



Patron: His Excellency General the Honourable
Sir Peter Cosgrove AK MC (Retd)

3 December 2018

The Council of Australian Governments
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
Canberra ACT 2600

To the Council of Australian Governments

We write to you regarding one of the items on your agenda at the December meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG): your consideration of how to refresh and build momentum in closing the gap in life outcomes between Australia's Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Beyond Blue is proud to be a member of the Closing the Gap Campaign Steering Committee and we share the concerns the Steering Committee has raised in correspondence with you today.

Australia has a significant mental health challenge. Around 45 per cent of Australian adults experience a mental health issue during their lifetimes. The situation is particularly severe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who, compared with non-Indigenous people, are around three times as likely to report high or very high levels of psychological distress and are twice as likely to die by suicide. Racism and discrimination are a major contributor to poor mental health. Research by Reconciliation Australia in 2016 showed that almost 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced verbal racial abuse in the previous six months.

This is why Beyond Blue is a member of the Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee; why we developed our *Invisible Discriminator* campaign to show the impact of racism on psychological wellbeing; and why we support the two seminal points made in the Steering Committee's correspondence to you:

- To be meaningful and effective, the refresh of Close Gap Targets and the strategies for achieving them must be co-designed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through their leaders and peak organisations.
- Long-term funding by current and future Federal, State and Territory Governments will be crucial if we are to make progress in closing the gap. We note in particular that investment is needed to underpin the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023*. We also note the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's 2016 report on the delivery of services by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) shows mental health/social and emotional wellbeing services constitute the top health services gap, reported by over sixty per cent of ACCHS.

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Beyond Blue urges all Australian Governments to make a concerted, long-term and bipartisan commitment to Close the Gap because improving the social and economic circumstances in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities live – including through access to quality education, health care, employment and housing – is fundamental to improving the social and emotional wellbeing of Australia's First Peoples.


We also believe that new targets and investment in social and emotional wellbeing are critical. Improving social and emotional wellbeing and preventing suicide are not only critical in their own right, they are also deeply connected to the social determinants of health and are a lynchpin to achieving all the Closing the Gap targets, notably education, labour market participation and mortality. Without good mental health, it is harder for children to learn, or for adults to get jobs and excel at work. People with poor mental health die significantly earlier than average; ten to 25 years earlier for people who live with severe mental health conditions.

Working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, current and future Australian governments can make progress in closing the gap.

Yours sincerely,



The Hon. Julia Gillard AC
Chair, Beyond Blue



Professor Steven Larkin
Director, Beyond Blue



Ms Georgie Harman
CEO, Beyond Blue