



What was heard from the engagements and how it has been included in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Priority Reform One – Formal partnerships and shared decision-making

What was heard

There was overwhelming support for Priority Reform One.

Participants described elements that make up strong partnership arrangements and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have a formal and meaningful say about policies and programs that have an impact on them. This included:

- Partnership arrangements (such as formal agreements) need to be agreed to by all parties and set out in writing or legislation.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be properly supported to participate fully in partnership arrangements including access to funding.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to determine their own representatives.
- Everyone needs to have the opportunity to have their voice heard, including Elders and young people.
- Mechanisms need to be included to ensure transparency and to hold everyone accountable for their actions.
- Effective, ongoing, and open communication is facilitated by the partnership arrangements.

There was support to include a target or measures to ensure accountability for Priority Reform One.

How the feedback is reflected in the Agreement

The National Agreement's Priority Reform One commits governments to new formal policy partnerships and place-based partnerships where decision making on Closing the Gap will be shared between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

Strong partnership elements are defined to address the feedback from the engagements on what partnership arrangements should look like.

Government parties have committed to include strong partnership elements in policy and place-based partnerships.

The parties recognise that adequate funding is needed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage and participate, including access to independent policy advice.

The National Agreement includes a target on Priority Reform One. Action taken and progress made against Priority Reform One is to be included in Jurisdictional Implementation Plans and annual reports.



Priority Reform Two – Building the community-controlled sector

What was heard

There was strong support for Priority Reform Two in engagements in all states and territories across Australia.

Sectors or services that needed to be strengthened further included health, housing, disability and child and youth services.

Participants identified several ways governments could support community-controlled organisations to grow and be strong. These included:

- Long term funding agreements that enable secure employment contracts for Aboriginal staff and certainty around service provision.
- Support for capacity building, and the provision of infrastructure and workforce development.
- Assurance that community-controlled organisations are given priority for funding relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

Most participants were supportive of a target for Priority Reform Two.

How the feedback is reflected in the Agreement

The National Agreement's Priority Reform Two commits parties to building formal community-controlled sectors.

Parties have committed to develop Sector Strengthening Plans, initially for early childhood care and development, housing, health, and disability.

Strong community-controlled sector elements are listed that respond to the feedback about how governments can support community-controlled organisations.

Government parties have committed to:

- Building community-controlled sectors in line with the strong sector elements and report on actions taken in their annual reports.
- Measures to improve the proportion of services delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (particularly the community-controlled sector).

The National Agreement includes a target for Priority Reform Two. Action taken and progress made against Priority Reform Two is to be included in Jurisdictional Implementation Plans and annual reports.



Priority Reform Three – Transformation of mainstream institutions

What was heard

There was strong support to include Priority Reform Three in the Agreement.

Participants noted that support for Priority Reform Three should not be at the expense of support for the community-controlled sector.

Participants identified key changes that mainstream organisations need to make to deliver better outcomes including:

- Tackling systemic racism and promoting cultural safety.
- More involvement and leadership in the development, design, and implementation of mainstream services.
- Establishing and supporting partnerships with community-controlled organisations.
- Transferring power and resources to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to play a key role in decision making in these organisations.
- Employing and supporting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in leadership positions within these organisations.
- Supporting these organisations to change the way they undertake engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Increased accountability including an autonomous Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander body to monitor and improve the accountability of the mainstream.

Inclusion of a target on Reform Priority Three was supported.

How the feedback is reflected in the Agreement

The National Agreement's Priority Reform Three commits parties to progress structural transformation of mainstream government organisations.

Government parties have committed to:

- Investment in mainstream organisations not being made at the expense of investment in the community-controlled sector.
- Implement a series of transformation elements in government organisations that respond to key changes identified by participants.
- An independent mechanism(s) to support, monitor and report on transformation of mainstream organisations.

The National Agreement includes a target on Priority Reform Three. Action taken and progress made against Priority Reform Three is to be included in Jurisdictional Implementation Plans and annual reports.



Priority Reform Four – Sharing data and information to support decision making

What was heard

There were repeated calls for access to data and information to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make informed decisions about their lives, to close the gap and to drive their own development.

Participants identified that increased sharing of data and information is needed to underpin the first three Priority Reforms, and that should be a standalone Priority Reform.

Participants described why data is important and how it can be used, including:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities understand the context of the data and are best placed to tell the story of their data.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should own data and information when it is being used to make decisions about their lives.
- Data and information need to be local and accessible.
- Data should measure what is important to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- Data is necessary for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to know what is working in their communities, to demonstrate the outcomes they are achieving and to advocate for funding and support.

How the feedback is reflected in the Agreement

The National Agreement's fourth Priority Reform in response to the engagements on sharing data and information.

Governments have committed to:

- Sharing data and information on closing the gap.
- Establishing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve access and use of data.
- Making government data more accessible.
- Several projects to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations access and use regional and local data.

The National agreement includes target for delivery of data projects. Action taken and progress made against Priority Reform Four will be included in Jurisdictional Implementation Plans and annual reports.



Closing the Gap targets

What was heard

Responses to the questions about targets varied significantly and to a greater extent than what was seen in the responses to the four Priority Reforms. It was difficult to get a clear consensus from the engagements on the targets, reflecting the diversity of voices heard.

Most participants supported the outcome areas for which targets were developed in the lead-up to COAG's meeting in December 2018. However, the feedback on the targets themselves, including the wording, outcomes, measures, and focus, was often that they needed to be changed, with suggestions offered.

Most participants supported national targets that all governments were responsible for achieving.

Participants wanted to ensure that the new phase of Closing the Gap addressed the deficit discourse of the last 10 years. They identified that the past focus on the targets had been a big part of this.

There were mixed views about the ambition of the targets, with some participants noting the level of ambition was too low and others wanting them to be more ambitious.

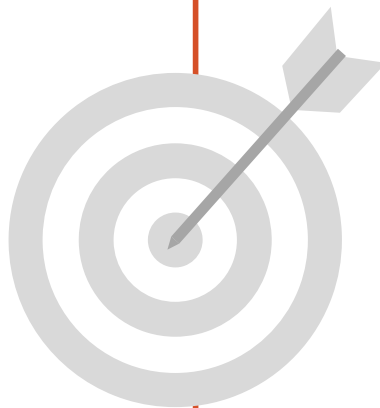
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Government accountability

What was heard

A key theme of the feedback from participants was that governments need to be more accountable and transparent including in relation to:

- Funding received by mainstream organisations and where and how it was being spent.
- The results that are achieved with government expenditure.

Participants also indicated the need for:

- More government accountability and transparency to improve service delivery.
- Independent oversight.

How the feedback is reflected in the Agreement

The National Agreement includes new monitoring and accountability measures:

- Jurisdictional implementation plans will identify actions to be taken to support the objective and outcomes, including how the partnership actions will be achieved.
- Annual public reports published by all Parties will detail what work has been done against each of the partnership actions, jurisdictional actions, targets, and Priority Reforms.
- A website will be developed and maintained by the Productivity Commission which will report progress on the targets.
- The Productivity Commission will undertake a comprehensive review every three years to assess progress under the National Agreement.
- An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review will be undertaken every three years to ensure the views and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are considered in assessing progress.
- The Joint Council will provide an annual update to the National Federation Reform Council.

All government parties have agreed to publicly communicate actions being taken to implement the Agreement, so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are fully engaged in the new way of working and can see progress.

Government parties will provide information on funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, including community-controlled organisations in their annual reports, including the:

- Proportion of funding allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations under Priority Reform 2.
- Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that have been allocated funding for the purposes of this Agreement.
- Names of the organisations and the amount allocated (subject to confidentiality requirements).



The importance of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

What was heard

Participants highlighted the importance of governments engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about policies, programs and services that impacted their lives to achieve better outcomes.

Participants felt that governments should not be making significant policy, program or service decisions that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without their full involvement. It was also noted that not doing so in the past had led to the roll out of harmful policies.

There was an emphasis on the importance of regular clear communication, and messages being developed by and for community-controlled organisations.

Participants also spoke about common weaknesses in the way governments engage including:

- Governments do not have standard engagement policies and processes. They differ across jurisdictions and agencies within the same jurisdiction making it difficult and confusing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage meaningfully.
- Government officials are sometimes over-represented during meetings with communities and the role and authority of each official is not clearly explained to participants.
- There is little or no coordination between Commonwealth and State and Territory governments who often consult on the same or similar things.
- Often it is not clear whether Governments want to inform, consult, or seek agreement when they engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- There is little or no feedback provided to the community on the outcomes of meetings or engagements and about what decisions were made as a result.
- There is often no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in government-led engagements.

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