children need early learning, development and socialisation opportunities. Access to quality early childhood education and care services, including pre-school, child care and family support services such as parenting programs and supports, is critical. Appropriate facilities and physical infrastructure, a sustainable early childhood education and health workforce, learning frameworks and opportunities for parental engagement are also important and require attention. Action in the areas of maternal, antenatal and early childhood health is relevant to addressing the child mortality gap and to early childhood development.

Schooling

Human capital development through education is key to future opportunity. Responsive schooling requires attention to infrastructure, workforce (including teacher and school leader supply and quality), curriculum, student literacy and numeracy achievement and opportunities for parental engagement and school/community partnerships. Transition pathways into schooling and into work, post school education and training are also important.

Health

Indigenous Australians' access to effective, comprehensive primary and preventative health care is essential to improving their health and life expectancy, and reducing excess mortality caused by chronic disease. All health services play an important role in providing Indigenous people with access to effective health care, and being responsive to and accountable for achieving government and community health priorities. Closing the Indigenous health gap requires a concerted effort in the prevention, management and treatment of chronic disease. Indigenous children and their parents need to access programs and services that promote healthy lifestyles.

Box 1 (cont): Building Blocks

Economic Participation

Individuals and communities should have the opportunity to benefit from the mainstream economy – real jobs, business opportunities, economic independence and wealth creation. Economic participation needs to extend to disadvantaged job seekers and those outside of the labour market. Access to land and native title assets, rights and interests can be leveraged to secure real and practical benefits for Indigenous people. Other financial assets, capacity building, employment and training programs, incentive structures and social and physical infrastructure, including communications and transport, are needed to foster economic participation and community engagement. Through this participation, parents and other adults can become effective role models for their families and community. The design and delivery of welfare (both transfer payments and services) needs to promote active engagement, enhanced capability and positive social norms. Ensuring that communities have support to address factors that are a barrier to engagement such as problem gambling is critical. Life-long learning is important and attention is also needed regarding adult literacy and numeracy skills.

Healthy Homes

A healthy home is a fundamental precondition of a healthy population. Important contributors to the current unsatisfactory living conditions include inadequate water and sewerage systems, waste collection, electricity and housing infrastructure (design, stock and maintenance). Children need to live in accommodation with adequate infrastructure conducive to good hygiene and study and free of overcrowding.

Safe Communities

Indigenous people (men, women and children) need to be safe from violence, abuse and neglect. Fulfilling this need involves improving family and community safety through law and justice responses (including accessible and effective policing and an accessible justice system), victim support (including safe houses and counselling), child protection and also preventative approaches. Addressing related factors such as alcohol and substance abuse will be critical to improving community safety, along with the improved health benefits to be obtained.

Governance and Leadership

Strong leadership is needed to champion and demonstrate ownership of reform. Effective governance arrangements in communities and organisations as well as strong engagement by governments at all levels are essential to long term sustainable outcomes. Indigenous people need to be engaged in the development of reforms that will impact on them. Improved access to capacity building in governance and leadership is needed in order for Indigenous people to play a greater role in exercising their rights and responsibilities as citizens.