### **Joint Council on Closing the Gap meet for first time since historic National Agreement came into effect**

Today the Joint Council on Closing the Gap convened for the first time since the historic National Agreement on Closing the Gap came into effect on 27 July 2020.

The Joint Council reviewed our collective responsibilities for the **implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.**

Each jurisdiction provided updates about the establishment and strengthening of partnership arrangements between individual governments, the Coalition of Peaks and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners to support the development and implementation of the Agreement.

Patricia Turner AM, Lead Convenor of the Coalition of Peaks and Joint Council Co-Chair said today’s meeting focussed on making sure strong partnerships are being established and strengthened to support the implementation of the National Agreement in each state and territory

“This is just the beginning. The National Agreement commits governments to a new way of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, based on negotiation and shared decision-making, to address the inequality too many of our people still face,” Ms Turner said.

“I’m pleased the Joint Council agreed to develop **an online, public tracker of the commitments** in the National Agreement and have **Jurisdictional Implementation Plans developed in a consistent format.** This will help ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the county can monitor implementation and progress.

The Coalition of Peaks are working with governments to ensure they transform and rise to the challenges set out in the National Agreement. Accountability and transparency matter to us.”

The Joint Council also agreed a **Strategic Plan for Funding the Development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Sector**. The Strategic Plan will guide investment from the joint funding pool committed by governments to support Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement.

The Coalition of Peaks secured the support of governments to establish the joint virtual funding pool to support the strengthening of the community-controlled sector as part of the negotiations on the National Agreement. Governments have made the following contributions across 4 years:

* Commonwealth: $46.5 million
* Victoria: $3.3 million
* Queensland: $9.3 million
* Australian Capital Territory: $0.8 million
* New South Wales: $7.4 million
* Tasmania: $1.2 million
* South Australia: $3.3 million
* Northern Territory $2 million

The Western Australian government is expected to announce their contribution shortly.

Consistent with the National Agreement, funding will initially be invested in the early childhood care and development, housing, health and disability sectors. Today, Joint Council agreed to the following areas for investment:

**Early childhood care and development community-controlled sector**

* Establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood development, protection and care workforce
* Enabling peak bodies to build the capacity and capability of the sector to deliver services and provide policy development leadership in partnership with governments

**Housing community-controlled sector**

* Enabling peak bodies to build the capacity and capability of the sector to deliver services and provide policy development leadership in partnership with governments
* Engagement across the sector on how best to build the sustainability and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-housing providers

“The Coalition of Peaks want to see a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood care, protection and development workforce like the successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners workforce. Better outcomes are achieved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when the services we need are delivered by our own people, from our own community-controlled organisations,” Ms Turner said.

“We want to make sure there are more jobs for our people in the communities in which they live and we are pleased that that governments have agreed to invest in this.

The Coalition of Peaks consider that establishing an effective community-controlled housing sector is essential to improving housing outcomes for our people. Whilst we need governments to commit to building more houses, we must also have national and state/territory housing community-controlled peak bodies to partner with governments in developing the right policies for new investment in housing and to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community housing providers.

We are looking forward to working with governments to ensure that investment from each government is made in a nationally coordinated and coherent way to maximise the impact of the funding and support the building of sustainable sectors.”

Investment priorities for health and disability will be considered by Joint Council in March 2021.

Joint Council also agreed to recommend to First Ministers, the President of the Australian Local Government Association and the Coalition of Peaks – as signatories to the National Agreement – a revised **Family Violence target** and a new **Access to Information target** which reflect a commitment in the National Agreement to develop these two targets within three months of the Agreement coming into effect. The proposed targets will be made public following the agreement of the Parties.

The Joint Council also endorsed **indicators for each of the four Priority Reforms**. The indicators will help to show the changes governments are making to the way they are working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Finally, the Joint Council reviewed a report from an independent Aboriginal consultant on the first annual **Partnership Health Check** of the Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap. The Health Check reflects the commitment of all Parties to put in place actions and formal checks over the life of the 10-year Partnership Agreement to ensure an effective partnership.

The Health Check report includes the following recommendations:

* Strengthening shared decision-making arrangements between the Coalition of Peaks and government parties through improved partnership processes to promote greater transparency and full and equal participation.
* Embedding cultural change sought through the partnership arrangements.
* Additional resourcing for Coalition of Peaks members to support their participation in the partnership.

The report, a response of the Joint Council and an agreed partnership risk register, will be published on the Closing the Gap website with Joint Council’s response following the first Joint Council meeting in 2021.

“The partnership between the Coalition of Peaks and Australian governments is historically unprecedented. The Partnership Health Check serves a critical role in the partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Australian governments,” Ms Turner said.

“The Partnership Health Check provides a formal way to review how the parties are working together to make sure that we can continually strengthen and improve the way our partnership operates.”

The **Strategic Plan** and the **Priority Reform Indicators** will be available on the Closing the Gap and Coalition of Peaks websites: [Strategic plan link](http://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Strategic-Plan-for-funding-development-of-community-controlled-sector-2.pdf), [Priority Reform Indicators link](http://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Item-5-Priority-Reform-Indicator-frameworks.pdf)

The **Joint Council communique** is available: [Joint Council communique link](http://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Item-8-Communique-for-distribution-002.pdf)

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**About the Joint Council –** The Joint Council is made up on 12 members of the Coalition of Peaks, elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members; a Minister chosen by each government; and a representative of the Australian Local Government Association nominated by its president. Its role is to support national leadership, coordination and cooperation on Closing the Gap and provide advice to First Ministers, the President of the Australian Local Government Association and the Coalition of Peaks as signatories to the Partnership and National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

**About the Coalition of Peaks –** The Coalition of Peaks is a representative body of around fifty Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak organisations and members. The Coalition of Peaks came together on their own as an act of self-determination to be formal partners with Australian governments on Closing the Gap. Members are either national, state or territory wide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak bodies including certain independent statutory authorities. Their governing boards are elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and / or organisations. For more information on the Coalition of Peaks and to sign up for our mailing list, go to: [www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au](http://www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au)